NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEW YORK POST, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2001

Gov vows to help give MTA a fare shake on budget

By LEN LOVETT
in Albany and
DAN MANGAN *in N.Y.*

MTA directors yesterday passed a $7 billion budget — with no fare or toll hikes — but still need promised state aid to plug a deficit.

Gov. Pataki, saying a fare increase wouldn't be fair to straphangers in the current economic climate, pledged that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority would get nearly $350 million in aid, according to MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow.

Without that money, "there's no question that there would have been a fare increase this year," Kalikow said yesterday.

He lauded MTA agencies — which operate city subways and buses, commuter railroads and some bridges and tunnels — for doing a "helluva job" in whittling down a projected $800 million deficit fueled by Sept. 11-related costs and the recession.

Insurance payouts, federal disaster money and cost cutting lowered the deficit, Kalikow said.

But getting the remaining $350 million to balance the 2002 budget — which provides for 100 new MTA police officers and World Trade Center-related expenses — will require more than a promise from Pataki, who is running for re-election.

"It's not going to be a simple matter," said the governor's spokesman, Michael McKeon.

"As we go through the budget year, we're looking at providing resources [to the MTA] and taking other action which will be spelled out as we go forward." He did not specify what "other action" could eliminate the deficit.

Pataki will submit his budget — which would include the MTA aid — at the end of January. The Legislature then will decide if the funds will be given to the authority.

Dan Weiller, spokesman for Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, said Pataki's aid request "is the kind of thing that we would examine in the full context of the governor's budget."

Silver, a Democrat from the Lower East Side, annually duels with Pataki over the budget. Their struggles in past years have caused big delays in its passage.

More pay phones on the subways are working, but too many straphangers still can't get a dial tone, says a new survey.

Twenty percent of Verizon's pay phones on subway platforms do not fully work, according to the Straphangers Campaign.

That's an improvement from 1999, when the advocacy group's survey found that 25 percent of Verizon's subway pay phones were busted in some way.

"The good news is they're doing better than two years ago," said Gene Russianoff, senior lawyer for the group. "The bad news is they [Verizon] fall short of their own contract to get 95 percent of the phones working."

Verizon spokesman John Bonomo said that the company meets that standard when all phones — not just those in the subways — are considered. *Dan Mangan*

CITY_21MC100_013367791

NYC-WTC_000416540