

# STREETSBLOG

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## The Budget Pain: Mayor's Fair Fares Cut Falls Heavily on Lower-Income Transit Riders

By Gersh Kuntzman | Jun 30, 2020 | 8 COMMENTS



Photo: Gersh Kuntzman

**T**he mayor wants to increase the cost of transit on some of New York's neediest workers.

Mayor de Blasio confirmed on Tuesday that he had cut \$65 million from the projected \$200-million Fair Fares program, which provides half-far transit [for close to 200,000 New](#)

[Yorkers](#) — with another half-million meeting the eligibility.

“It’s just think the reality of that program, which is a great program, it was an effective, important program,” the mayor said on Tuesday morning. “I think the whole underlying concept of the program got just disrupted profoundly by the coronavirus and we’re not going to see that turnaround in the short term.”

It’s unclear whether the cut will throw some existing members off the rolls — or if the savings are simply due to the expectation that far fewer riders will be using transit for the foreseeable future.

At a press conference on Tuesday afternoon, Council Speaker Corey Johnson said he didn’t know what the mayor was talking about.

“We believe this is the re-estimate and it won’t result in anyone losing Fair Fares,” he said, citing the decline in transit ridership.

Council Member Steve Levin also suggested that no current riders would be affected by the cut, [tweeting](#), “We’re not cutting enrollment to Fair Fares at all. ... If there is savings in the program, it’s because subway ridership is down so much due to Covid.”

Still, New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg issued a statement being that the city had chosen to “defund the Fair Fares program”:

“The mayor’s decision to slash the Fair Fares program will make it more difficult for tens of thousands of customers who rely on mass transit to afford to get to jobs, school and work as New York continues to reopen,” she said. “At a time when the MTA is hemorrhaging money at record levels due to the COVID-19 crisis, this cut sets us back and will further hurt our ability to provide critical services to New Yorkers.” (*City Hall has still not gotten back to us.*)

Advocates were confused and angry.

“Mayor de Blasio must be clear in how these cuts will [not] impact New Yorkers. He must make every effort to deliver Fair Fares and the access to opportunity it provides New Yorkers, who need it now more than ever,” said Riders Alliance Community Organizer Danna Dennis.

Dennis added that the worst time to cut a social program is when people are at their neediest — and that goes double for a period when essential workers are among the city’s least paid.

“Transit remains absolutely essential to frontline and returning workers,” Dennis said.



**Dana Rubinstein** ✓  
@danarubinstein



"It was an effective, important program." -- Bill de Blasio, confirming that he is cutting \$65 million from Fair Fares

10:23 AM · Jun 30, 2020



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Jaqi Cohen, the campaign director at the Straphangers Coalition, said that Fair Fares had not even reached close to its full potential, making the cut especially painful.

“There are 600,000 New Yorkers who were eligible for the program even before the COVID epidemic,” she said. “So now, with so many people suffering, to cut a service that has been such a lifeline is so devastating.”

She also pointed out that lower-income New Yorkers have stuck with transit at higher rates during the pandemic than higher-income commuters.



That was then: Corey Johnson and advocates celebrated the mayor's capitulation on Fair Fares after reaching their initial agreement. File photo: [John McCarten/NYC Council](#)

“You can see that in the fact that bus ridership numbers did not drop as much as subway or especially commuter rail,” she said. “Fifty percent of bus riders were considered essential workers.”

Johnson said he asked the mayor to cut his [bloated, highly subsidized ferry system](#), with its \$70-million annual budget, but Hizzoner refused.

“I think the ferry should have been cut,” Johnson said. “We identified all sorts of cuts that they didn’t take. It was a negotiation, but in the end, the ferry system was only cut \$10 million.” (Each ferry ride [is subsidized by more than \\$9.30](#), the highest in the nation — and that doesn’t include the free Staten Island Ferry, which is 100 percent subsidized.)



The budget also cut \$5.7 million more out of the mayor’s Better Buses initiative, [which had been announced earlier in the year](#).

Riders Alliance Senior Organizer Jolyse Race said those cuts would end up causing bus riders to be “stuck in traffic on crowded buses, increasing their risk for infection. The cut leaves DOT to stretch a smaller budget and speed up bus lane installation citywide.”

[The mayor did commit to building](#) 20 miles of dedicated bus lanes this year.

