



NYPIRG **Straphangers Campaign**

A project of the New York Public Interest Research Group Fund

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New York Public Interest Research Group and NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign

STATEMENT ON FORMER MAYOR EDWARD I. KOCH (1924 - 2013)

Friday, February 1, 2013

The New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) and its Straphangers Campaign extends its condolences to Mayor Edward I. Koch's family and friends.

When Mayor Koch took office in 1978, he inherited a crumbling subway and bus system, the victim of decades of inadequate investment. Ridership had fallen to its lowest level since 1917 and aging cars were covered in graffiti, often arriving with non-working doors and lights and breaking down frequently. (In 1981, the average subway train travelled 6,500 miles before it had a mechanical failure. In comparison, today subway cars have a failure once every 170,000 miles – more than 25 times better.)

For many, the decay of the subways symbolized the decline of New York City.

Mayors have limited powers to affect subway and bus service, which is run by a State public authority. Mayor Koch used his to the fullest, employing his bully pulpit to drag public promises out of transit executives before the glare of cameras, such as improved announcements and a crackdown on subway graffiti. Under pressure from Mayor Koch, the MTA completely eliminated graffiti on subway cars in 1989, during Mayor Koch's last term in office. In the mid-1980's, Mayor Koch doubled the City's commitment to the MTA's vital five-year rebuilding program.

One of Mayor Koch's most controversial transportation stands was his support for "Westway," a proposed Interstate highway along the west side of Manhattan and to be built partially in landfill in the Hudson River. Supporters like Mayor Koch and Governor Mario Cuomo argued that the project would generate new waterfront development and tax revenue and be paid for by the federal government. Facing strong community and environmental opposition, Westway was "traded-in" in 1985, yielding more than \$1 billion for city subways and buses.

Most famously, in 1980, he greeted New Yorkers who had walked across the Brooklyn Bridge during a transit strike that year.

Lastly: NYPIRG - which created the Straphangers Campaign works extensively on city good government reforms. In 1988, Mayor Koch enacted into law New York City's landmark campaign finance program, hailed widely as the most effective in the nation. Candidates voluntarily agree to limit how much they spend in exchange for receiving public matching funds. The program has made it possible for candidates of modest means to mount effective campaigns and has contributed greatly to achieving a diverse City Council.

The campaign finance program remains one of Mayor Koch's enduring achievements on City politics. The program will be evening the playing field and limiting the role of special interests in the 2013 elections, twenty-five years after Mayor Koch signed it into law.