



Access-A-Ride Reform Group Urges Governor to Declare State of Emergency for Access-A-Ride

AARRG! Outlines Steps for Improvement on Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act

New York, NY – July 26, 2017 – The Access-A-Ride Reform Group (AARRG!) today urged Governor Cuomo to declare a state of emergency for Access-A-Ride, the MTA’s paratransit service for New Yorkers with disabilities.

AARRG! members read from their letter to the Governor at today’s Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board meeting, decrying decades of “abysmal” service which has resulted in low employment, missed medical appointments and anger and frustration for riders with disabilities.

AARRG!’s letter, delivered on the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was passed 27 years ago today, noted that the MTA’s own data show that Access-A-Ride users often wait more than a half hour for their rides. AARRG! also cited a “parade of horrors” that included being shuttled “from borough to borough to borough” and four-hour rides that should take 60 minutes or less.

“Along with the horrendous service,” the letter noted that “Access-A-Ride riders are the only New York mass transit riders who must call a day in advance to reserve a seat, making last-minute trips for work or pleasure impossible.” AARRG!, which was joined by two other advocacy organizations, then noted that **“No one should have to put up with this.”**

“There has been a great deal of attention paid to the recent issues with the subway and train systems across New York City – yet very little public outrage has been directed towards the similar, if not worse, issues with the Access-a-Ride system,” said Eman Rimawi, Access-A-Ride Campaign Coordinator and Organizer at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. “Access-A-Ride has been plagued with problems since its inception, affecting the nearly 150,000 New Yorkers with disabilities who use the service and take nine million Access-A-Ride rides annually. It’s time that the needs of this community are given the attention they deserve so that critical changes can be made.”

Nearly 30 percent of people with disabilities in New York are unemployed, and longstanding issues with Access-A-Ride are major contributing factors to this troubling statistic. In 2016, Access-A-Ride pickups were late nearly one-third of the time, while users frequently experienced rides four times longer than needed due to indirect routes. These problems, combined with countless others, including inconvenient drop-off points and a process that requires reservations a day in advance, severely limit the ability of people with disabilities to have jobs that require something as seemingly simple as commuting to work each day.

"Governor Cuomo made the right call in January by keeping the Access-A-Ride fare at \$2.75, and now he'd make the right call by declaring an Access-A-Ride State of Emergency to solve the service's long-standing failures," said Yesenia Torres, an advocate for the Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled.

AARRG! concluded their letter by outlining the steps that must be taken immediately to improve the service:

- Make on-demand service a priority
- Improve data collection to accurately assess service quality
- Streamline application procedures
- Change the complaint procedures so the MTA isn't the judge and jury
- Continue to have top-quality managers in place as current AAR leadership retires

"Transportation is the second biggest barrier to employment for people with disabilities," said Susan M. Dooha, Executive Director at the Center of Independence of the Disabled, NY. "We see every day how not having on-demand transit like everyone else is inconvenient, limits opportunities, and devalues people with disabilities. We call on the Governor to fix Access-A-Ride now."

"For years, Access-A-Ride users have been forced to use an inferior transportation service that is constantly late, indirect, and unreliable," said Samantha Rauer, Staff Attorney at Mobilization for Justice. "We urge Governor Cuomo not to forget the over 100,000 New Yorkers who rely on Access-A-Ride as he looks to make much needed improvements to public transit in New York City."

"Access-a-Ride is a disgrace, pure and simple," said Gene Russianoff, Staff Attorney for the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign, a transit riders group which works with AARRG! "An overhaul of access-a-ride is long overdue."

About Brooklyn Center for the Independence of the Disabled

BCID is an organization of people with disabilities that provides services, and advocates for major systematic changes for people with disabilities.

About Center for the Independence of the Disabled, New York

The Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York helps over 23,000 New Yorkers with disabilities with direct services every year. We seek to reduce barriers to access and affirm our civil rights through legislative advocacy, organizing, conducting research, and educating the public about issues affecting people with disabilities, including transportation, voting, health care, and employment.

About Mobilization for Justice

Mobilization for Justice's (formerly MFY Legal Services) mission is to achieve social justice, prioritizing the needs of people who are low-income, disenfranchised or have disabilities. We do this by providing the highest quality direct civil legal assistance, conducting community education and building partnerships, engaging in policy advocacy, and bringing impact litigation. Mobilization for Justice handles more than 12,000 individual cases a year, and in 2016 the organization settled a class action lawsuit against New York City Transit (NYCT) that challenged NYCT's unconstitutional Access-A-Ride policies.

About New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) advances equality and civil rights, with a focus on disability justice, health justice, and environmental justice, through the power of community lawyering and partnerships with the private bar. NYLPI puts its legal, policy, and community organizing expertise at the service of New York City communities and individuals, and NYLPI's partnership with the private bar strengthens its advocacy and connects community groups and nonprofits with critical legal assistance. NYLPI is a recipient of the New York Community Trust Nonprofit Excellence Award.

AARRG's work is generously funded by the New York Community Trust.