*This is a breaking story and will be updated.*

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## Discount Fares for Low-Income New Yorkers Still Missing From de Blasio's Budget

By David Meyer | Apr 27, 2017

Mayor de Blasio did not add funds for discount transit fares for low-income New Yorkers in his executive budget, released yesterday. The "Fair Fares" coalition has called on City Hall to fund half-priced MetroCards for the 800,000 New Yorkers living in poverty.

## Growing Coalition Urges de Blasio to Fund Discount Fares for Poor Residents

By David Meyer | Oct 19, 2016

Advocates are turning up the heat on Mayor de Blasio to fund discount MetroCards for low-income New Yorkers. The Riders Alliance and the Community Service Society led a rally on the steps of City Hall this morning calling on Mayor de Blasio to fund discount fares in his FY 2018 budget, which will be drafted early next year. A majority of [...]





## Wednesday's Headlines: NYPD Budget Blues

By Eve Kessler | Jul 1, 2020

The mayor claims to have cut the NYPD's budget by \$1 billion, but Corey Johnson begs to differ.



## Corey Johnson: NYC "Should Not Wait on Albany" to Fund Discount MetroCards for Poor New Yorkers

By David Meyer | Apr 11, 2018

The City Council speaker said the "Fair Fares" program would be a "pillar" of his budget negotiations with Mayor de Blasio.



## Council Members Press City Hall for Half-Priced MetroCards for Low-Income New Yorkers

By David Meyer | Feb 13, 2017

It would cost the city \$212 million annually to provide half-priced fares to the 800,000 New Yorkers who live below the federal poverty line. De Blasio has refused to include the funding in his \$86 billion budget, prompting City Council members to accuse him of "passing the buck" to Albany.

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**Larry Littlefield** • 2 months ago • edited

"Taken together, advocates were outraged."

They should have been outraged for 20 years, when the special deals and non-decisions were made that will make this all seem like a picnic. There is a long history of lies and shifting the pain the future in every budget crisis. The real disaster is still in the future.

I'm not writing about the city budget, or the state budget, or the federal budget, which I once did every four years, because I don't believe a damn thing that is in them.

I'm almost done with the stages of grief, and they are just starting. All that's left for me is a drive to correctly allocate the blame.

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**Vooch** • 2 months ago

3 million unmetered car storage spots in NYC - meter these and you'd be able to run a fareless subway system

1 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›



**Jeremiah Clemente** ➔ Vooch • 2 months ago

What is with the obsession with charging every parking spit for unnecessary free transit? Is this some new fetish porn I wasn't aware about?



However, if anything, if they could meter some spots and find other areas for an efficient budget, then they should give free fares to all full-time CUNY students and those attending full time at SUNY Fashion Institute of Technology, alongside lower income folks, while everyone else pays the \$2.75 fare. This should alleviate the financial burden for those folks.



I also recommend making the Q70 bus route free as well, which would allow for increased ridership on the route (and the system as a whole), and alleviate overcrowding on the M60, the other SBS route to the Airport, and the Q48, which travels to Flushing. It's a win-win for all transit riders. Increased revenue from those who choose the Q70 over the Q48 would then be used to lower the fare for other routes.

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**Vooch** ➔ Jeremiah Clemente • 2 months ago

How much is 200 sq.ft. of scarce curbside space worth ? In these times of budget crisis, we shouldn't be gifting 600 million square feet of valuable city land.Six. Hundred.Million.Square.Feet.

I suggest we SMARTmeter these 3 million car storage spaces and find out.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Jeremiah Clemente** ➔ Vooch • 2 months ago

Not every car space should be metered. Rather, some of those spaces should be reserved for restaurant outdoor seating. Residential spaces shouldn't be charged at all.

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**Vooch** ➔ Jeremiah Clemente • 2 months ago

Restaurants should have priority for curbside space - BUT pay for use of such space.

Car Storage spaces in residential areas should be SMART metered. SMARTmeters charge variable pricing based on demand. If demand is low, pricing will be low. If demand is high, then pricing will automatically adjust higher. This is fair and equitable.

The City has long had a pilot SMARTmeter program - it works and just needs to be expanded.

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**Arlington Traveler** ➔ Jeremiah Clemente • 2 months ago

Residential spaces should be charged for if they are on street parking.

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**Jeremiah Clemente** ➔ Arlington Traveler • 2 months ago

That's basically most of Southern Brooklyn, and they may not be happy to some extent.



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By Benjamin Kabak | Jul 9, 2020

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