NASSAU COUNTY

BUS TRANSIT COMMITTEE

December 8, 2016

3:00 P.M.

BEFORE: SHELDON SHRENNEL, CHAIRMAN
APPEARANCES:

SHELDON SHRENKEL, CHAIRMAN

SAMUEL LITTMAN, ESQ.

LIVIO TONY ROSARIO

AARON WATKINS-LOPEZ

JACLENE D'AGOSTINO

JOEL BERSE

DAWN FALCO

JEAN DUROSEAU
MR. SHRENKEL: Good afternoon.

Thank you all for coming. Welcome to the Nassau County Bus Transit Committee Meeting. Today, we have a public hearing. We have two sessions. We have the afternoon session and we have an evening session which we anticipate should be starting by 6:00.

I would like to introduce our members. I'm Sheldon Shrenkel. I'm the chairman of the committee. To my far left, we have Mr. Aaron Watkins-Lopez. To my immediate left, Ms. Dawn Falco, my immediate right, Mr. Jean Duroseau, Mr. Tony Rosario, and our counsel to the committee, Mr. Sam Littman.

Please let the record state we are anticipating possibly two members who will be joining us who are running late, Mr. Joel Berse and Ms. Kathy Comerford.

By a show of hands, I would like an acknowledgment of receipt of the
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minutes from our last meeting of September 22nd. The minutes were distributed on October 17th. Would everyone please raise their hand if they acknowledge they received a copy.

Please note the record of being unanimous. Every member present has received the minutes.

This afternoon, we're going to have a presentation of the CEO from NICE Transportation, Mr. Michael Setzer. After Mr. Setzer's presentation, we will allow the public to speak their mind with their comments; however, we limit those comments to three minutes, so please try to think your thoughts out before you come up to the podium, and be considerate that another person has to go next. Also, please understand that we do have a second public hearing this evening.

With that, I would like to welcome Mr. Setzer.
MR. SETZER: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. Can you hear me all right?

MR. SHRENKEL: Yes, sir.

MR. SETZER: I've got a few slides to help set the stage for some decisions and for the public hearing. So with your permission, I will just jump right in.

So the agenda for this afternoon is to review the current funding environment, and that will take a look at what we can foresee today for next year's budget, the 2017 budget. I will make some recommendations and then I'll sit down and the public will provide their input on this.

So I would like to begin with the funding environment in which we operate today. Here's a bunch of headlines from various media, some local, some from around the country. The point of this is that the difficult funding situation that prevails in Nassau
County is not unique to Nassau County, and in fact, it's fairly common around the country.

Even in our sister counties, Suffolk and Westchester, local funding has been insufficient to maintain service. Suffolk County, as you probably know, reduced service significantly earlier this year and may do so again. Westchester County had a small service reduction in April of this year.

Going outside the New York Metro area, you would find similar situations in many places. Not every place, but in many places, the most dramatic of which is probably Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C., they have cut bus routes already in a very significant way, 14 bus routes as you see in this one headline here. They're in the process of reducing nighttime train service, and mind you, this is the third largest transit system in the
United States. Only New York MTA and Los Angeles Metro are larger.

Similarity among these systems and the many others is that in every one of those cases, local funding comes from a general fund where it is in effect balanced off against other important things like public safety and public health, public education and so forth. And often times when that's the occasion, public transportation just doesn't have the same emergency feel to it, and public transportation ends up being the one where the cuts are the heaviest. That is the situation here in Nassau County.

As you're all aware, I'm sure, Nassau County has a fairly serious fiscal situation of its own, and in its interaction with Nassau Interim Finance Authority. Budgets going back and forth, cuts being made, and one of the victims of these cuts is public transportation. So that's the
environment in which we have this discussion.

I would like to remind you of a couple of things before we move into 2017. One is that NICE Bus, by which I mean the partnership between Nassau County and Transdev has done a great job so far of making what dollars the county does have available go as far as possible.

The chart that you're looking at is a chart that was prepared by Nassau County OMB. It's not our chart, it's their chart. The blue column represents the operating budget for NICE bus. The orange column is the hypothetical Long Island Bus budget if Long Island Bus were still doing it.

If they ran exactly the same service at their costs, it would be that much higher. So for instance in 2015, on the right side, you see there's a 43.5 half million dollar difference between the cost of NICE Bus
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doing this and the hypothetical cost of doing it the way it was done before.

Now, Nassau County didn't have that 43.5 million dollars to spend. So the difference between the blue column and the orange column is the service that would already be gone except for the partnership between Nassau County and Transdev.

Here it is on a per hour basis.

You have seen this before, per platform hour. Again, the blue is the cost of NICE Bus operating one hour of fixed route service, and the orange is the differential if it were operated with the old cost structure.

So if you go to 2015, there's 40 something dollars there. Again, Nassau County didn't have that 40 dollars to spend in 2015, so that really represents service that wouldn't be on the street at all today except for the NICE Bus low cost approach.

I want to do one more comparison,
and that's with another similar operator. That's with the Bee Line, which is Westchester County's service, which is also a partnership between the county and a private operator, and they're looking at it on a per mile, or per hour or per passenger basis. You see a 15, 20 percent difference in the cost.

So for all of the challenges that we face and the one very difficult decisions we're about to discuss, be mindful that you still have the most efficient operation in the metro area, one that has preserved the county's dollars and preserved the county's service as long as possible.

One more thing, just to remind you, five years ago, six years ago, this is the math that the MTA published after demanding an additional $26 million from Nassau County. The demand was rejected by the county because I presume they didn't have the
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money, and their response was -- the
MTA's response was to remove all of the
lines that are shown here in red; in
other words, to take about half of the
transit map away altogether.

So again, as difficult as this
situation is, it would have been much
worse, much earlier, except for the way
we have approached this.

Let's move ahead and look at what
we can reasonably foresee for 2017.
Mind you, the budget process. Our
fiscal year actually starts January 1st.
We bring to you a budget recommendation
in the middle of February, and you act
on that by the end of March, and the
purpose of that sort of lagging was
to have better information when you
actually are asked to make a budget
decision.

This year, that timing is
particularly problematic, and I hope
you'll see why in just a moment here.
I also want to remind you of the -- we
look at this slide every year, the balance budget mandate. The language in the contract, which is also in the public law under which the contract was adopted says, in effect, that after all revenues have been accounted for, we must reduce -- we must adjust the hours of service to meet that revenue.

We have no way to deficit finance and operation. We have no way to borrow, no way to operate service other than that provided by the revenue that the county has available. So that's what always leads us to this situation.

Right now, best information that we have, is that there's about a $12 million difference between the cost of operating the current service, the service that's on the street today, and the revenues available to Nassau County in 2017.

I'll detail this for you in just a minute, but basically the components of that $12 million gap are that our costs
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will go up by about three and a half percent or $5 million dollars next year, and I will show you what the components of that are.

At the same time, operating revenues will fall by about $7 million. 5 million and 7 million is 12 million. Cost going up, revenue going down, something has to give. These are estimates based on what we know now. It's conceivable that the situation could get worse.

This 12 million is an early forecast. Maybe it's really 11 and a half million or maybe it's really 13 million, but 12 million is a good number to work with right now based on the information we have available to us.

It could fall a little bit more, and you'll see why in a minute, and major unknowns remain as we meet today, both on the revenue and the expense side, and let me show you those in just
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a second here.

Expenses are rising next year primarily because of people cost. As we discuss every year, our business is about two-thirds people cost, wages salaries and fringes. I'm assuming they'll go up next year.

We have a labor contract that expires in the middle of April, and so we haven't begun to negotiate it, but I'm assuming it's not going to reduce our labor costs.

There are some non-personnel costs, fuel would be one of them, which will probably go up next year. Not that fuel isn't still a really good bargain compared to historical rates, but it's not quite the bargain that it was this year. The cost locked in this year is simply not available for next year, so there will be some creeping up there.

The third component may be a little bit of a surprise. If you
recall, at the beginning of 2016, we reduced a bunch of service for similar reasons, and then the county found another 3 million and said we'll reinstate that service.

