

Neal Zuckerman



Honorable Kevin Byrne
Putnam County Executive
Putnam County Office Building
40 Gleneida Drive
Carmel, NY 10512

Dear County Executive Byrne,

I received your letter of April 3, 2025, and wanted to respond promptly related to my work on behalf of Putnam County residents at the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA).

It has been an honor to serve the commuters, riders, and taxpayers of Putnam County in MTA roles for nearly 15 years – first on the Metro-North Commuter Council from 2010-2016 and since then as the Putnam County representative to the MTA Board. I was recommended for these roles in the spirit of bipartisanship by Putnam County Executives Bob Bondi and Mary Ellen Odell, respectively. This bipartisanship continued with your support for my second term. Governor Kathy Hochul subsequently nominated me and I was confirmed by the Senate on June 9, 2023.

Although Putnam County is allotted a $\frac{1}{4}$ vote on the MTA Board, I have been able to ensure a greater voice for its constituents by serving as the first-ever Finance Committee Chair from a suburban county. In this capacity, I have been able to successfully advocate for a range of specific improvements benefitting Putnam riders. Priority repairs to Garrison and Cold Spring stations were recently completed and there are projects in construction to increase parking capacity at Southeast and expand Brewster Yard. This built on the work I had championed earlier to increase the safety on Metro-North through Positive Train Control, capping prices for the monthly commutation tickets, and increasing service following COVID.

More broadly, we have successfully shifted MTA Capital Program priorities so that – finally – Metro-North Railroad (MNR) is no longer playing second fiddle to Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) (which was the case when I first joined the board). In the past LIRR major projects like East Side Access left little for MNR, as documented by Reinvent Albany. Today, the MTA Capital Program includes multi-billion dollar MNR major projects like the Grand Central Trainshed, the rebuilding of the Park Avenue Viaduct, and Metro-North Penn Station Access. Indeed, over \$7.7 billion is allocated for MNR in the MTA's 2025-2029 Capital Plan (funding in large part by Congestion Pricing). Highlights benefitting Putnam County include a station renewal at Brewster, elevator replacements at Cold Spring and Garrison, and tunnel repairs at Garrison and nearby Breakneck Ridge. Perhaps most importantly, the 2025-2029 Capital Plan includes a massive and necessary investment in the Hudson Line: to make it more resilient to heavy rain and sea-level rise while increasing reliability and capacity through signal upgrades.

As your major concern seems to be about Congestion Pricing, I'll address it directly. My support of the program should come as no surprise as back in 2019 I voted to approve the MTA's 2020-2024 Capital Plan, which included Congestion Pricing as a partial funding source (as congestion pricing was expected to begin earlier than January 2025). At recent board meetings, I have lamented the added burden of yet another fee on residents of our region. But the reality is that the Congestion Pricing program was enacted as a law of the State of New York in 2019 and is the only funding source for \$15 billion (or close to 25% of the next capital plan) of borrowing necessary to maintain and improve the system that is essential to the livelihoods of Putnam County commuters and, indeed, for the region's economy. In fact,

69% of Putnam residents, a super majority, who visit the Manhattan's Congestion Zone take the train to get there and will benefit directly from these investments.

In my role on the MTA Board, I will continue to fight for Putnam County and push back against misinformation and disinformation, including from elected/appointed officials, whether about Congestion Pricing or other major elements related to my roles. I stand by the process Congestion Pricing, a vetted law of the State of New York, underwent prior to implementation: years of federal environmental study, hearings, votes, and public engagement. Even more important, I am gratified by its needed, financial productivity as well as its documented success in reducing congestion and speeding travel times – especially for drivers headed into the Manhattan's "Central Business District" (including the minority of commuters who choose to drive from Putnam County). That's ostensibly why polls are showing increases in the program's popularity with the public.

I very much respect your views and look forward to continuing to work with you. However, as a Senate confirmed appointee nominated by Governor Hochul, I intend to serve for the remainder of my term, unless my circumstances change. I am committed to fulfilling my duty – both as a fiduciary of the MTA and as an advocate for Putnam County residents and the riding public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. Zuckerman", with a stylized flourish at the end.

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