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## **Bridge tolls, better bus service only means more of the same**

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An open letter to state legislators:

State legislators need to know what they buy when they go back to their constituencies to explain any vote they take. When it comes to a vote to toll free bridges, promises of bus service enhancements make the rounds.

No one questions the unfairness and inequitable, regressive levy tolling represents. The promises of more service to induce legislators to vote for tolls and threats to cut service unless legislators cave in on tolling warrant a look at bus service issues.

If enacting tolls means more bus service, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority must explain the source of the money when Keep NYC Free already documented the revenue issues associated with tolls. Tolls do not cut it and no net money exists under the current toll scheme. For that matter, Richard Ravitch testified that under the original scheme, the MTA remains free to shift the toll money promised for bus service. The money is not there and will not be there through tolls.

Also, the MTA plans to rely on borrowing again and use the Ravitch proceeds to fund a capital plan. That model means we will still be paying for these projects years later, the Ravitch revenues will not be available to fund a new capital plan and the next round of gouging will be upon us.

Even if you believe tolls could provide some cash, note the MTA ties bus service improvements to a new Regional Bus Authority, a new MTA-like agency subservient to the MTA to combine city and suburban bus lines.

A single regional bus authority for the entire MTA region, merging its city, suburban and former private bus systems offers an excuse to combine the lower-cost city routes with higher-cost suburban routes. City routes could end up on the block to subsidize routes from outside the city.

At a time when legislators are pressing the MTA to cut its bloated staff, the geographic area covered by a massive new bus agency requires new tiers of management. The region remains too huge for its top officials to be hands-on managers.

Other issues to look at include the under-funded pension systems of the suburban lines. Who pays if all go under the same roof?

Ridership helps determine the average cost per bus ride. The latest available 2006 data indicates that the average ride costs New York City Transit \$2.10, MTA Bus (former private lines now subsidized by the city) and Long Island Bus \$3.40 and Westchester's Bee Line \$3.60.

Guess who might take the money under the Ravitch scheme? By the way, the MTA compiles no data on the cost per ride for different bus and subway routes.

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