So we reinstated some services in April, the bulk of it June and some of it in September. So we got less than 12 months expense for those services. Going forward to next year, if we maintain all those services, that would add about another million dollars to the budgets just because we're running it for the entire year.

So again, the $12 million is the difference between what's available and what it would cost to keep service exactly as it is today for another 12 months. The big challenge or the big change is on the revenue side.

So if you allow me to just touch on each one of these lines very briefly. The top line, of course, is the big one. That's state operating
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assistance, $66 million. My assumption going -- I think you should -- you may want to just consider these reasonable assumptions as we go along here, and these are assumptions. This is an estimate. We don't have this data yet.

The assumption is that for 2017, we should not count on more than we got this year, and the reason for that is this year, we got the same amount as last year. The political dynamics are about the same, no better in Nassau County's favor.

So I think it would be quite optimistic to assume a significant increase in state operating assistance. We'll keep working at it, we'll keep looking for it, and perhaps there will be some additional state assistance for this coming year, but it's not going to be 12 million or 6 million. It might be a million or 2 if you're an optimist.
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The best year that we ever had as far as increase in state operating assistance was 5 million, and that was the year that the committee was chaired by the senator from Nassau County. That's not the case anymore. So for us to think that this will solve our problem is extremely optimistic.

The second line is the local match that the county must provide in order to get that 66 million. So I assume that's not going to go down, but I also assume that it's not likely to go up since the current -- well, let me go to the next line.

The next line is the one where the big change is. In addition to the minimum local share that the county provides every year -- during 2016, the county provided almost $6.8 million in discretionary county funding.

When the county passed its budget in October, that went down by 3 million, and earlier this week and
back and forth between the county and
NIFA, where NIFA demanded more cuts, an
additional 3.8 million for a total of
6.8 million came out of the budget.

Now, that hasn't been approved
yet. NIFA still has to act on that
budget, but considering that history,
it's very unlikely that NIFA is going
to demand that they put money back into
the budget.

So again, my assumption here is
that that zero is probably going to
stand. I would be happy to find out
that it's not, but in my view, that's
the reasonable assumption right now.

Next few lines are a lot less
important. The federal money is by
formula. That's a pretty safe
assumption. The matches for the
federal money are small and by formula.

Passenger revenue is the other one
where we could see some change. As you
probably know, the MTA is currently
holding hearings about raising its
fare. Our custom here, though we're not obligated to, but our custom has been to follow whatever the MTA does with MetroCard rates, and so once the MTA's decision is known to us, we'll bring to you some recommendation about that. Again, it's conceivable that there could be a little bit of an increase here.

The two increases that the MTA is currently considering, however, would produce about a million dollars at the very best, and maybe less, depending on which one they adopt and how they implement it.

So that million would be very welcome, but it's still well short of the $12 million gap. The last line is advertising revenue also, very small amount not likely to increase in any significant way.

So that's the revenue picture, and that's really the reason combined with the growth in costs that we're looking
at a $12 million gap for next year.

The unknowns, the big unknowns, one of them, the first one, you're used to because every year it's like this the STOA amount for Nassau County, State Transportation Operating Assistance for Nassau County is developed in Albany as part of the state's budget process.

We typically don't have any idea what it will be until the very end of March when the state legislature adopts a budget. I don't know any reason to think it will be known any sooner than that this year.

So that unknown we're accustomed to, but in addition to that we have the MTA fare change that I just talked about which we see every year, and so we're sort of accustomed to that. But two other brand new things, one, that there's a new -- will be a new labor contract in April or sometime thereafter, and that is completely
unknown at this point. We have not begun to negotiate it.

It will probably add a significant impact on the expense side which is unknown right now, but I've assumed in the rising expense of $5 million that I've talked about before. I've assumed some increase in labor rates and I really don't want to get into detail because that's a number to be determined at the bargaining table, not here.

Then lastly, we do not have an approved Nassau County budget at this point. Ordinarily there's a budget approved in October, and that's -- so this is another unknown that we're not accustomed to looking at right now. The combination of those four creates a very un-clear picture for right now.

So if we have an unbalanced budget, we really have only three kinds of tools. One is to increase revenues as we just discussed. The second is to
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look for non-service costs, and we will
do that when we look for a non-budget
recommendation in February.

We will look for every way we can
to reduce non-service costs, and if we
do some service reductions, it's
possible that we'll have a very large
reduction in the neighborhood of a
million and a half from being able to
consolidate operations into fewer
facilities.

The last thing we can go to if the
first two lines don't solve the nine
budget, the last thing we must do
according to contract and according to
law is go to the service loss. We have
to reduce service. I believe that will
be the case this year.

So we are about to make a
recommendation to you to approve today
the elimination of nine low ridership
routes in January. That's the only
action, the only which we're asking for
the committee to take action. But I
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want you to be aware of the rest of the overall environment, in the absence of some more relief from some source between now and the budget recommendation, that we have to consider further reductions in April.

Not recommending them to you today and I'm not asking you to act on them today, but I think it's only fair to be aware that that's the possibility out there.

Those reductions would be much more significant than the January ones, and they would call into question the Able-Ride service area and how much Able-Ride service we would provide also. Again, no need to make that decision today, but that decision could be before you in another six or eight weeks.

I do want to remind you in thinking it's reasonable to say, listen, since we don't know so many things, why don't we wait until we do
know those things before doing anything drastic. And if the gap were smaller, I would be very much in favor of that and be recommending that, but given the size of the gap and the unlikelihood that it's going to be taken care of by somebody else, I want to begin early with some prudent actions, because if we can reduce some non-performing routes now, then we get 12 months worth of savings out of it.

If we wait until we know everything, it's mid-April. There's a process to reduce service. It's not instant, so mid-year before we can do any reductions, and that means going twice as deep in order to get the same amount of savings once we get out of January reductions.

These are the routes that we would recommend eliminating in January. These, we would eliminate in their entirety. Most of these are the routes that were eliminated at the beginning
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of the this year and then reinstated
after the county came up with some
additional funding.

I am certain that there are people
saying don’t you realize how silly this
is. You take them away, you put them
back and then you take them away again,
and I get that. It does seem silly or
foolish, but understand, that the
reason they were eliminated at the
beginning of January is that they were
poorest performing routes, meaning they
serve the fewest people, meaning they
require the greatest tax subsidy.

When we put them back during the
year, all of the customers didn't come
back just as you would expect. So
those previously poor performing routes
are now even poorer performers
financially. Some of them are doing
quite well in terms of -- remember, we
did these with some -- some of them, we
did with small buses and some different
styles of operating. They actually
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worked very well, and for the people that are using them, they're very --
the customers are very pleased with them. I would love to be able to let
them grow some more, to leave them in place, but given the financial
situation, I don't think that's sustainable.

If you go over to the right side,
there's a column that says passengers per day. So you can see all of these are fairly small routes in terms of the number of people they serve.

Then the last column is subsidy per passenger. That's how many tax dollars are going into each one. So if you just read across that first line, the Elmont FLEXI, 150 passengers per day. That's probably 75 individuals taking round trips or something like that.

So that means for each 150 trips taken a day, a person puts their MetroCard in and pays $2.75 or maybe a
discounted amount, and the taxer payers
150 times a day put in $24.72. That's
about $3,600 per day tax dollars going
to this.

Now, for those 75 folks, this is
great service and they will miss this
service a lot if we eliminate it, but
given the scarcity of tax dollars,
$3600 a day in order to maintain
something for 75 people just isn't
sustainable, I don't think. I wish it
were, but I don't think it is. That's
a policy decision of course, but those
are the basic economics of this.

Read down that column a little
further, Freeport shuttle, almost $37 a
day times 35 trips. Again, great
service for those 20 or so people who
use it, but very, very expensive and a
very inefficient use of taxpayer
money.

Much more troublesome than the
January cuts are these -- this
potential service reduction package
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that we have designed for April. So
the first five routes would be -- if we
use this approach, those first five
routes would be eliminated entirely.

If you look down at the passengers
per day column there, you see we're
affecting significantly more people,
and they're significantly more
efficient in their use of taxpayer
dollars if you look at the subsidy per
passenger column. But when we arrange
all of our routes in the order of
efficiency, these are the next ones up.
There aren't easier things or less
painful things to reduce before we get
to these.

