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The Main Street **WIRE**

EXTRA

Roosevelt Island's Community Newspaper

in association with Website NYC10044

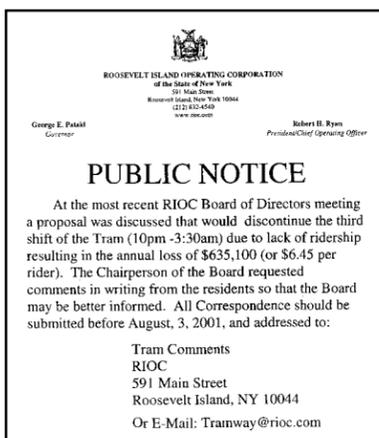
RIOC Considers Tram Cutback – Would End Service at 10 p.m.

RIOC Asking for Resident Comments

The Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) has placed posters around the Island asking residents to comment on the idea of a reduction in Tramway service that would eliminate the shift that serves passengers after 10:00 p.m.

RIOC has provided the e-mail address, Tramway@rioc.com, but also is accepting comments mailed to 591 Main Street, Roosevelt Island, NY 10044. (In a related editorial on page 2, there are addresses for other officials interested in resident reaction.)

The inconvenience of a Tramway schedule terminated at 10:00 p.m. would primarily affect those residents and their visitors who are unwilling or unable to use the subway alternative, or unable to pay the cost of cab service. It is a safety issue for many, and an accessibility issue for others; wheelchair-dependent residents and wheelchair-dependent visitors find the subway unusable, partly because boarding from the Island platforms is impossible for many, or because street access at their destinations is impossible.



RIRA Slates Town Meeting Wednesday Night at 8:00

The Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation is again considering a cutback in Tramway service. It would end service at 10:00 p.m.

The Roosevelt Island Residents Association has scheduled a Town Meeting for Wednesday night at 8:00 to coordinate resident response. The meeting will be held in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

At the RIOC Board's July 12 meeting, CFO Patrick Siconolfi told Board members that the late shift produces only 9% of Tramway revenue, while accounting for 27% of operating costs. "To provide one ride on the overnight shift cost \$7.94" during a one-year period, Siconolfi said, adding that the total cost of the third shift is \$645,000 and its revenue production only about \$100,000. "The net cost-saving associated with that

overnight shift would be about \$545,000," he said.

Siconolfi said that of the 9% of riders who make late-night trips, less than 1% of the number were seniors, and only 2.6% were disabled. "The data shows they are very small numbers," he said. Defenders of the Tram often point out that it is virtually the only access to the Island for seniors and disabled, particularly during late hours.

Board Chair Marybeth Labate said she wasn't prepared to have the Board vote on elimination of the third shift at the July 12 meeting, but said it would be taken up again in September, after allowing time for resident comments. RIOC later set August 3 as a deadline for comments, but Labate extended that to mid-August at the request of Residents Association President Matthew Katz.

RIOC Board members seemed to be unanimous in their concern about the late-night losses, but none appeared immediately ready to commit to the service cutback. John Mannix said, "Instinctually, I don't think we should do it, I think fiscally the numbers clearly say what they say. Instinctually, I feel cutting back that service while we are trying to build and bring more residents... may send the wrong message."

Resident Board member David Kraut said, "I have no trouble understanding, on a purely dollars and cents basis, why we should cut out the third shift. We can use that money elsewhere, such as on the many Tramway maintenance issues we're facing. But I also understand that the Tramway is the way some

number of our residents are accustomed to coming home late at night." Kraut also cited concerns about complying with provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as did others on the Board.

"I will always speak in favor of absorbing the expense of that extra shift," Kraut said, "even though I know it's an incredible subsidy to the people who ride the Tram at those hours... Financially, it looks horrible, but in terms of continuing to keep the Tram a viable part of the community's operation and the potential for more ridership in the future, at the least I offer the thought that, if we do decide to go to two shifts, that it be a short-term consideration until we begin to see the population of Southtown growing."

