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MTA Releases Panel Recommendations for Workforce Development

Latest Step in Improved Relations Between MTA and its Employees

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) today released the report of its blue ribbon panel on workforce development, which identified 61 recommendations for creating a stronger, more respectful partnership between management and labor. The report included ideas for improving employee motivation and availability, promoting a better trained and prepared workforce, and preparing for the retirement of the baby boom generation of employees.

MTA Executive Director and CEO Elliot G. Sander formed the panel in May in acknowledgment of the invaluable role played by the MTA's 68,000 employees. The eight-member blue ribbon panel was co-chaired by Richard Ravitch, former Chairman of the MTA, and Hezekiah Brown, mediator and arbitrator. Brown presented the findings at a press conference today.

"The recommendations made by the blue ribbon panel are fair, objective and address many long standing issues in a positive and humanistic approach," said panel co-chair Hezekiah Brown. "I am convinced that with the adoption of the recommendations by management and labor it will enhance the ability of the parties to solve problems at all levels in a more expeditious manner and reduce conflict on a daily basis which ultimately transcends into labor peace."

MTA Executive Director and CEO Elliot G. Sander joined panel members and labor leaders in embracing the panel's recommendations.

"The MTA's hard-working men and women are critical to fulfilling our vision of being the best-in-class large, older transportation system in the world," said Elliot G. Sander, MTA Executive Director and CEO, who embraced the report's recommendations. "We will begin work immediately on an implementation plan. I believe when put in place these recommendations will have a truly transformative effect on this organization and its talented workforce."

Labor leaders were also on hand to illustrate the new spirit of cooperation between management and labor and to express support for the recommendations.

"This is an opportunity for the first time in many years to turn the corner and improve labor-management relations at the MTA, and TWU Local 100 fully supports the initiative," said Roger Toussaint, President of Transport Workers Union Local 100.

The panel initiated its work by conducting interviews with employees throughout the MTA as well as union representatives. Data analyses, field visits, and research into leading industry practices provided additional insights into the issues facing the workforce. Based on these sources and their own expertise, the panel developed a series of recommendations organized under the following five areas:

Organizational Culture: The MTA has an interest in fostering a work environment that reflects and rewards the core values of mutual respect, teamwork and high quality customer service. The report recommended sixteen ways that the MTA can work to create a culture of pride in delivering service to the public, including: publicizing and describing the hard work that employees do every day; increasing employee recognition events; and establishing quarterly informal forums between agency presidents and employees.

Workforce Development: Employees at all levels should be well equipped to meet future challenges as they pursue their careers within the MTA. The panel's sixteen recommendations under this rubric include creating a formal mentoring program within each agency, establishing an MTA-wide leadership and development academy, and creating individualized development plans for each employee that could be monitored and tracked.

Succession Planning: Given the increasing number of baby boomers set to retire in the next three to five years, it is important that the MTA create a process to develop candidates for senior-level positions, so as to ensure the continuity of managerial expertise and leadership skills within the MTA. The panel issued nine recommendations including working collaboratively with unions to explore the development of apprenticeship programs, and among management staff, teaming up veteran employees with less experienced ones for training with hands-on knowledge transfer.

Employee Availability: There are 260 potential workdays in a year, and the MTA should take steps to ensure that employees strive to be present at as many of these as they can. The panel issued twelve recommendations, including creating a stronger focus on health and wellness among our employees, developing programs to alleviate job-related stress and examining the applicability of flextime and greater use of alternative assignments.

Labor-Management Relations: Labor-management relations should be respectful and collaborative, and can be used as an effective tool for promoting efficiency and resolving workplace issues. The panel's eight recommendations in this category included establishing labor-management teams to collaborate on developing solutions to the issues of greatest concern and fostering dialog between the Executive Director and CEO, agency presidents, and union officials by instituting quarterly meetings.

In addition to the co-chairs, panel members include: Robert B. Catell; Susan G. Metzger; Robert E. Paaswell; Patricia Smith; Sonia M. Toledo; and Myrna I. Ramon. The panel began its work at the beginning of May 2007.