From the N21 on down, we're not
reducing the route -- we're not
eliminating it rather, but we're
reducing. So for example, the N21, it
wouldn't operate on weekends. It
wouldn't operate on -- in midday. A
peak hour only route.

This is a good route, as you can
see by the number of people affected, even by the weekend and off peak numbers, and its subsidy is higher than the rest, but not as high as the ones in the January cuts.

So these are next -- if we have to do this all with service cuts, these are the next ones to go. The January package, that's worth about a million and a half if we get 12 months out of it.

This package is worth about 6 and a half million in expense offset by a million and a half in fare-box revenue that we won't get, so about a $5 million net coming from this package in service reductions.

I need to say very clearly that I think nobody in this room, not members of the committee, certainly not people who work for NICE Bus are happy about looking at this chart at all. As professionals, we like to service, we like to carry passengers and we hate to
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do this kind of thing, but as I tried
to say at the beginning, in the end,
after we’ve done everything else, this
is what’s left, this is what we must
do.

This is what the map looks like.
The lines in blue are lines that remain
untouched. The lines in red are the
lines that are either eliminated or
significantly reduced.

Maybe even more painful is this is
what, if we follow the federal
three-quarters of a rule,
three-quarters of a mile rule, these
are -- the bubbles are areas where
Able-Ride eligibility would be
affected, not necessarily eliminated.

For instance, in Great Neck, five
days a week instead of seven. In some
of these areas, not in the midday. In
some of these areas will be complete
elimination.

So if the choice is to
eliminate -- is to stick with the
policy that we follow now, which is to
follow the federal minimum,
three-quarters of a mile from any fixed
route bus stop, then there would be
effects here. There's a million or so
worth of savings on this page, and as
much as we hated the cuts on the
previous page, we hate these just as
much even though it's a smaller number
of people affected.

So our recommendation to the Bus
Transit Committee today is that you,
after hearing from customers, that you
approve the elimination of those nine
routes in January, and that you also
reflect in the minutes that you have
received, some public comments that are
before you that we've received in
writing, plus the ones you are about to
receive and that you've also received
the Title 6 analysis, which is at your
place.

The remainder of the picture that
I just tried to paint is for
consideration later unless something positive happens that allows us to either not go forward with those cuts or reduce those cuts in some way.

Mr. Chairman, that's the end of my presentation, and I would be happy to respond to questions or receive comments from the committee.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you, Mr. Setzer. I've been here before last year, and we faced a similar problem with not such a drastic budget cut, but a significant one. I assume the routes that you have chosen pretty much correspond to the prior year.

MR. SETZER: The January cuts are virtually all cuts that you looked at before, that's right. The April ones are new.

MR. SHRENKEL: As you stated, you know, the issue is really getting money from the county and getting money from the state, and now we have NIFA in the equation, and on the expense side from
NICE, it's your coming negotiations with your union. You didn't present -- is it -- is the $2 million in salaries or is it health benefits included or --

MR. SETZER: It's mostly in wage rates and some in salary. If we provide wage increases for one group of employees, we try to maintain some kind of equity for employees who aren't represented.

MR. SHRENKEL: Well, certainly everyone likes to see people get a raise when they work hard. There's only so many dollars to go around, and I think it's incumbent upon as corporations are doing today. They don't make bonuses if the company is not making money, and in this case, there's just so much dollars to a given budget, a given pie.

Hopefully, in your negotiations, you will work hard in trying to make the union understand that the dollars may not be there. I understand this is
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a game of -- some people call it a game
of chicken.

We certainly don't want to see
workers go out on strike, but
nevertheless, I certainly as a member
of this committee am wanting to see
less service cuts. I think everybody
has to share in the difficulties of
economic times including some of NICE
employees.

So that is my comment, my
recommendation. As I said,
negotiations are not always easy.

MR. SETZER: Right. Point taken,
sir.

MR. SHRENKEL: Are there any other
comments from committee members?

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: Good after
noon, Mike.

MR. SETZER: Good afternoon,
Mr. Watkins-Lopez.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: A couple of
questions.

MR. SETZER: Sure.
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MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: When did you realize there was a $7 million deficit in this budget?

MR. SETZER: Well, the first $3 million part of it when the county approved the budget in October. The additional 3.8 just became a reality earlier this week, although, I was aware of the possibility.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: Secondly, as you said before, this is not the first time we've been here.

MR. SETZER: Right.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: This is also not the first time we bring up the wages. When you signed a contract with the drivers, did you not know what you would have to pay them every year? Was there no way of being able -- was there no foresight into how much it was going to cost every year with the wages, and the increases, and the salaries and the healthcare? Did you not know this before this year?
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MR. SETZER: I don't know what
next year's wage rate will be.

MR. SHRENKEL: I'm not talking
about next year, I'm talking about this
year. Did you not know in 2015 how
much you would have to give the
drivers?

MR. SETZER: Certainly. We have a
labor contract negotiated for five
years, so yes, that was a known factor
through 2016. It is unknown next year.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: That's fine,
but then how come it has been a
surprise factor for the last five
years. Every time you come to this
committee, you will see labor cost,
labor cost. How is it -- how have you
not been able to project these labor
costs beforehand?

MR. SETZER: Mr. Watkins-Lopez, I
think you misunderstood what I said.
It is a surprise -- not a surprise. It
is an unknown for next year. It has
not been an unknown for this year.
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If I can continue on with that point just a little bit. I think our employees deserve to be fairly compensated. They are not overpaid. They need to be compensated fairly.

We have to compete for our workers. It's not an easy job. We complete with many other transit operators, so I'm quite prepared to defend the pay raise and benefit packages that our employees receive.

MR. SHRENCHEL: Absolutely. I just feel that every year, we come to this room, we have this conversation with you and it's you that blames it on the workers.

MR. SETZER: There's no blame at all in my comments.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: Okay. Next thing, what is your contingency plan for the rapidly dropping ridership? Because you're already down from 120 riders when you came on to about 91 that Newsday had reported. That's
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$30,000 in riders.

On top of that, you're now basically saying you want to cut over 20 routes. How do you plan on making up this money if you don't have the ridership and you don't have the routes?

MR. SETZER: The fare-box, Mr. Watkins-Lopez, provides about 40 percent of the flat funding for the operation. As we reduce routes, we also lose some of that ridership, but the net -- the fact is to reduce expenses more than to reduce revenue.

The way to add riders is to have enough funding to add service. Much of this system is over -- is overloaded, is heavily loaded, let's say. There is no capacity on existing service, so ridership will go up when and if we can expand service.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: We're not expanding service, so what is your contingency when you lose these riders?
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How do you get -- because essentially, you're also cutting off a lot of the capillary routes to the main arteries, the n4 and the n6, so on and so forth, the moneymakers.

If people can't get to these money making routes, how do you plan on getting them there?

MR. SETZER: Well, I would like to make two points. First of all, there's no such thing as a moneymaking bus route, not in Nassau County, not in New York City, not anyplace. Every route is subsidized by the tax payers virtually everywhere in the western world.

So it's not a matter of finding profitable bus routes. It's a matter of using the available subsidy dollars as effectively as possible.

Now, your question is what is the contingency plan for this lost service which really amounts to how can you get two people into one bus seat, and there
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is no plan to do that and it's not possible. The answer is steady sufficient funding so that this system can grow to meet needs rather than to shrink.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: Now, also in the past, we haven't seen any new revenue streams, we haven't seen any new grants for operations, and you have usually said that that's the county's job. Is there anyone at NICE that works with the county to procure more monies?

Who do we need to talk about looking into getting more grants for our bus system, because it's been five years, and we're still banking on STOA.

MR. SETZER: Well, I think you're mistaken. We use a lot of federal funds in both the operation and the capital. We do work closely with the county in looking for those opportunities.

The other thing that you have to
consider is that federal grants are never free money. They're usually 50/50 grants, and so they start with a 50 percent local match.

Well, the issue that we're talking about that brings us here today is that the county's fiscal situation is what it is. So thinking that there is more money to match local grants is -- I don't understand it. I don't get that.