Leo Kayser, a recent appointee to the Board by Governor George Pataki, cited the potential for advertising on the Tram cabins as a possible solution to financial problems, and lamented the fact that the City Council has forbidden it (separate story, this page). Kayser's concerns over being allowed to advertise dominated much of the discussion of Tramway finances and the consideration of a cut that would eliminate service after 10:00 p.m. Kayser asked that a resolution be prepared authorizing RIOC President Robert H. Ryan to ignore the advertising ban.

The last Town Meeting in which a Tramway cutback was considered was held during the RIOC Presidency of Dr. Jerome Blue, after he had announced termination of the third shift. After residents filled the Chapel and angrily denounced the plan, it was scrapped.

Kayser Says RIOC Should Prepare to Defy City Council's Ban on Tram Ads

RIOC Board member Leo Kayser put out something of an ultimatum on Tramway advertising to City Councilmember Gifford Miller at the Board's July 12 meeting. On Wednesday, after a query from *The WIRE*, Miller responded in kind.

Speaking of the RIOC Board's difficult choices on how to cope with Tramway losses, Kayser urged his fellow Board members to "be bold if required and go ahead with looking into advertising whether it's authorized by the City Council or not..." Kayser had reference to a ban on Tram advertising inserted into the City Council's terms for the Tramway franchise.

Miller told *The WIRE*, "I'm surprised and a bit shocked... I think it's an enormously irresponsible position for a member of the Board of a State corporation to advocate breaking the law." He added, "The problem here is that RIOC is totally out of step with the importance of the Tram to the Island. At a time when they're trying to promote development, for them to send a signal that the Tram is in jeopardy is inane and unacceptable."

In the July 12 meeting, Kayser sought to cast his position on Tramway advertising as a defense of Island residents, saying "[the RIOC Board should let] people on this Island know that we are prepared to stand up for them, even if their own elected representatives on City Council aren't, and [we should] look into the advertising contracts we might have, and bring the money in, so that some of these choices we're being faced with can be alleviated."

The full text of the RIOC Board's discussion of possible service cutbacks, as well as Miller's response to Kayser's proposal, are available on *Website NYC10044* at www.nyc10044.com.

Kayser, who practices law, told the RIOC Board that the legal remedies available to the City Council are limited, should the Board defy the ban on advertising. "The realities are that the remedy, in the event we were to proceed with advertising... is that we are technically in violation of our franchise agree-

ment... The remedy is limited to injunctive relief, and the injunctive relief would only arise out of revoking our franchise and saying we can't operate the Tram. I suggest that's not going to happen, because Mr. Miller would be in a position of preventing it from happening, because he could go back... and get us authority [to put advertising on the Tram cabins], and if he didn't, he would be responsible for the shutdown, and he would be responsible for our not having the revenue

See Kayser, page 3

Self-Governance Bites the Dust in Albany, Again, But the Governor Plans a Fall Visit, Says Mendez

Senator Olga Mendez had a wide-ranging one-hour conversation about Roosevelt Island with Governor George Pataki on Tuesday. Others present for the meeting included aides to Pataki and Mendez, as well as RIOC President Robert H. Ryan and two of his staffers, Vice President Robert Antonek and Attorney Kenneth Leitner.

One outcome of the meeting might be a Town Meeting in September, suggested by Pataki as a way for him to take the Island's pulse on several key issues, among them the question of a locally-elected RIOC Board.

"The Governor understood the three main issues – development, infrastructure, and self-governance," Mendez told *The WIRE* on Tuesday. "He proposed that he would like to have a September Town Hall Meeting to listen to the people, and he proposed appointment of two or three members of a group to meet with his staff to deal with those three issues."

The projected meeting would be Pataki's first visit to Roosevelt Island. As Governor, he appoints the President of RIOC, the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (currently Robert H. Ryan, who succeeded Dr. Jerome Blue two summers ago) and members of the RIOC Board of Directors.

