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## MTA Eyeing 2017 Bus, Subway Fare Hike to \$3; Hopes to Raise More Than \$300M

By Dan Rivoli

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The \$3 subway ride is looming and could be a reality next year.

The MTA on Wednesday issued a financial plan that includes an all but definite fare hike in 2017, with the aim of raising more than \$300 million annually for a transit system struggling to provide reliable service.

Just how the MTA comes up with a cash infusion — tweaking MetroCard and commuter rail prices as well as bridge and tunnel tolls — is up to agency officials.

But if past fare increases are a guide, MTA officials could well suggest that the base \$2.75 fare go up a quarter to \$3, according to Jamison Dague of the nonprofit, Citizens Budget Commission. Raising the price of an unlimited ride MetroCard is on the table, too.

“Usually, in all of these options, the MTA is careful to ensure that everyone has some sort of shared pain here when it comes to a fare increase,” said Dague, the commission’s director of infrastructure studies.

MTA brass stressed that the fare hike is part of a budget projection and that the forecast could change when the numbers are crunched again in November.

“That’s different than a, ‘Yes we’re gonna have a fare increase,’” MTA Chairman Thomas Prendergast said.

Still, a 4% fare hike kicking in this March would raise \$308 million a year on average through 2020.

On top of that, as part of its regular two-year fare increases, another spike in 2019 would reap the MTA an additional \$594 million over two years.

“The biennial fare and toll increases need to be pursued,” MTA finance chief Bob Foran told agency board members Wednesday.

In 2015, the MTA pulled in \$7.7 billion in fare and toll revenue, which covers half of what it costs the MTA to run its system, according to budget docs.

But after setting ridership records in 2015, business seems to have fallen off, as the system has been wracked by late trains and buses, broken equipment and overall shoddy service.



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After a rosy February financial outlook, the MTA took in \$182 million less from fares and tolls than officials estimated.

“The numbers indicate that maybe that rate of rise is trimming somewhat, coming back somewhat,” Prendergast said, adding that running more trains “is a challenge that we’ve got to meet and meet faster.”

Riders said last year’s fare increase is still fresh in their minds and that they’re having a tough time covering their transportation costs.

“I have a wife and kids. A little rise to some is a big rise for people like me,” said Syad Rizvi, 50, a gas station cashier from Queens. “So how can working people afford this?”

Ovid Bathersfield, 34, a nursing assistant from Canarsie, Brooklyn, said she could tolerate a fare hike if service was worth it.

“The train needs to run smoother. No one wants to wait 20 minutes for the next train,” Bathersfield said. “If the trains improved, paying more wouldn’t be as much of an issue.”

David Jones, one of Mayor de Blasio’s MTA board members and an advocate for low-income New Yorkers, said he wants the burden of a fare hike to be spread out or covered by other sources of revenue.

“That’s going to be my starting point — are there any ways to come at this that won’t jack up fares for other people just to support the very poor, but at the same time, are there other revenue streams that we have to start looking at more seriously?”