If there were, we would be happy to look for more grants or we would be happy to use that money in some other creative way. We are actually quite effective in pursuing federal and state grants.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: What happens -- so what are we going to do with the new buses that we bought? Are they just going to go to Able-Ride? But if Able-Ride gets cut -- you know, we did just spend a lot of money on these new buses. Are they going to go to Able-Ride for now after we cut the
FLEXI Ride services?

MR. SETZER: Do you mean the smaller buses?

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: Yes, the smaller buses.

MR. SETZER: The smaller buses will probably be uses for Able-Ride, yes. We still have a lot of very over age buses that need to be retired, so we can make very good use of them in Able-Ride. The same thing with newly received 40-foot buses.

If we reduce the size of the fleet, that's something that allows us to retire some half a million mile, 12-year, 14-year-old buses which would be a good thing. It would actually reduce our maintenance expense somewhat.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: So before April, will you be moving some of these smaller buses onto the lower ridership routes, or no as well?

MR. SETZER: I don't know because
I want to see what else happens with funding. That could be part of a recommendation when we come to you with a budget in February. It depends on what happens to the overall funding picture.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: You are aware that there is a very good possibility that you will be getting less STOA money than before?

MR. SETZER: I recognize that. STOA money is not provided according to formula, so it's entirely up to the appropriate arms of the budgeting process in Albany, so anything is possible.

We've never, at least in my experience, seen a reduction in STOA money. I'm aware that there are those other counties who would like to take some of ours, but certainly, it's possible. I'm not banking on that, but it's possible.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: Thank you.
MR. SHRENKEL: Mr. Setzer --

MR. SETZER: Yes, sir.

MR. SHRENKEL: -- in the past, we had a Nassau County cap X budget for new buses --

MR. SETZER: Right.

MR. SHRENKEL: -- and at one point, what we did, we took some of the money out of cap X and we put it into operations. Do we have any flexibility with this coming in 2017? Is there any new cap X coming in?

MR. SETZER: Mr. Chairman, that's certainly something we would look at if there was an opportunity. The cap X that you're thinking of was an additional state allocation of 3.8 million or capital, which we were then able to, by moving some other funds around, effectively turn into operating assistance.

If there were some additional state money, but that also would be in the state budget, which we won't know
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until the end of March --

MR. SHRENKEL: Wasn't there a county cap X or a county cap X contribution at one time?

MR. SETZER: I don't recall that there was, but I don't always -- in a couple of years after the budget was adopted, the county came forward with some additional funds.

MR. SHRENKEL: I seem to recall that there was a switch and we got some extra money from the county by virtue of, you know, forging buying new equipment.

MR. SETZER: I do think, Mr. Chairman, that you're thinking of the state money in 2015. There was an extra 3.8 million that they added to our -- each of the downstate systems got an additional allocation, one time capital.

We turned that into operating assistance, but that was the source of that. That's all that I recall. If
that happens again this year, that's certainly something to be considered in an overall solution.

     MR. SHRENKEL: Of course, you know, one of the optimistic sides, and I read this in the newspaper. I didn't speak with the county executive, but he was hoping that some of these eliminations are sort of tentative suspensions, and if money is found, perhaps they can come to you --

     MR. SETZER: That's my hope too.
     MR. SHRENKEL: -- and restore some of these routes.

     MR. SETZER: I think that's probably the hope of everyone in this chamber.

     MR. SHRENKEL: Are there any other questions for Mr. Setzer from committee members?

     Mr. Setzer, thank you.
     MR. SETZER: Thank you.
     MR. SHRENKEL: Please feel free if you choose to -- we're going to call on
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the public comments. If you feel that any given one is necessary, just raise your hand, and of course, you can, you know, respond to it, but it's your option. Or you can come back to us later on and just pick the significant ones you think that absolutely should have the answers. I leave that to your discretion, all right?

MR. SETZER: Understood.

MR. SHRENKEL: Gentleman in the back with the sign, did you have your hand up?

MR. MENDEL: Yes, sir.

MR. SHRENKEL: When you come to the podium, please understand, state your name and who you represent, whether you represent yourself, an organization and the area of what, you know, you're speaking about.

Again, please remember that your comments are limited to three minutes and, you know, if I raise my hand, that means, you know, finish your last
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sentence.

MR. MENDEL: What if I can't see your raised hand?

MR. SHRENKEL: Well, then, you will just hear me from my mic and I'll say thank you very much.

MR. MENDEL: I will say this to you, and sir, Mr. NICE, I apologize to you on behalf of more than you'll ever know.

MR. SHRENKEL: Speak into the mic.

MR. MENDEL: To the gentleman, Mr. NICE, I apologize to him more than you'll ever know because the last thing I ever want to do is see anybody lose their job bid, God forbid, or be insulted.

What I will say to you is this, and hopefully I get my other comments in, I speak to your drivers all the time. Nobody wants to work there, the buses are always braking down. You can't keep people there, number one. Number two, the gas. Gas has been cut
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in half over the last three or four years. I don't know where those profits go.

Number three, what you had said about when you talked about the advertising, you said, well, I don't expect much of an increase there. I don't understand that. To me, you have to beautiful buses running up and down everywhere. There are people who pay companies to put their signs on trucks to drive all over.

My suggestion might be maybe you get together with the advertisers, make some really interesting signs, you know, that maybe light up a little bit, make some different deals, and if you help the Hispanic community, and God forbid even think about cutting anything. You should add lines.

The Hispanic community will respond and deal with the advertisers, number one. That was my comment to him.
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MR. SHRENKEL: Sir, did you state your name for the record?

MR. MENDEL: My name is normally mud, but it's David Mendel.

MR. SHRENKEL: Are you representing yourself, Mr. Mendel, as a rider or --

MR. MENDEL: In a way, I'm representing myself because the truth is I'm doing this so everybody can think what a great guy I am, that I have a voice to use.

I've been everywhere fighting about this because I hate the fact that you people can even think about cutting the buses for these poor people, mostly Hispanic people that work 13 hours a day for $9 an hour.

If any one of you who decides to even think about cutting this, if you took the bus two days, and if you took those buses two days in the rain and you had to make a transfer, you would do anything in the world to add the
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buses.

The buses don't need to be cut, they need to be added to bring much more money into the county, give these people who wait out in disgusting rain and snow, can't tell when their bus is going to come, and you just suggested, well, we'll cut this for a while and then we'll bring them back.

What about the poor people who depend upon these things? And please, I never ever mean to be rude, but I'm going to say this to you. You built a bicycle path, a bicycle path from Seaford to Tobay Beach. A bicycle path that must have cost millions of dollars and that flops around 90 percent of the time, the outside part of it.

You built miniature golf courses around the new parks. You built the parks, you have free concerts, you have signs. In my next life, I want to come back as a sign maker. How dare you even think about cutting back on these
buses for these poor people.

I will make one other suggestion
to you, and again, I will make one
other suggestion to you. I was in,
unfortunately, the security and alarm
business, and what I will tell you is
this, it's illegal for businesses
without full fire systems to house
smoke detectors, which is ridiculous
because it's always been about false
alarms.

So what I will tell you, the alarm
systems are so much more sophisticated
now that if you charged every business
that, believe it or not, is not allowed
to have a smoke detector, if you
charged them $50 and now their place
is going to be safer, they would be
very, very happy to pay it.

Number two --

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you, Mr.
Mendel. You have run out of time.
You're on overtime.

MR. MENDEL: You tag fire
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Extinguishers -- each year, a fire extinguisher in every business has to be tagged and certified. I actually did it, and I'm a moron. I passed the test.

Millions upon millions of dollars are spent by these people tagging fire extinguishers for all these different companies. If you had a county company do it, it would raise a lot of money. It would do a lot of good.

MR. SHRENSKEL: Thank you, Mr. Mandel.

MR. MENDEL: I appreciate it. You have the nicest day possible and I hope I wasn't rude. And besides that, everything's fine.

MR. SHRENSKEL: Again, please let's not run over. We're not going to set examples that occurred previously. We don't want to be rude either.

MR. MICHNO: Hopefully, the clock will work this time. I'll try to remember.
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These cuts are actually worse than the MTA proposed because they're affecting Westbury now, and Westbury is a low income area. This is pathetic. That's what I have to call the way the county treats bus riders. You restore service only to take it away six months later.