Like Assemblymember Pete Grannis, Mendez has been working with the Island's Maple Tree Group, a subcommittee of the Roosevelt Island Residents Association, on legislation that would provide for Island residents to elect the members of the RIOC Board. That elected Board would

hire a professional civic manager to administer the affairs of the community and RIOC, which is a State Public Benefit Corporation formed specifically to take over management of the Island. (It succeeded earlier organizations with that responsibility.)

In the 1998 and 2000 Residents Association elections, residents backed the idea of a locally-elected RIOC Board by margins of 92% and 80%. The votes were widely taken as a show of dissatisfaction with RIOC's management of the Island.

Grannis introduced a comprehensive bill in the Assembly this session, but Mendez held off, waiting for a meeting with Pataki to learn what provisions he would accept and sign into law. The Grannis bill provided for extended State responsibility for the Island, particularly for infrastructure that has deteriorated since the State stopped providing subsidies for the Island's capital needs and operating expenses. Four years ago, RIOC President Blue and the Governor declared the Island "self-sufficient" financially, and the Roosevelt Island subsidy was removed from the State budget.

Grannis has repeatedly stated his view that the Island is not self-sufficient, and that there has been serious deterioration of the infrastructure. Most Island Community leaders agree.

Mendez said the Governor responded warmly to the idea of a locally-elected RIOC Board, while reserving final judgment until after he has met with residents in the projected September Town Meeting.

Marginalized by RIOC

How many times must we fight *this* particular battle?

The RIOC Board has asked Islanders for their views on eliminating the third shift of the Tramway, which would end service at 10:00 p.m.

RIOC points out, in asking the question, that every rider on that shift is subsidized some \$6.45, resulting in a "loss" of \$635,100 a year. The cure our mostly-non-resident Board apparently has in mind is to eliminate the service during the hours involved.

Doing so would marginalize every handicapped resident and every senior unwilling to risk a late-night subway ride. It would say, in effect: *You late-night riders unable to use the subway or, in the interest of your personal safety, unwilling to use it, and unable or unwilling to pay the price of a cab ride from Manhattan, are now officially out on the margin of society, unworthy of the services others enjoy.*

In fact, **even asking the question** demeans and marginalizes this segment of the Island's population – putting those residents under threat of termination of a vital service. It marginalizes us all: Threaten my neighbor this way and you are threatening me. The threat, cavalier and callous, is too easily issued by a Board that demonstrates once again that it is unable to act responsibly toward the people who live here.

We have no evidence that the Board of Directors has asked for a Tramway subsidy appropriation in this year's State budget. And we note that *virtually every other mass transit system in the State* is subsidized with tax money – almost every one at a far higher percentage than the average Tramway rider.

So for the Board to raise this threatening question is both irresponsible and irrational, when what it should be doing is demanding that the State not only subsidize the Tramway appropriately, but subsidize the addition of the service to the MTA's MetroCard.

RIOC President Rob Ryan will tell you that "the Tram is subsidized." It is, by RIOC, but only with Island-generated funds that otherwise could be used for Island maintenance and services. It is *not* subsidized with your State tax dollars, which *are* used to subsidize every other mass transit system.

The RIOC Board seems determined, repeatedly, to hand us clear demonstrations of why the unelected, appointed Board should instead be composed of elected residents. Meanwhile, despite efforts, the Island's legislative representatives – Pete Grannis and Olga Mendez – have again failed to move legislation for a locally-elected RIOC Board through the State Legislature. Residents remain powerless over their own community.

It is time for an elected RIOC Board, *now*, before this runaway Board follows through on another of its bonehead ideas. Failing that, it's time for this RIOC Board to realize the nature of its responsibilities, which manifestly *do not include* threatening our seniors and disabled residents with a 10:00 p.m. curfew.

While we are at this, we have a question for the resident members of the RIOC Board (Susan Whitaker, David Kraut, Patrick Stewart, and – though he moved away recently – Kevin Fullington): *How dare they allow their fellow Board members even to ask this threatening question? Do they expect those who have no need for late-night service to say, "Go ahead. Screw my neighbors. I don't need Tram service at those hours..."?*

We don't act that way. We are community. We all, every one, should exhibit the outrage that this question deserves in letters and calls to RIOC and to our elected officials. And while you're at it, let's keep the process honest. Send a copy to *The WIRE*. The appropriate mailing addresses, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses follow.

