

Subway Riders Get the Shaft

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Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature have forged a new tax structure that is being hailed as good for everyone except those making more than \$2 million. Not quite.

Apparently forgotten are the millions of low-income New Yorkers who, in addition to getting zero in tax cuts, must now rely on a Metropolitan Transportation Authority that lost \$250 million in tax revenue in exchange for a pledge that the funds will be made up, but for how long and in what form, no one knows.

The people paying the taxes that are carrying the state through hard times live or make their money in New York City, and they deserve a decent transit system.

The circus called Congress has so lowered our expectations that this tax reform, done with the support of both political parties, makes Albany look like Athens on the Hudson. However, it is essential to understand that Albany is drawing upon wealth generated in New York City and its adjacent counties to solve its problems. Under the name of tax reform, New York City's economy is bailing out the state government. And, rather than treating the M.T.A. finances as an urgent problem, it makes them worse to gain support from Long Island and other suburban state legislators.

Contrary to Albany doctrine, our mass transit system is not just a local issue. The flow of people in and through our subway and bus system is vital to the entire state's economic health. But, the eight million transit riders have less political influence than the city's taxicab industry or bicyclists. Unlike every other major city in the world, New York's subways operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Subway ridership is growing, not just during the peak hours, but on weekends and at night as well. Does anyone in Albany recognize the serious fiscal challenges facing the mass transit system: operating costs, underfunded capital projects and growing pension expenses?

If we fail to maintain the reliability of the transit system, then eventually the city's capacity to generate innovative industries and entrepreneurial firms will suffer. Let's remember most of the millionaires in this state, the people paying the taxes that are carrying the state through hard times, live or make their money in New York City, not in Utica or Plattsburgh. I remember when firms left New York City because their workers could not get to the office safely and on time. Do we really want to return to those days? For too many people in Albany, M.T.A. spelled backwards is A.T.M.