You are playing with people's lives here. It's almost as if this is some sadistic game with people who depend on buses. This is one of the most corrupt bus operations I have ever seen or experienced.

All of you, except one, don't even rely on the buses. You do not realize just how your actions are affecting innocent people. We did not create this budget mess. We are always asked to sacrifice while the county's wealthiest residents are not.
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Every day, I see more and more luxury cars on the road, and somehow, Nassau County cannot afford to run a quality bus system. Taking away this service will once again leave people stranded and forced to rely on walking, friends or taxis, the latter of which has seen booming business under Ed Mangano. It's no wonder why so many have signs thanking him.

Eventually, you will pay for what you are doing to us. Mangano is under indictment by the FBI, and it will come out how this contract for the bus system screwed the people of Nassau that and its poor citizens. This was a bad deal from the beginning.

MTA knew what they were doing when they knew more money would be needed to preserve the current level of service and maintenance in 2011. NICE has never provided as much service compared to MTA Long Island Bus. On average, routes were less frequently.
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Take the n27, for example. Used
to be every 30 minutes all day, but now
it's not. You guys have empty buses
all over the place. That's hardly
efficient. Then there's the breakdowns
because you provide much less service
and maintenance than the MTA, so riders
have to deal with missing buses.

The condition of the fleet is
criminal, buying new shuttle buses for
a service that's discontinued in less
than a year. Painting buses in a new
fancy paint job, but not replacing
parts until it breaks down. Driving
riders and fare revenues away by these
cuts and poor reliability.

I guess I too will be relying on
the train even more now after these
cuts are in effect. I will have to ride
the train now all the time, and it
costs me more. I know this is all part
of the mentality to make things so
miserable for the lower incomes and
disabled on Long Island so we just
Well, I am going to stand before you and continue this fight against the agenda. You have no business running a bus system. Hand it over to the MTA and let it be run like the Long Island Railroad. If Nassau doesn't want to fund the system, then they have no business owning it.

MR. SHRENKEL: Lady in the back, please.

MS. CURRAN: Thank you for having me. I'm Nassau County Legislator Laura Curran, and I would like to share a solution, the way that we can get the $6.8 million dollars back to the buses, and this is something that I've shared with NIFA and with the budget office here in the county.

We should look at fund balance. We have a precedent for this. Last year when the routes were cut, we went into the fund balance for $3 million and we restored most of those routes,
and it breaks my heart to see those on the chopping block again.

So I'm saying let's use money in fund balance. Fund balance is way over what it needs to be. The county has a policy to have levels of unreserved fund balance at no less than 4 percent and no more than 5 percent of prior year expenses.

Actually, right now, the county is $3 million more than the 5 percent number, so we're actually more than our policy dictates. If we were going to go to the 4 percent number, we would have $31 million extra and still have our fund balance at the appropriate amount.

So there really are options to avoid these draconian cuts. NIFA doesn't not like us to use fund balance; however, there's precedent. We did it last year. Not very much money.

It seems a shame really that we're
money that we can't use, and meanwhile, we're hurting our most vulnerable people by cutting buses. It just doesn't seem right.

If Nassau County is going to become economically viable in the 21st century, we have got to keep our young people here. They're not using cars as much as their parents. They're not buying cars at the same rates.

We've got to promote smart growth development and make our streets more navigable, right, if we want to survive as a region, that's what we have to do. In a robust transportation system, public transportation is key to accomplish all of those goals.

So I would urge NIFA and the county, if you hear me, please consider fund balance. We have more than we need. In fact, we have more than our policy dictates. It's real money that we're sitting on, a big pile of money that we're sitting on.
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So that's my case. Thank you very much.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you, Legislator, and my comment is I certainly agree with you. You are, of course, in the mix and I don't think it's a political matter of a party divide, so I would tend to think every legislator should want to use that money and I would possibly think that the county executive would want to use it also.

So I guess it's a matter of the legislature and all parties to try to convince NIFA to use those fund balances.

MS. CURRAN: I agree. This cuts across party lines. It's in all of our districts. It's the entire county.

MR. SHRENKEL: This is not political. This is about people losing ridership.

MS. CURRAN: I think really it's NIFA. NIFA needs to hear this message.
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MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you for putting it on the record and making it public.

MS. CURRAN: I appreciate the opportunity. Thanks.

MR. SHRENKEL: You're welcome.

Man with the hat.

MR. LEE: My name is Andrew Lee. I'm from Queens, New York here in Nassau County. I live by a couple of NICE Bus routes along Hillside Avenue and Northern Boulevard and also on Jericho Turnpike.

The buses that go into the terminal, 165th Street terminal, like almost every week is usually this crowded, but I just saw the cuts for the first time.

It's like there's no way you can cut the N22A during the rush hour because I see a lot of people on the N22A during the rush hour between Jamaica and Mineola because that's when most of the people come from the 179th
Street subway. And speaking of the 179th Street subway, last Friday there was a missing N22 line, and then I was on a 43 going to 179th Street, Hunter College, and then I asked the bus driver, I said, have you seen the N22 and he said no.

When I got up to the 179, it broke down. It was one of those ill XM40 buses, and this is interesting, because every two weeks along Hillside Avenue, Jamaica Avenue and Northern Boulevard now, there's always going to be a breakdown somewhere.

One time, three breakdowns in 16 hours on Hillside and Jamaica Avenue. That's really unacceptable, really unacceptable, and because -- and there are a lot of riders that travel between the subway station and parts of Nassau County.

I can't -- I'm afraid to go out here at times to Nassau County because I might be stranded let's say if I come
from the beach or I come from Eisenhower Park playing volleyball. What gives? And now a $12 million deficit? Here we go again. Here we go again. How are we going to fix it? How are we going to fix it until we get to apocalypse levels. Thank you.

MR. RASKIN: Good afternoon. My name is George Raskin, R-A-S-K-I-N. I'm with the Long Island Bus Riders Coalition.

My own personal view is you haven't approached the possibility of raising fares. I know that goes down hard, a lot of people do have trouble with that, but you should at least consider that in how much it can help with the cuts, the budget cuts by raising the fares a little bit.

I don't have personal research on it, but I would think the people with the bus company could look into that. If it were to increase the fares some, how much of the cuts could be saved?
Sometimes I wait on the bus almost an hour, almost an hour and a half sometimes. The bus, the number 1 bus on Sundays, there really could be some things done to improve service. I don't have a lot of comments, so I'll cut it at that. Thank you.

MR. SHRENKEL: I have one for you. It would be interesting to know if the Bus Riders Union can come up with some statistics of who would be willing to pay higher fares, and if so, how much, and I think that information should be transmitted to NICE Transportation.

We have three hands. Yes, sir.

We will get to you next.

MR. LEVITT: Good afternoon. I'm Dr. Lou Levitt representing the Amsterdam at Harborside in Port Washington. We are a senior residence, 300 people, a nursing home, a hospice center, assisted living center, and we're located on West Shore Road in Port Washington. We have appeared
before the committee before and I will summarize briefly the case I made then.

We're very appreciative of your interest, and we received the assistance of NICE, who in response to our testimony, developed a proposal to expand service on West Shore Road.

We're working together with the 70 businesses who occupy two industrial parks on West Shore Road, and these businesses are expanding and are in need of a work force. They are among the largest tax payers in Nassau County.

The proposal we made is based on this, our employees who are similar to the employees of the new hotel that's going up in that area really cannot afford to work for us at the salaries that we pay, which are more than the going wage. So we have an unstable work force that relies on cars, and in some cases, walks 2 miles in order to get to work.

The proposal that NICE submitted
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connects the two Long Island Railroad stations and uses Roslyn as a connecting link to at least five other bus routes in Nassau County.

So if that proposal were funded, it would make for some very serious growth in job opportunities in Nassau among a population that really needs it. We need it badly as well. So that's the proposal.

We intend to move forward in contacts with our state representatives. We have the support of our local Democratic and Republican representatives, our county's legislature -- legislator is very much with us.