Senator Olga Mendez

87 East 116th Street
New York, NY 10029
[Fax: 831-0530]
[E-mail: mendez@senate.state.ny.us]

Member of Assembly Pete Grannis

1672 First Avenue
New York, NY 10128
[Fax: 996-3046]
[E-mail: grannis@assembly.state.ny.us]

Councilmember Gifford Miller

250 Broadway, 17th floor
New York, NY 10007
[Fax: 442-1467]
[E-mail: miller@council.nyc.ny.us]

RIOC / Tram Comments

591 Main Street
Roosevelt Island, NY 10044
[Fax: 832-4582]
[E-mail: Tramway@rioc.com]

Copies to The WIRE

531 Main Street #413
Roosevelt Island, NY 10044
[Fax: 755-2540]
[E-mail (preferred): MainStreetWIRE@rcn.com]



Letters deadline for next Friday's regularly-scheduled August 4 issue: Monday, July 30

To the RIOC Board:

This past Fourth of July I had the opportunity of hearing a reading of our Declaration of Independence, which was telecast on ABC. As I listened, I was struck by the similarity of the conditions in the colonies in the 1770's with the situation we are now faced with on Roosevelt Island.

It is almost laughable that you are asking for comments [regarding the Tramway third shift]. When have you ever cared about them before?

If the Tram is losing \$600,000, I would suggest you ask Governor Pataki for the money. Before we were "blessed" with him, Dr. Blue, and Mr. Ryan, we were getting money from the State. Now we have what the early colonists had – *taxation without representation*. Maybe we should stage our own Boston Tea Party, but instead of tea, we could throw RIOC in the East River!

Closing the Tram at 10:00 p.m. would create a hardship for those returning from the City after that time. The 63rd Street subway station is a scary place at night and forcing residents to take cabs is costly.

Perhaps there would be enough funds for everything if the Island were run more efficiently. In the meantime, just ask "King George."

Louise Maniloff

To the RIOC Board:

The suggestion that the Tram should be shut down after 10:00 p.m. is so ridiculous that it leads me to believe that RIOC does not have faith in Southtown. Tram ridership will increase when our only alternative is an overcrowded F train. The addition of Southtown residents would also increase peak-hour riders. This should balance the lighter late-night shift.

I will not ride the subway at night. The 63rd Street station and the Roosevelt Island stations are too dangerous. If I have to take a cab, I might as well move back to Queens. Can there be rent parity between Southtown, Manhattan Park and Astoria?

And finally, RIOC presents this proposal when many Islanders are on vacation. That is just sleazy.

Susan Sinisi

To the RIOC Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to write to you on this critical issue.

I am unalterably opposed to discontinuing the third shift of the Tram. I often use it late at night and so do my guests.

May I redirect your thinking?

- Make the Tram part of the Metro system. This alone will greatly increase revenue.

- Double fares are required now, and thus many people don't use the Tram. When the MetroCard is accepted, many more people will leave on the Tram (earning the Island system much income) and return on the Tram (earning less). The total income will be gratifyingly large.

- We seniors would be adding revenue. We leave the Island free on the Tram, and get into the bus or subway system. You lose your just portion of that fare. We return on the subway, again denying you any income. We would like to use our MetroCard on the Tram both ways, but it hardly makes sense to return on the Tram for an extra \$1.50 cash when no transfer is available.

- Get a subsidy. The Tram should not be the only transportation system without a subsidy.

- Do promotional work to make the Tram a destination. Brochures in visitor bureaus, hotels, etc. This should all be done out of the Mayor's office.

- Remove the Tram from the Roosevelt Island budget. And remove the seawall as well. Eastsiders don't pay for their sea wall, and neither do Queens folk. We don't take pay for our little red bridge. Infrastructure is never financed by neighborhoods – how on earth did these items get on our budget?

