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**THE LEAGUE
OF WOMEN VOTERS**
of New York State

**TESTIMONY FOR 2009-2010 JOINT BUDGET HEARING
TRANSPORTATION
HEARING ROOM C-LOB
JANUARY 27, 2009**

My name is Gladys Gifford and I am the Transportation Specialist for the League of Women Voters of New York State (LWVNYS.) This testimony has been prepared by both Ms. Bartoletti, LWVNYS Legislative Director and myself. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be able to submit testimony.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League of Women Voters of New York State has over fifty local Leagues statewide.

The League of Women Voters of New York State supports transportation policies that encourage energy conservation, reduce air pollution and contain urban sprawl. Therefore, concerning Governor Paterson's proposed NYS 2009-2010 Budget, the LWVNYS position is:

1. to oppose proposed cuts in public transit aid;
2. to oppose reductions in both rail appropriations and rail operating subsidy;
3. to support reductions in highway construction;
4. to support actions that increase revenues for transportation, provided that such revenues are dedicated to transportation needs and not funneled through the General Fund.

Detailed discussion of these four points follows.

TO OPPOSE PROPOSED CUTS IN PUBLIC TRANSIT AID

The NYS 2009-2010 Budget should support expanding, not reducing, public transit service through support for transit operating funds. The proposed cuts to transit aid (\$18.8 million) will cripple transit systems at the very time when demand for public transit is rising. An expanded and improved public transit conserves energy and reduces air pollution through reducing the need for commuting by automobile.

An excellent discussion of the value of transit operating funds has been published by Public Advocates (available at publicadvocates.org), under the title, “Why Transit Operating Funds are an Essential component of a Successful Economic Recovery Package.” Supporting research data are available at the website cited above. The relevant paragraphs are cited here in support of the LWVNYS position, opposing cuts in public transit aid to operations:

“Capital construction projects will create far fewer jobs than transit operating grants, and will take precious time to deliver many of those jobs. And the wider economic benefits of those capital projects will not be felt for years, until they are completed and placed in service. A package that complements capital projects with operating support for existing public transportation, by contrast, will immediately maintain and create good “green” jobs, while delivering economic multiplier effects in consumer spending and business sales, tax revenues for state and local governments, and increased mobility for our most disadvantaged communities.”

“...transit operating funds would deliver immediate unionized jobs that provide healthcare coverage and good salaries. These are also “green-collar” jobs that advance an

environmentally-sustainable economy by reducing our nation's dependence on fossil fuels and promoting climate change goals by reducing carbon emissions.”

“Beyond job creation, operating funds for transit would have a range of well-documented economic multiplier effects:

- \$1 invested in transit operations produces \$3.20 in increased business sales. This 300% multiplier means both additional jobs in the local economy and increased sales tax revenues for state and local governments.
- Conversely, \$1 in service cuts resulting from operating deficits yields \$10 in local economic harms, from lost wages and productivity, and increased transportation costs. These harms fall hardest on disadvantaged communities, youth, seniors and people with disabilities, who depend on public transportation to reach jobs, schools, job training, and life's necessities like health care and grocery stores.
- Increasing transit service can be a powerful antipoverty strategy. Households that use public transit save an average of \$6,251 per year. And families in areas with robust transit networks spend only 10% of their income on transportation, whereas those in auto-dependent communities spend as much as 25%.
- In 2007 alone, the existing public transportation services in 9 California regions prevented more than 70 million hours of traffic delay in regions, and saved the state's economy more than \$1.2 billion in lost time and productivity.

“Finally, an infusion of transit operating dollars is a timely down-payment on meeting the greenhouse gas reduction goals of the new administration.

- Existing levels of public transportation use in the United States are already estimated to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 37 million metric tons annually.
- Individuals who commute to work using public transportation “reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 pounds per day (more than 4,800 pounds per year),” compared to those “who commute to work using a single occupancy vehicle.”

TO OPPOSE REDUCTIONS IN BOTH RAIL APPROPRIATIONS AND RAIL OPERATING SUBSIDY

Following on the above argument in support of public transit’s benefits to both the economy and the environment, it follows that rail appropriations and rail operating subsidy funds must be increased, not cut. The excellent work of Commissioner Astrid Glynn to update the NYS Rail Plan shows that both freight and passenger rail must be upgraded and supported as the best answer to the imperative need to turn NYS into a leader in the area of transportation for the 21st century. Improved rail infrastructure and operations will relieve the pressure on roads by truck traffic, provide the most energy efficient way to transport people and goods, and significantly reduce air pollution. In addition, investment in rail corridors encourages development to concentrate along those corridors and thereby reduce sprawl.

TO SUPPORT REDUCTIONS IN HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Local Metropolitan Planning Organizations are constantly juggling the fiscal demands for highway maintenance, highway widening or building, transit infrastructure needs and economic development. Given the greater economic and environmental benefits of transit improvements and support (cited above), scarce NYS dollars should be directed away from any new highway construction projects. Widening highways in the short run provides construction work, but in the long run simply induces more congestion in the corridor. Furthermore, additional multi-lane

expressways built now require endless maintenance into the future, requiring all taxpayers to maintain more lane-miles regardless of usage.

**TO SUPPORT ACTIONS THAT INCREASE REVENUES FOR TRANSPORTATION,
PROVIDED THAT SUCH REVENUES ARE
DEDICATED TO TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND NOT FUNNELED THROUGH
THE GENERAL FUND**

Taxpayers fund transportation in two major ways: through public transit and through highway construction and maintenance. However, not all taxpayers can make use of the transportation that they fund. Only public transportation is available to all--provided the rider can pay the fare. The use of highways and airports is only available to those taxpayers who can afford to buy a car or an airplane ticket. Therefore, this singular inequity of access should be an opportunity to create financial strategies that target the highway user, not the transit rider.

Every action taken by NYS in the area of raising funds for transportation should emphasize to the public that highways are not “free,” but taxpayer funded. By funding transportation in these many ways, NYS provides all taxpayers with the mobility required to live freely in a healthy society.

Again the League thanks you for this opportunity to express our views on the vital topic of transportation needs in the 2009-2010 Executive Budget.