We have a request to make of you. You are a citizen advisory group. You don't have budgetary responsibilities. Your job is to make recommendations to the county exec and to the county legislature.

So we have a resolution we would
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like you to consider. We have sent copies to Mr. Littman.

MR. SHRENKEL: We've received that, Doctor. It was sent over the e-mail.

MR. LEVITT: It's two sentences. I would like to read it out load.

MR. SHRENKEL: Please, quickly.

MR. LEVITT: Having reviewed the proposal for public bus service on West Shore Road submitted by NICE and the compelling evidence for the urgent need for this service submitted by the representatives of more than 70 businesses and the Amsterdam, we the committee recommend that the service should be initiated as soon as it is possible. Thank you.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you.

Sir, we're going to get to this side next. Everybody will get their turn.

MR. WELLS: Good afternoon. I'm Frederick Wells. I reside at Queens
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and part of the Long Island Bus Riders Union.

The main reason for some of those low ridership routes is for network coverage because if you don't have the network coverage, people don't depend on your system. The elimination of the N80 and N81 route is -- even though it was low ridership, it's vital because it services major job areas and colleges.

One, for example, one of my former employers, Slomin's, which is on Lauman Lane, that's where the N80 passes through. The N80, it runs past PSE&G and some of those major job sites, maybe Cablevision and like Bethpage Railroad Station.

You know, cutting those lines, people without cars or people that car broke down who was once able to go to work will have to quit their job, and then there you go again. You know, you have low ridership even if you try to
Then, according to -- going to April, you was talking about eliminating the N1 on weekends. Well, for one, the N1, you shouldn't have the N1 go to Jamaica. It should -- the N1 should be -- should stay in Nassau County so it could transfer to the N24 in Floral Park instead of straight up because you need the north-south coverage.

Then in my area was the Queens/Nassau border. You eliminate what was once the Dutch Broadway line. Dutch Broadway line should feed in the Jamaica subways because that's pretty much where the travel is going in that area because the N4 and the N6 needs help.

I understand you're going to buy these 60-foot buses, to articulate buses for those busy lines, but that's not enough. If you want to take cars off the road -- because eliminating bus
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service is not going to do it.

Putting more cars on the road is
going to cause more traffic jams. If
you want to take cars off the road, you
have to leave the buses alone and try
to add service to the lines that's
vital. Thank you.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Endo, will you come up to the
microphone and introduce yourself, and
with your permission since you too are
part of the Bus Riders Union, I'm going
to ask Mr. Aaron Watkins to read your
comments. Please introduce yourself.

MR. ENDO: My name Yuki Endo,
resident of Jackson Heights, Queens.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: "My name is
Yuki Endo, resident of Jackson Heights,
Queens and a member of the Long Island
Bus Riders Union.

I depend on NICE Bus, MTA
Subway/Bus/LIRR/MNRR, Bee-Line Bus,
Suffolk County Transit, Academy Bus
X23, X24 and Hampton Jitney bus.
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I am urging NICE Bus to adopt MTA fare hike if MTA plans to raise fare to 3 dollars, but I do not unlimited MetroCard fare increase because NICE Bus has been awful service than MFA.

On Friday, November 18th, on my way to Port Washington for my friend's birthday, I got off late 3:55 P.M. N81 Hicksville, number 1742 bus at Hicksville at 5:08 P.M. due to bus broke down before and witness 5:22 P.M. N22, number 1657 bus driver skipping first stop, Hicksville Station, which made passengers waiting for N22 bus furious for forcing to wait for next bus, which is outrageous. You should not be cutting Elmont FLEXI, Freeport, Hicksville, Wantagh Shuttles, N45, N51, weekend N80/81 bus. If you're cutting N48 Shuttle, you should send some select N48/49 trips to/from Jericho Quad.

The reason community shuttles are not working well because not lots of
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people know they came back under new name. Don't cut Hicksville-Wantagh N73 shuttle, N80, 81 and N51 bus.

Lots of businesses long N20 route including Americana Mall are asking for full restoration of direct N20 bus between Hicksville Station and Flushing via Great Neck Station because some folks are spending more time on N20G/H due to miss connection at Great Neck, and security at Americana Mall told me their stores are losing their customers as a result of N20 split routes.

I am also asking NICE Bus to reinstate former MTA Long Island Bus route N28 bus, which ones operated by Roslyn Station and Roslyn Industrial Park, then extend to Amsterdam at Harborside, Gulf Link, new hotel, Port Washington parks, and Helen Keller Blind & Deaf Center for youths, and adults in Sandy Point which needs a bus route. Thank you for your cooperation."
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MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you,

Mr. Endo.

Yes, ma'am.

MS. MCCLAIN: Hi. My name is Kelly McClain, and I'm with the Long Island Center for Independent Living. We're located in Levittown, and we advocate and work to ensure the equality for people of disabilities across Nassau County. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

I just wanted to raise a few points and to go on record as saying that this was strongly opposed to any reductions or cuts in services.

As you know, NICE and Able-Ride are people's lifeline to work, school and the community particularly when they have a disability and don't drive. If you take away their transportation, you create increased barriers to living a full life.

The impact of the drastic services reduction in 2011 and '12 are still
strongly felt throughout the disability community. Introducing further cuts will only increase the marginalization experienced by the community.

So as a service provider for people with disabilities in Nassau County located in Levittown, any cuts to fixed routes in Able-Ride reduce our consumers' ability to utilize our services.

So I'm just asking that you please do all you can to avoid further cuts to these vital services. Thank you.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you.

MR. CONLIN: My name is William Conlin. I'm speaking for myself. Can I ask Mr. Setzer a question?

MR. SHRENKEL: You can ask him, but that's on your three minutes.

MR. CONLIN: That's kind of funny though considering you guys were late 20 minutes, so threatening us about 3 minutes when you made us wait here for you.
Anyway, Mr. Setzer, your basic runs on cost per ride, do you receive money based on each route?
MR. SETZER: No.
MR. CONLIN: So why is the cost per ride different on each bus route?
MR. SETZER: Let me discuss that when I've got some other comments. I'll get to that.
MR. SHRENKEL: Why don't you address the committee with your questions as if you're talking to Mr. Setzer, and if he chooses to respond, you know, after the meeting, individually, it's up to you. You have three minutes and that's it. You know, this is not confrontational.
MR. CONLIN: I'm not an expert on this. That's why.
MR. SHRENKEL: Please say what you have to say.
MR. CONLIN: I take the N81 from Massapequa to Garden City. I work for Verizon. They just moved 2,000 workers
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into that building coming from all over the place including Queens, Suffolk. They would all love to use the bus.

We also have something called economy check card. I'm a full fare rider. I'm the kind of person you want to be taking the bus, and you're now going to drive me off he bus, which makes no sense. I'm even willing to accept the rate increase.

Why you guys do not go around to all the business in Nassau County and try to get them to sign on for the economy check card and actually go after people to come and take the bus, get them off the road.

I have never seen anybody go into any employer saying how do your employees get to work, why don't you use the bus, use the economy check card. If they're small, maybe you can group them all together and they can all get together and use the economy check card. Verizon happens to be big
and they'll pay for it, but all these other employees mentioned the same thing.

Cutting the buses back is not going to increase ridership. I'm not going to come back again. You cut this bus again, that's it for me. Back in the car and more traffic. If that's what you guys want, that's fine. Other than that, I have nothing else to say.

Thank you.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you.

MR. DAS: First of all, thank you very much for allowing me to talk. Due to my accent, I will try to read this letter very slowly.

MR. SHRENKEL: Please state your name and the town you’re from, whether you represent yourself or an organization.

MR. DAS: My name is Ron Das, D-A-S. I am from Floral Park and I am representing my wife who is severely disabled, and the other lady said about
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not cutting the funding for the
Able-Ride.

My wife just wrote a letter to the
Honorable Edward Mangano, the County
Executive. I do want to read this
letter so that the funding would not be
reduced and the service would be
improved.

This is my letter to Mr. Mangano.

Dear Mr. Mangano, as you have always
extended your help to those in need
with Nassau County services.

My name is Christian Das. I live
in Floral Park. Today, December 8,
2016, I had appointment to see my
therapist at Stars Rehabilitation
Center at 1554 Northern Boulevard,
Manhasset.

