

Trump administration threatens to cut funding for New York City transit system

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The Trump administration is threatening to slash vital federal funding for New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in direct retaliation for the transit agency's refusal to sufficiently line up with Trump's law and order campaign. Using the fraudulent pretext of out-of-control crime, Trump's dictatorial attempt to blackmail and discipline the MTA threatens to accelerate the agency's financial crisis, which will be passed on via attacks on transit workers and riders.

Last week Trump's Transportation Secretary, Sean Duffy, sent a letter to the MTA chair Janno Lieber threatening to cut federal funding if the MTA did not satisfy the administration's demand for information about crime and steps to curtail it on New York City's subway and bus system. The federal agency has given the MTA until March 31 to respond.

In the letter, Duffy wrote, "I appreciate your prompt attention to this matter to avoid further consequences, up to and including redirecting or withholding funding." Duffy did not specify how much federal money would be withdrawn if his request is not met. Nor did he attempt to explain how unilaterally overriding congressionally authorized funding was legal.

The MTA has been looking for up to \$14 billion from the federal government over the next five years to help finance its \$68 billion capital maintenance and improvement plan. In addition, the New York state legislature has not come up with a plan for \$35 billion that the agency needs for this to complete this capital plan. The state budget is supposed to be in place by April 1.

The current five-year capital plan is one of many that has been ongoing for decades to help maintain and update an aged \$1.5 trillion mass transit system, by far the largest in the United States.

MTA Chief of Policy and External Relations John McCarthy, in a statement responding to Duffy's letter on Tuesday, said, "We are happy to discuss with Secretary

Duffy our efforts, alongside NYPD to reduce crime and fare evasion. The good news is numbers are moving in the right direction.

"Crime is down 40% compared to the same period in 2020 right before the pandemic, and so far in 2025 there are fewer daily major crimes in transit than any non-pandemic year ever. Moreover, in the second half of last year subway fare evasion was down 25% since increasing dramatically since COVID."

The supposed surge in subway crime is largely a media fiction promoted by both political parties in the aftermath of the onset of the pandemic, which has killed nearly 47,000 in New York City and at least 168 transit workers. Total numbers of crimes in major categories of murders, assaults, robberies and burglaries are at historic lows. However, political and media coverage has moved in the other direction, exploiting every incident of violence on the subway system while virtually ignoring road deaths and injuries.

Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul last year ordered 1,000 National Guard members into the subway. Right now, there are about 1,250 members of the Guard, MTA police and state police who patrol the transit system. In addition, there are several hundred New York City police officers assigned to the subway system.

Hochul, along with New York City Mayor Eric Adams and the Transport Workers Union, which supported the law-and-order hysteria, paved the way for Trump's phony invocation of subway crime to attack public funding for transit.

To the extent that assaults and other forms of violence remain real problems, law enforcement cannot fundamentally provide an answer. In fact, about two thirds of the people evicted from the subway system are suffering from mental problems and homelessness and in desperate need of housing and other social services.

Any real solution must address the root cause of

capitalist exploitation and oppression. Instead, the mass deployment of police in the subway system serves to condition the population for martial law and to crack down on opposition from workers and riders.

While claiming to fight crime, Hochul is now proposing that the state legislature criminalize wearing masks. In addition to the fact that the pandemic is not over, it is an attack on pro-Palestinian demonstrators who wear masks fearing victimization for expressing their views, as well as an attack on public health, given that N95 masks are a crucial tool to lower transmission of Covid.

The Trump White House is cynically using the issue of congestion pricing, under which the transit authority would receive funds through a charge of \$9 a day for vehicles who enter Manhattan south of 60th street, to posture as a populist opponent of New York officials. Trump's claim that he opposes these tolls because they are regressive is the height of hypocrisy, as he pursues to cut funding for the very transportation options that most of the working class in New York City depends on. Meanwhile, the administration is triggering a trade war which will lead to huge price hikes on consumers.

Duffy has unilaterally rescinded federal approval of the congestion pricing program, and the Federal Highway Administration Executive Director Gloria Shepherd has notified the MTA in a letter last month that it "must cease the collection of tolls ...by March 21." MTA Chairman and CEO Janno Lieber has stated that unless ordered to do so by a court, the agency will continue to collect tolls.

In response to this declaration, the Secretary on Thursday afternoon posted on X a notice for a 30-day reprieve with the following threat:

The federal government and @POTUS [President of the United States] are putting New York on notice. Your refusal to end cordon pricing and your open disrespect toward the federal government is unacceptable.

We will provide New York with a 30-day extension as discussions continue. We know that the billions of dollars the federal government sends to New York are not a blank check. Continued noncompliance will not be taken lightly.

Before this latest statement on X by Duffy, Lieber, when asked about this possibility of a money cutoff,

replied, "We're playing by the rules, and we're expecting them to play by the rules too."

However, the Trump administration has not been playing "by the rules." Earlier this month, it canceled \$400 million federal grants and contracts to Columbia university to strong arm the university into even more repression against students opposed to the Gaza genocide. It then used ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) to abduct Mahmoud Khalil, a Columbia University graduate who was a leader of the pro-Palestinian protests, who was sent to jail in Louisiana without any charges against him.

Trump's threats on the New York transit system are part of the wider attack on federal agencies, enforced by Elon Musk, the richest man in the world, head of the so-called Department of Government Efficiency. In violation of the US Constitution, he has been cutting thousands of jobs and needed services for working people, such as public education, Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security.

On top of that, Trump has been demanding more tax cuts for the billionaires and wealthiest Americans. In order to represent their interests, to engage in an enormous transfer of wealth from the working population to the oligarchy, Trump and those in his fascist circle has proceeded to overthrow democratic forms of rule and create a tyrannical police state.

The attack on the MTA is part of this. New York City and its surrounding area depend heavily on its mass transit system. Its collapse would do immeasurable damage to not only the city, its surrounding area, but also the entire nation.

Mass transit can only be defended by uniting transit workers and riders in rank-and file committees against this reactionary capitalist system, independent of the unions, as well as both Democratic and Republican parties of who work for the oligarchic elite.



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