Testimony in Support of Metro-North Railroad
Mid-Harlem Line Third Track Project DEIS

Presented by Lisa Schreibman of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign
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The Tri-State Transportation is a consortium of thirteen of the region's leading environmental, planning and transit advocacy groups that work to achieve sustainable transportation by reforming and redirecting transportation investment patterns. We have over 100 affiliate groups who have agreed to pursue our transportation reform. We support Metro-North Railroad's analysis that upgrading or building a third track between Mount Vernon West and Crestwood Stations in Westchester County is the best option according to the DEIS.

Metro-North Railroad is the only provider of commuter-rail service between Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess counties and New York City. Thus, in 1997, the Harlem Line served over twenty million riders. Due to growth in population and dispersing land use patterns, projections for the future indicate that by 2005 ridership on the Harlem Line will be twenty-three million and by 2020 thirty-one million.[1]

However, given the two track system, there will be almost no room for growth on the railroad. The Metro-North Railroad estimates that it can only add one peak-hour train southbound without eliminating local service, express service or reverse peak service. The consequence of doing nothing will be detrimental to the region. On the other hand,

[1] Mid-Harlem Line Third Track Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Section 4(f) Volume One of Two. MTA. May, 1999. Page 1-8.

the consequence of upgrading or building a third track between Mount Vernon West and Crestwood Stations in Westchester County will have positive long-term effects.

If a third track is not built, one possible scenario is that more commuters, faced with overcrowded trains, will drive to work. According to the State Department of Transportation, cars entering Manhattan on the Major Deegan Expressway – the main north-south highway serving the region - must slow to under 30mph during the AM and PM peak hours.[2] Increasing the number of cars on the already congested highways will decrease air quality, increase noise pollution, increase accidents and make goods delivery more expensive.

Another possibility, outlined in the DEIS, is that Metro-North will cancel its reverse commute service during the peak hours. The cancellation of reverse commute service during peak hours will allow Metro-North to run more trains south during the morning rush hour and more trains north during the evening rush hour. However, such a decision would strand thousands of people who work in Westchester but live in the Bronx and Manhattan. Presently, 1,500 people use Bronx stations to go to points north during the morning peak hours. Over 2,000 riders coming from points south debark at White Plains alone. [3] At a time when the federal and state governments are providing more funding to improve access to jobs, it would be unjust to eliminate such service to people living in New York City.

[2] Existing Conditons and Problem Identification Report. Bronx Arterial Needs Major Investment Study. New York State Department of Transportation. March, 1999. Page 3-11, 3-12.

Third track construction in the existing right-of-way of Metro-North Railroad will allow the railroad to run additional peak hour service while maintaining the reverse commute services. This solution provides the best alternative for the growing demands to get to jobs in Westchester, the Bronx and Manhattan.

According to the DEIS, building a third track will increase ridership by 700,000 passengers annually by 2005 and by 1.9 million riders by 2020.[4] By not driving, these passengers' use of the railroad will reduce vehicle miles traveled by 150,000 miles per day. This in turn will reduce CO emissions of 234 tons/year, HC emissions of 18 tons/year and NOx emissions of 26 tons as compared to the no-build option.[5] Given the poor air quality in the region generally, this project is of vital significance.

[3] Mid-Harlem Line Third Track Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Section 4(f) Volume Two of Two. MTA. May, 1999. Appendix D Table "Fall 1997 Harlem Line "Ridership by Station."
[4] Mid-Harlem Line Third Track Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Section 4(f) Volume One of Two. MTA. May, 1999. Page 1-22.
[5] Mid-Harlem Line Third Track Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Section 4(f) Volume One of Two. MTA. May, 1999. Page 4-41.