I book my reservation with
Able-Ride on Tuesday in order to have
the transportation. I gave all
necessary requirements for booking,
such as traveling with my personal care
assistant, which is a PCA, extra wide
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wheelchair and lift on the bus.

The scheduled time after the pick-up was over. I called Able-Ride was told me that it would pick up at 12:45. 12:45 came and gone. The first when the driver eventually came in, he told me that we were just an add-on in the van, he cannot take the wheelchair, he cannot take PCA, and he also said that a bus is coming to pick us up.

He also mentioned he already had the passenger and he has to go. We found him rude and argumentative.

Please note, this is not the first time I have had a chronic problem with Able-Ride. Not too long ago, I had to cancel my therapy appointment due to miss handling and dereliction of duties by the Able-Ride staff.

MR. SHRENKEL: Try to sum it up, please.

MR. DAS: That's it. That's the final sentence. Mr. Mangano, I am requesting your intervention so that my
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next appointment on Thursday,
December 15th and all of the future
appointments will be -- will not be a
fiasco like this one due to the
incompetency of the Able-Ride staff.

I look forward to hear from you.

Signed, Cristian Das. Thank you.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you.

Please under that all your
comments are part of a public record
being taken down by a public
stenographer, and those minutes are
available to the legislature, members
of the legislature, the County
Executive, and of course, the committee
can review it and look at them again,
and certainly NICE Transportation.

Let's get some people on the right
side who have been patiently waiting,
and I appreciate it.

Sir, in the first row. Thank you.

Q. Steve Edmundson, Oceanside Civic
Association, and I used to work for Nassau County
as well.
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Sorry to say, there's only one person from the county government here when we have 19 legislators. I don't know where the rest of them are.

Long Beach has a bus service, and they actually take all types of denominations of money, dollar bills, quarters, whatever. I don't know when you get on a NICE Bus system, you got to have exact change, and then on Sunday with the horrible bus service. The bus is like a sardine can when people are loaded up on the bus of the N15 all the way to the door, which is a safety and health hazard. I mean it's crazy.

You guys ought to come out and ride these buses. I know Mrs. Cohen, the legislator, has been on the bus, I know Salaj has been on the bus. I don't know how you people get elected or appointed to this board, but you should come out and ride these buses and see what's going on in the County of Nassau. Thank you.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you, sir.

Yes, ma'am woman.

MS. ALICE: Sister Mary Alice,

Mercy Medical Center. My third time
out here. I'm out of words. I went on the website to remember what was promised to us in 2012.

We were told that our choices would no longer be limited and we wouldn't have to suffer any slashing services, that January 1, 2012 is going to mark a new year of reliable service for riders and job opportunities and reduced costs for tax payers.

Mr. Mangano told us that through this public private partnership, Nassau County will provide reliable bus service that tax payers can afford, and that this county's bus system is a vital transportation link for thousands of riders who use it to commute to work, to get to school, to visit the doctor, to shop or take other important daily trips.

We were told that this is saving us $32.4 million. I don't know where that went. That it's going to restore draconian MTA cuts planned for route
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cuts, that it's going to preserve
Able-Ride services rather than MTA cuts
that we experienced, that it's going to
replace an MTA board with a hundred
percent Nassau resident board.

I don't know why public
transportation can't happen in a county
such as Nassau County, 3rd richest
county, I think, in the United States.
I don't know why transportation can't
be delivered. It makes no sense to us
people, ordinary folk.

I don't blame anybody, but I do
think that everybody is responsible,
the county, the bus system, whomever.
I think they're all responsible, and
honestly, I think it's a disgrace that
we can't provide public transportation
for people who need it, and it is
beyond my ability to believe it. It's
my third time here. That's even beyond
my ability to believe it.

I would like to thank Ms. Curran.
She has been a help each time I have
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tried to write to people. Thank you.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you.

MS. DARCY: Good evening. I'm Michele Darcy, Nassau County Finance Director for the Minority Legislature, and the only reason why I'm speaking today is to let the audience members know that I represent minority legislators, Legislator Minority leader, Kevan Abrahams.

I've been taking notes on everyone one of your comments. We plan to address your concerns, to meet with Mr. Setzer and NICE Bus, and we actively meet all year long, and I work for Legislator Curran, who is here today.

We also have Dan Small. He's been here since the beginning. He works for Legislator Birnbaum. So we just want you to know that you're all represented. Thank you.

MR. SHRENKEL: Yes, ma'am.

MS. WACHSBERGER: Good afternoon.
My name Maura Wachsberger, W-A-C-H-S-B-E-R-G-E-R. I'm here representing myself and the hundreds of people with disabilities who attend the program that I work at, CPF Nassau.

First of all, my nephew lives in Syosset, and the first round of cuts, he was a victim of, and he's sitting at home depending on his elderly father to take him anywhere he wants to go, which is just ridiculous.

As a Nassau County tax payer, myself, I find it appalling that we can't find funds to give people transportation. I'm here with people from CP Nassau who rely on Able-Ride to go to their program, to go home to visit their families. Many of them live in group homes.

I also find it appalling that New York State is telling us that everybody with a disability should have a job. How can they have a job if they don't have transportation? And that's all I
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wanted to say. Thank you for
listening.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you very
much.

MS. BROWN: Good evening, ladies
and gentlemen. First off, my name is
Emily Brown. I am a licensed social
worker with YAI, the Young Adult
Institute in Port Washington, which is
a group home for elderly seniors with
developmental and intellectual
disabilities. I would like to thank
you for your time. I know it’s been a
long day, so let’s get started.

By eliminating the route to Port
Washington, you are hereby eliminating
the ability the individuals that I
support to be independent. We have
several residents, both of whom are
present here today, who utilize
Able-Ride so they can go to work, go
shopping for themselves and attend
doctors' appointments.

We have residents who also use
Able-Ride to visit their loved ones who are further along the island. By eliminating Able-Ride, that is completely diminished and they have to rely on their elderly siblings or staff which often cannot take them to take them to take them.

I speak for YAI when I say that independence is of utmost importance to what we do and what we stand for. So today, I implore you to think about that when deciding the fate of the Able-Ride routes. Thank you, and I hope you have a wonderful afternoon.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you.

Before we have our next comment, we have another committee member, Joel Berse, who is kind of going to be sitting with us to listen to the comments.

MR. CRISMAN: My name is Kevin Chrisman, and I'm a rider of Able-Ride and I also represent my friends and colleagues from CP Nassau, and I have
written comments that, at the end, you
can tell me where to submit. I wish
this were being videotaped because what
I would do is turn to everyone and
raise their hand and ask if they would
rather not have a bus, or take a fare
increase to have a bus so they could
actually get employees, because I know
that I would.

It's been said before, it's really
impossible for people with disabilities
to have richer, fuller lives if they
can't get anywhere on buses that other
people use that are supposed to be
accessible. And the only other thing I
would like to say -- I'm glad someone
else mentioned it because I would have
forgotten -- that not much has improved
since 2012. In fact, the service has
gotten worse. So I'd pay more money for
better service. Thank you very much.

MR. PENNER:  Good afternoon. My
name is Larry Penner. I'm a transit
advocate and historian. I go back to
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the days of skank (phonetic) busing and
the private operators that were taken
over by the county in 1973, so I have a
good institutional memory.

What we have is a four-way dance
between fares paid by the riders known
as fare-box revenue along with funding
provided by Nassau County, the state
and the federal government.

The fare-box revenue presentation
proposed cuts you saw today in my
professional opinion having worked in
the transportation field for 31 years
was fair, professional and honest.

No one in this room probably
remembers, it was 53 years ago that the
county took control of all the bus
routes from private operators. Over
that time, the county, state and
federal governments combined have
invested over 700 million dollars in
capital improvements and operating
subsidies easily well over
$1.5 billion.
The NICE service has continued to be one of the best bargains in town, believe it or not. Since the 1950s, the average cost of riding a bus in the county has gone up at a lower rate than either the consumer price index or inflation.

