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Testimony Submitted to:
New York State Division of the Budget

Submitted By:
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Re: Priorities for the 2008-09 Budget

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. First, let me welcome you to my Assembly district.

We've all heard the gloomy economic forecast for 2008. Creating a budget, always a challenge even in prosperous times, will be even more complicated this year. There is never enough money go around and always tough choices to make.

We certainly will have to make tough choices in 2008. We must not, though, make the same mistakes made in the past of solving the immediate crisis at the expense of our future- in other words, robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Obviously, there are many funding priorities. In the interest of time, I am going to focus on public transportation. For too long, the state has under-funded the MTA with an unfair apportionment of our tax dollars subsidizing the commuter rail lines. Hopefully, the new administration will allocate funds on a more equitable basis.

I, along with many others, have expressed to the NYC Traffic Mitigation Commission that before any traffic reduction plan be implemented our regional transportation system must be upgraded to handle the additional demands that will be placed on it. Most subway lines and commuter railways are already at full capacity and some are dangerously overcrowded. If we are going to increase the number of riders, we must properly fund mass transit. My colleagues and I in the State Legislature are working to achieve this goal. If New York City is to remain an economic powerhouse, we must take proactive steps to ensure people can be transported quickly and efficiently, including people with disabilities. It is unacceptable that only 58 out of 488

subway stations are even partially accessible to people with disabilities. For example, the plan to rehabilitate the Smith-Ninth Street Station, the highest in the system, does not have a provision to be wheelchair accessible.

This is also the perfect opportunity to continue the much-needed reform of and greater accountability from semi-autonomous public authorities. Despite some progress, much more is needed to ensure their actions are completely transparent. These public authorities spend tens of billions of our tax dollars with little or no accountability.

The MTA is a perfect example. To begin with, the MTA has not been honest about its financial records. It is deeply disturbing that there have been too many reports of sloppy financial record-keeping by the MTA and the existence of two separate financial record books- a public version that continuously shows the MTA in financial duress and a private version that provides a more accurate picture. For instance, the State Comptroller's office in 2003 reported the MTA "hid more than half a billion dollars from the public when it was asking for a fare increase by keeping two sets of financial plans, one public and one secret." I hope the new leadership at the MTA will ensure this does not happen again.

Unfortunately, the MTA's financial mismanagement does not stop there. It is incredulous that the MTA sold the Atlantic Yards for a price less than half of its own appraised value of \$214 million. Now we are faced with a possible fare increase. Why did the MTA not receive fair market value for the property? The MTA has tried to do the same on the West Side of Manhattan. This is outrageous. The MTA needs to be acting in the best interests of us, the tax-payers.

Lastly, we also need to look at other funding options such as reintroducing the commuter tax. Raising taxes is never a pleasant option; however, if we want to live in a society with clean and safe streets, good public schools, efficient public transportation and strong economic growth we need to pay for these services.

I also want to thank the Governor and the NYS Division of the Budget for holding these public hearings.