

**LONG ISLAND FEDERATION OF LABOR, AFL/CIO
LONG ISLAND JOBS WITH JUSTICE
LONG ISLAND PROGRESSIVE COALITION
NEW YORK COMMUNITIES FOR CHANGE**

**THE NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP
TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN
VISION LONG ISLAND**

Media Advisory

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PRESS RELEASE

**At ‘People’s Hearing’ Riders, Taxpayers, Businesses and Workers
Demand Answers**

Garden City—Scores of riders, civic group members, LI Bus workers, motorists and business representatives spoke out about the possible LI Bus privatization at a ‘People’s Hearing’ at the Ethical Humanist Society in Garden City Wednesday night.

Event organizers asked Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano to commit to five years without fare hikes or service cuts, regardless of who is operating Long Island Bus. They also urged the County to reenter negotiations with the MTA. The ‘Hearing’, organized by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, the New York Communities for Change, the Long Island Progressive Coalition, Long Island Jobs With Justice, Vision Long Island and the Hicksville Chamber of Commerce was held due to the lack of County sponsored hearings about the privatization of one of the largest suburban bus systems in the country. The ‘Hearing’ was made possible through support from the Long Island Unitarian Universalist Fund and through ongoing support from the One Region Funders’ Group.

County Executive Edward Mangano and Peter Schmitt, the Presiding Officer of the Nassau County Legislature, have ignored requests from the organizers to hold public hearings on the privatization of Long Island Bus. The County Executive and the Presiding Officer, as well as all County Legislators and County Comptroller George Maragos, or members of their staff, were invited to attend the hearing to listen to rider concerns about the potential privatization. The groups thanked those who had committed to attending, including Legislators Judy Bosworth, Denise Ford, Judy Jacobs, Robert Troiano and Wayne Wink, as well as representatives from Comptroller Maragos’ office. Neither County Executive Mangano nor Presiding Officer Schmitt was expected to attend the hearing.

“A ‘People’s Hearing’ does not make up for the fact that Nassau County has failed to be responsive to its citizens and residents,” said Kate Slevin, executive director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a non-profit transportation policy watchdog in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. “It’s time for Nassau County to commit to five years without fare hikes or service cuts regardless of who is running the system.”

The County announced in June that the privatization, scheduled to go into effect on January 1st of 2012, will be run by Paris based Veolia Transportation for five years. While the County and Veolia have said

that service and fares will remain the same in 2012, no information about what that system will look like after 2012 is available, nor is any information available about how effectively Veolia will run the system, how responsive it will be to rider concerns and how it will address changes of service and fares to the bus and Able-Ride systems.

With the news of Jay Walder's departure in October 2011, the groups urged the County to reenter negotiations with the MTA.

"LI Bus was taken over by MTA in the early 1970s because the private sector failed to adequately provide efficient, affordable and effective mass transit," said Ryan Lynch, senior planner and Long Island coordinator for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. "County Executive Mangano should take advantage of Chairman Walder's pending departure to restart negotiations with the MTA to find a funding solution that works for all parties involved."

It still remains to be seen whether Veolia and Nassau County have actually agreed upon a full five year contract, and the lack of clarity over subsidy levels was identified as a key concern of the riders and groups in attendance. Veolia has a track record of raising fares and cutting service when it does not receive subsidies it needs to run a robust transit system. In Columbia, South Carolina, the lack of local resources led to fare increases of 100% and the elimination of the downtown trolley service and service cuts along other routes since Veolia took over operations for the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority in 2002.

"We are very concerned with the potential loss of service for LI Bus as the system becomes privatized in 2012," said Eric Alexander, executive director of Vision Long Island. "Nassau County must remain a partner throughout this process, with the understanding that eliminating service works directly against the public interest. Not only would cuts hurt bus riders, but they would be an affront to the various downtown revitalization efforts occurring throughout Nassau County that rely on transit service to boost both quality of life and small business.

"People are aching for information about what this privatization scheme will do to their service, pocketbooks and quality of life," said Charlene Obernauer, executive director of Long Island Jobs With Justice. "We need formal hearings to discuss how much a Veolia run bus system is going to cost taxpayer's and what this system will look like over a five year period."

The rapidly approaching deadline, with no detail of the plan available, worried the 'Hearing' participants.

"I am an Able-Rider that relies on the bus to get to my doctor's appointments in Garden City and to my commissioner meetings in Mineola", said Angela Davis, a member of New York Communities for Change. "I already need to spend 3 hours each way waiting for Able Ride and cuts will only make this worse. On top of that I am on a fixed income and can barely afford the fare as it is now. If fares were to increase I would be forced to cut my activity and become further isolated. I rely on the bus to get around outside of Hempstead. Since the County and Veolia won't tell us what they are going to do, I don't not whether I will be able to afford the bus and Able Ride or how much longer I will have to wait."

“Our Campaign believes that the riders have been left in the dark about the details to privatize Long Island Bus,” said Jason Chin-Fatt, Field Organizer for the New York Public Interest Research Group. “There is a lot at stake for Long Island Bus riders, and they are rightly worried. The County’s current plan makes it unrealistic to believe that existing fares and levels of service will remain the same.”

“When the MTA raises fares or cuts service, it takes about three months to put these changes into place,” said Lynch of TSTC. “The fact that we are four months away from a much greater change than simply fare increases and service cuts, with no information available, is extremely concerning.”

“If the union representing the LI Bus employees had been allowed any input, they would have reminded the County of their obligations under Section 5333(b) formerly known as 13 (c) of the Federal Transit-Act which preserves the collective bargaining rights when federal funds are involved when there is a change of employer”, said John Durso, president of the Long Island Federation of Labor, AFL/CIO. “The public has no way of knowing whether Section 13 (c) was taken into consideration or whether Veolia intends to absorb a loss for the first year and then come back with fare increases, service cuts and an attack on the collective bargaining agreement in the years to follow.”

“Hundreds of students just like me deserve much more of a say on our transportation needs to get a balanced education”, Said Christen Rieger, a student at Nassau Community College. “I think it's utterly unfair that these people who use Long Island Bus the most have no say in something that could drastically change their life.”

Yet the attendees held out hope that Nassau County and the MTA could come to an agreement that would avoid the privatization of LI Bus and the maintenance of their bus service.

“The best deal that Nassau County taxpayers will get is one in which the MTA runs LI Bus,” said Lisa Tyson, executive director of the Long Island Progressive Coalition. “Instead of pursuing an ill-advised plan to privatize the County’s bus system, County Executive Mangano should begin to lay the groundwork now for re-entering into negotiations with the MTA after Chairman Walder leaves in two months.”