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5TRT ANNOUNCES 5 POINT PLAN FOR EAST END TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUBLIC TRANSIT

According to Kathy Cunningham Faraone, President of 5TRT, Inc. “The recent statement by the MTA/LIRR that they plan to shut down rail service to the North Fork is yet another example of their insensitivity to the East End’s transit needs. It comes only months after a US/DOT Volpe Center feasibility study validated the concept of increasing rail and bus service on a coordinated basis, known as East End Shuttle™. Rather than having its own status as a regional transit authority, the East End is an insignificant part of the behemoth MTA’s responsibility for New York City, and we are continually short-changed. We have become a ‘donor region’ for them, providing far more in tax revenues than we get back in the form of service. And now, after an increase in payroll taxes for local businesses, ostensibly to support transit investments, we are told they will eliminate services, not expand or even maintain them.”

The current group that advises on transportation matters locally is the East End Transportation Council (EETC). It was formed in 1996 by the East End Supervisors and Mayors Association (EES&MA) after the LIRR closed several rail stations. Planners and officials from the Towns and Villages are invited to participate, as well representatives from various transit provider agencies (all based outside our region). Its stated goal in 1996 was to overturn the station closures and improve transit in our region. After 14 years, the stations remain closed and there are no substantive improvements in service. Clearly, this approach has not worked.

5TRT, Inc., the non-profit transit advocacy group that developed the now validated East End Shuttle™ concept believes the time has come for change. We offer a 5-point plan for the East End to take control of its transit future. It won’t be easy to achieve but it is now the only way to go.

The components of the plan are as follows:

1. Establish Peconic Bay Regional Transportation Commission (PBRTC)

The local East End governments should establish a Commission comprised of appointed officials from each Town and several Villages, as well as selected local residents. Its primary goals would be to advance regional transit solutions and achieve independence from the MTA. This group would be a forerunner to an organization with increased authority from New York State.

2. Conduct Implementation Study of Volpe-Validated East End Shuttle Concept

The first order of business for the newly formed PBRTC should be to secure funding for an engineering and implementation study of the East End Shuttle concept, as outlined in the Volpe Study. In that regard, Assemblyman Thiele has been in conversation with U.S. Representative Tim Bishop to get Federal funding for this purpose. This required study would deal with the “nuts and bolts” requirements for development of the Shuttle concept on the East End, as a prerequisite for actual implementation.

3. Conduct Feasibility Study for East End Regional Transit Authority Formation

The second PBRTC responsibility would be to examine the feasibility of leaving the jurisdiction of the MTA and forming our own Regional Transit Authority (RTA) on the East End. This is not as far-fetched as it may seem. Many other regions, including Cape Cod, have achieved this status in the past twenty years, and the Volpe Study presented strategies for our region to investigate such an outcome. By having our own RTA status, we would largely be able to determine our transit needs locally.

4. Advance NYS Legislators’ Bills to Form Peconic Bay Regional Transit Authority

NYS Assemblymen Fred Thiele and Marc Alessi have introduced New York State Assembly Bill A09861 to authorize formation of a Peconic Bay Regional Transportation Authority (PBRTA) at the State level to replace the MTA on the East End. And our NYS Senator, Ken La Valle, has introduced Senate Bill 06774 for the same purpose. These bills would initially authorize a non-binding referendum among voters in the five East End Towns to gauge voter support. 5TRT wholeheartedly supports our NYS Legislator’s initiatives. In addition, we acknowledge that our Suffolk County Legislators, Ed Romaine and Jay Schneiderman, also now strongly support formation of an RTA on the East End.

5. Develop and Conduct Education Programs Regarding Regional Transit

In preparation for the non-binding referendum, we need to prepare and deliver an education program about public transit options for the East End, first to our elected officials and later to the voting public.

Most of the points in this plan have been discussed by 5TRT and local elected officials in recent years, as we have become more and more frustrated by the lack of progress in improving public transit. 5TRT does not claim to be the originator of all of them. This document is an attempt, however, to put the many good ideas in one place for consideration and action by our local governments and the general public in the very near future. The time for action is now.

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