Ethel Romm

DL

To the RIOC Board:

The proposal to discontinue the third shift of the Tram appears inadvisable for three reasons:

Economics: The notice itself does not substantiate the proposition that the lack of ridership on the third shift causes an annual loss of \$6.45 per rider or a total of \$635,100.

This implies a ridership of 98,465 so, if one adds back the implied income of \$147,700, the incremental cost of the 10:00 p.m.-3:30 a.m. shift becomes \$780,000, which would appear to be more than twice the incremental cost of attendants and electricity (which is all that would be saved).

The true annual loss resulting from the third shift becomes about \$200,000 instead of \$635,000, if actual savings (as opposed to prorated loaded costs benefiting the other two shifts) are, say, \$350,000, and the present income is about \$150,000. As mentioned above, no details were presented in the request for comments.

Southtown: The figure of \$200,000 does not reflect any expectation of increased ridership from the tenants in Southtown who are likely to be younger than the average current population of Roosevelt Island and therefore likely to cause a disproportionate increase in evening ridership.

The figure may be further reduced by contributions from the developers of both Manhattan Park and Southtown, who will not welcome a reduction in the transportation services after marketing their properties with emphasis on their proximity and convenient commute to Manhattan.

There is also the future vision of a possible Marriott geared towards tourists, who are not likely to be back by 10:00 at night.

The Elderly: The remaining shortfall, if any, should be considered a social cost for the number of elderly and/or handicapped people living in the "original" buildings on Roosevelt Island – those who do not feel comfortable using the subway late at night and whose economic situation does not allow them to travel by taxi.

Thank you for giving the above factors proper weight in your further deliberations.

M. J. Petersen

More Letters

To the RIOC Board:

The Public Notice to residents of Roosevelt Island seeking comments on your proposal to discontinue the third shift of Tramway operations is a further indication to the Island's residents of Mr. Ryan's and the Board's total insensitivity and lack of any real understanding of this community and the people who live here.

What makes Roosevelt Island so very special is the composition of its people, a total social/economic mixture, with a heavy proportion of disabled, elderly, and hospital patients, most of whom were originally drawn here by the Tram and a safe place to live. The Tram is uniquely accessible and in no way are the subway or buses that serve Roosevelt Island a substitute or replacement for the Tram.

The Tram is still the magnet – and if you are not aware, our subway station platform does not conform with the Americans with Disabilities Act. That is, there is a ¾-inch spacing between the platform and the subway car, as well as ¾-inch elevation difference, making it impossible for a person in a wheelchair to get on and off. The Tram is still the only answer.

Reduction of Tram service will place a curfew and a great life-style limitation on many of our residents, especially the disabled and the seniors, as well as many others.

What is really hypocritically dishonest is Mr. Ryan's and the Board's failure to seek a transportation subsidy for the Tram and Minibus service, which is at the heart of this Island's life style. *Every other community is subsidized, but not Roosevelt Island.*

The Board's and Ryan's behavior with regard to the Tram and our residents is the same apparent attitude that is leading to the decay of our infrastructure, services, Blackwell House, the Chapel, etc.

If the Board really attempts this very foolish and inconsiderate diminution of service, then the Island's residents should create a

strong political and legal reprisal.

Don't you dare touch our Tram!

Ronald T. and Fay Vass

To the RIOC Board:

I am responding to a flyer on a Main Street kiosk requesting residents to provide input on the question of shortening Tram hours. Many of my neighbors have not seen these flyers, and I would encourage you to make this request for information more widely known.

Having attended your last Board meeting,

Kayser from page 1

to keep up the safety requirements, and for our having to prune back service, and the political accountability would be where it ought to be."

Kayser asked RIOC staff to prepare a resolution – to go ahead with advertising – for consideration at the Board's September meeting. "I think we should proceed whether or not the authority is there with respect to the [franchise] agreement," he said.

Miller told *The WIRE*, "I'm willing to discuss [advertising] with them, and I have. They haven't been able to come up with the follow-through on any of the discussions we've had, which I find disappointing. Shrink-wrapping the Tram? I'm not sure how much money they're going to make on that.