The MetroCard introduced in 1996 affords a free transfer between NICE Bus and Transit Authority bus or subway. Purchasing a weekly MetroCard further reduces the cost, and if your employer offers transit check, that covers even more of the.

At the end of the day, it all comes down to the ability of increased funding for additional transportation service to service residents. Operating subsidies are required to increase the level of service and reduce the amount of time one waits for a bus on existing routes. Same for adding more off-peak, evening and weekend service. This holds true for
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those routes currently under discussion for elimination with their insufficient revenues to maintain existing service.

I took notes during the presentations today. What union leader in his right mind negotiating with NICE Bus is going to take a pay cut or no increase in salary when he has to negotiate on behalf of his employees, many of whom live and work in Nassau County and pay taxes like all of us.

Nassau County has one of the best capital programs working with the Federal Transit Administration and New York State Department of Transportation. They're so sophisticated, they tend to replace their buses when they become 12 years old, and trust me, they go after every federal discretionary dollar that's available. You're getting really a darn good deal in the organization they're managing the program.

Thank you.
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MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you.

Are there any other comments from anyone? No other comments?

MR. PENNER: If you have available time, I would like another minute or two if you'll indulge me. I know your time is valuable. I would like to share with you, if you give me another minute or two.

MR. SHRENKEL: I'll give you another minute.

MR. PENNER: Before I go on, if no one else is testifying, I would ask that you give me more than a minute. I agree with you everyone is entitled to three minutes.

Is there anyone else who is testifying? I would let that gentleman go before me, and then if you would indulge me.

MR. SHRENKEL: Take your minute.

MR. PENNER: Just like when you own a home, there's wear and tear over time, you replace components in your
house, your oil burner, your roof, et cetera. The bus system in Nassau County was built with over a $100 million in federal, state and county money for the Rockville Centre, Hempstead Bus Terminal, the Mitchell Field Bus provides the Mineola parking facility and the Stewart Avenue paratransit facility.

All these facilities, just like when you own a home, every year, NICE Bus working with Nassau County, state and federal government has to rebuild and replace different components of those systems.

I would urge you as members of the committee, visit the facilities, take a tour and see what a great job NICE Bus is doing with the capital funds being provided through a coalition of the county, state and federal governments, and the county legislature broke the deadlock last summer to provide the bonding money.
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To remind you, without a local share, it's 80 percent federal, 10 percent state, 10 percent county. If the county does not continue to provide 10 percent hard cash local share to county and NICE Bus corporate, millions and millions of dollars of federal assistance.

I'm available after the meeting if you would like to learn more about the history of our excellent bus system if you have any time. Thank you.

MR. STERN: My name is Howard Stern, and I live in Port Washington. I don't think I can rely on Able-Ride no more, and I'll tell you why. Each time when I'm on the road with Able-Ride, they tend not to stop and think about the other drivers coming in the opposite direction, and I do not appreciate that because they put my life in danger. What should I do then? I'm asking you what should I do because -- I just don't think I can
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rely on Able-Ride no more. I don't appreciate it at all.

MS. FALCO: I'm sorry, I'm just a little bit confused. When you say that your life is put in danger, are you forced to walk across the street or are you talking about when you're already riding?

MR. STERN: No, I'm talking about when I'm on Able-Ride and Able-Ride drivers don't even stop and think, because they don't look when the other car is coming in the opposite direction, and that's putting my life in danger and I don't appreciate it.

MR. SHRENKEL: I think what you should do in that distance, please, get the facts of the date, the time of the incident, and what I recommend, of course, is that you forward this to NICE Transportation and they will look into this matter, I'm sure.

MR. STERN: I think I'll do that from now on.
MR. BERSE: I just, for the record, for that gentleman that asked was a latch key kid that lived in Brooklyn and moved to Levittown in 1969 and road the 73 with Skank from when I first moved there at age 11 because I was riding the city transportation at 5 alone. In those days, you could.

So I have a knowledge, and that's one of the reasons why I was appointed to this committee of what you're talking about, and I know there are other people on this committee that are involved in other parts of the transportation system here in the county that have other knowledge.

So you don't have to question the fact if we know something or somebody on the committee does, and we do share with each other whenever issues come up. So I just wanted you to be satisfied that you don't have to worry that we're not informed.

MR. SHRENKEL: Please also
understand, two of the members of the committee have been bus drivers for a number of years. Perhaps they didn't like my comment that the union contract has to be negotiated with strength, but nevertheless, they serve on this committee, they serve with distinction and knowledge and I'm proud to serve with them.

One more comment. Yes, ma'am.

MS. BESMEL: My name is Sila Besmel, and I am here representing YAI. You know, the people that I support may not always be eloquent or elegant in the way that they present their case, but it's definitely passionate. The Able-Ride bus is their lifeline to everything that they do. If any of us could get out of this wheelchair right now and not depend on it anymore, they would. Trust me, they would. So it's veryconcerting to me to see how -- I'm not saying it was easy for Mr. Setzer. I'm sure it
wasn't -- to propose these cuts to the Able-Ride because there is no other choice for them. There is nothing else. If Able-Ride is not here how can they live a life.

We're all going to be old one day. We're all going to need something for somebody, help from somebody, from a different system. Let's set an example that there are things that we're not willing to compromise on. Able-Ride should be one of them.

MR. SHRENKEL: Thank you.

Are there any other comments from the committee members?

MR. ROSARIO: First of all, I want to thank the legislator for being here. That's showing that it's going across party lines, and it's got to be an effort, you know, where our hands are actually tied.

As a committee member, that's for me. I'm torn between the services that have to be cut. People say that we
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don't recognize the use of it. Like he said, I was a bus driver and I saw the ridership in these bus lines.

So it's hopeful that the legislator is here and maybe we can start working on the funding because that's where it's all at. It's about the dollars at the ends of the day. I know it affects people, but it takes money to run these lines to run the service.

Again, that's all I would like to say. I appreciate all the legislators being here.

MR. SHRENUEL: Thank you, Mr. Rosario.

At this point, I don't think there are any questions or comments. We have another public hearing starting at 6:00. Certainly, I think the committee needs a break. Therefore, I would like someone to make a motion to adjourn our meeting.

Mr. Watkins-Lopez has a comment.
I will hold my motion.

MR. WATKINS-LOPEZ: I just want to remind the public, Nassau County Legislature is meeting next week and they are going to be voting on their budget. We do not have any power over the Nassau County Legislature or their budget, but you do as tax payers, as bus riders, as residents of Nassau County.

So I implore you to go out next week on the 14th and tell them what you've told us, because at the end of the day, they're the ones who are deciding to cut or give us the money that we need.

So please, if you are free next Tuesday, the 14th, come back here. Come to this room and tell the Nassau County Legislature, all 19 of them, because only two were really represented here today, what you told us. They're the ones with the power and they're the ones that you need to
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be telling this to.

The meeting, I'm sure pretty sure
is at 1 P.M., if I remember correctly.
I think we actually have better data.

MS. DARCY: You're right that
there is a public meeting at 1:00 for
the whole legislature, and there will a
time period in the beginning for public
comment.

Just for clarity, because I don't
want you coming all the way here via
bus for a budget hearing that is not
occurring. The budget hearing has
taken place and the legislature already
adopted the budget, and it's now going
to be before NIFA for adoption.

There's also a NIFA meeting that
night at 6:30 at the Marriott in
Uniondale as well. So you have a 1:00
full legislative session here that
there is public comment and you can
speak on and advocate for the bus
funding, and then you can also go, if
you wish, to the NIFA meeting at the
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Mr. Shrenkel: At this point, I would like to make a motion to adjourn. Who would like to make a motion to adjourn our meeting? Mr. Rosario, second.

Thank you very much for coming. Our meeting is adjourned.

(Whereupon, the Nassau County Bus Transit Committee meeting was concluded at 5:00 P.M.)

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CERTIFICATION

STATE OF NEW YORK  )

: SS.:

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK  )

I, ALEX TURTEL, a Notary Public for and within the State of New York, do hereby certify:

That the minutes of the Nassau County Bus Transit Committee meeting are a true and accurate record of the stenographic notes taken by me therein.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 28th day of December, 2016.

__________________________
ALEX TURTEL

ALEX TURTEL