"They need to remember the value that the Tram has to the Island in general, and that is the problem with proposing to eliminate evening hours. If the Board of Directors of Roosevelt Island knew anything about the Island at all, they would understand that the Tram's importance to the Island transcends its dollars and cents and the bottom line of its operations... It's just flat-out unacceptable for them to be talking about jeopardizing their franchise and eliminating operations on the Tram."

More Tram Letters and related material on Website NYC10044
www.nyc10044.com

I am familiar with the financials that CFO Pat Siconolfi presented regarding ridership vs costs. However, the requirements of Title III of the ADA seem to make this debate moot, given that the subway system, including our own Roosevelt Island station, are not disabled-compliant. This segment of our population, which includes non-wheelchair-bound seniors, must be served, and I am opposed to eliminating the Tram's third shift.

I expect that every public transit system in the United States, especially those which are 24-hour-a-day systems (unlike the Tram) has

periods of low usage with high per-rider costs. However, every public transit system in the United States, with the exception of our commuter Tramway, is subsidized to some extent by government. We should be entitled to the same support that the subways and buses and LIRR and New York Central receive as a matter of course. RIOC should be required to demand subsidies that, at the very least, cover the costs of the third shift and, at best, cover the Tram's entire deficit.

Why does Roosevelt Island always fall through the cracks when City or State support of public facilities and infrastructure is involved?

Matthew M. Katz
President, RIRA

Miller continued, "Leo Kayser has never had a conversation with me about this. I have not been approached by the Board or by Rob Ryan directly in months. I had a brief conversation with Rob the other day when I called [him], and I suggested to him again that they need to come forward with a reasonable proposal to use the [advertising] revenue to improve services for the Island." Among other things, Miller wants RIOC to make the arrangements necessary to make the Tramway part of the free-transfer MetroCard system. At the RIOC Board meeting, Ryan had said, "We had meetings last summer [with Miller and Walter McCaffrey, the Chair of the City Council's Franchise Committee]. We are the only form of transportation... that is not allowed to have advertising. I think it's sort of discriminatory... We could stand to raise... somewhere in the neighborhood of a half-million dollars a year... and when you have a Tram system that is losing \$1.7 million a year, every \$500,000 counts." As for putting the Tramway on the MetroCard, Ryan said, "The capital cost of putting in the MetroCard system is going to be about between \$700,000 and \$800,000, and then the MTA takes about 40-50% of the revenues, so we would be losing \$700,000 to \$800,000 a year. We would be getting the advertising... but we'd be in a worse position than we are now."

Miller responded to that comment by pointing out that he has brought capital funding to Island projects in the past (most recently, \$600,000 for the Youth Center), "but these people are too inept even to have basic discussions. It's unbelievable. It's unbelievable."

The RIOC Board will consider its alternatives for coping with Tramway losses again in its September meeting. At the July 12 session, there was no discussion of seeking a mass-transit subsidy from the State, which subsidizes virtually every other mass-transit operation with tax dollars. The Tram is subsidized only with on-Island income which otherwise might be used for other purposes, were Tram operations to be funded in some other way. Leo Kayser pointed out in a Wednesday conversation with *The WIRE*, however, that State tax breaks given to the Island amount to an indirect taxpayer subsidy of Tramway operations when Island-derived income is used to cover Tram losses.

In its July 12 meeting, the RIOC Board also authorized approval of American Tramways as contract operator of the Tramway, replacing Intefac, whose contract had been extended to the end of July.

The full text of the Tramway discussion at the RIOC Board meeting, as well as Councilmember Miller's remarks, are available with this issue of *The WIRE* on Website NYC10044 at www.nyc10044.com.

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Managing Editor – Dick Lutz
Chief Feature Writer – Anusha Shrivastava
Reporters – Francine Lange, Robert Laux-Bachand
Ombudsman – Armand Schwab – **838-3184**
Chief Proofreader – Kay Thompson
Proofreaders – Linda Heimer, Frances Salten
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