Testimony of Roland Lewis, President & CEO  
New York City Council Committee on Environmental Protection  
Oversight Hearing  
re: Use of Biodiesel Fuel in City Ferry Fleet and DEP Marine Vessels  
January 13, 2015

The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA) is a bi-state coalition of over 800 community and recreational groups, educational institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders committed to restoring and revitalizing the New York and New Jersey waterways. Our waterways are alive with economic activity, active recreation, environmental education, and waterborne transportation, particularly critical to our region’s emergency preparedness on our island metropolis.

Intro 54 and Intro 451 are a positive step toward improving an already clean and efficient mode of transportation. The bill before this Committee today would require the City to begin using a fuel blend with 5% biodiesel on its own fleet, with an increase to 20% biodiesel blend by 2020. Ferries are already an efficient mode of public transit: the Staten Island Ferry carries triple the number of passengers of a crowded subway train, and a mid-sized passenger ferry can carry 10 times the number of people as the average bus. In 2008, New York City mandated the use of less polluting, ultra-low sulfur diesel (ULSD) by city-owned ferries, and many private operators have followed suit. The use of ULSD fuel has reduce pollutants from diesel exhaust to help the City to its air quality goals and improve public health.

These requirements have reduced emissions, but there is still room for further reductions. Ferries, like all fuel-powered vehicles, still produce some air pollution. Diesel fuel exhaust, and the resultant particulate emissions, have been identified as one of the most significant airborne health risks facing our region. To reduce emissions, vessel operators must switch to cleaner fuel, but ultra-low sulfur diesel (ULSD) for boats is often hard to find. The few facilities from which it is available are not located near marine enterprises, sometimes making it impractical for most operators to fill up with ULSD despite their willingness to do so.

Biodiesel fuel mixes have been identified as an effective means of reducing emissions, and New York has already taken the lead. The Environmental Protection Agency has projected use of B20 fuel (20% biodiesel) is expected to reduce hydrocarbon emissions by 21%, carbon monoxide emissions by 11%, and diesel particulate matter by approximately 10%. The City has made great strides, passing a bill in 2013 to make its municipal fleet of over 27,000 vehicles the greenest in the nation. That law mandated use of 5 percent biodiesel (B5) by 2014, and 20 percent biodiesel (B20) by 2016, excepting winter months, and a study of the feasibility of year-round B20 use.

Our counterparts across North America are already powering many public and private ferries with biofuels. The Red and White fleet in the San Francisco Bay area has used B20 biofuel since 2006, and San Francisco’s public Water Emergency Transit Authority (WETA) has used biofuels on its Gemini vessel since 2007. Following suit, BC Ferries, which serves the Vancouver metropolitan region, began using a B5 biofuel composed of 5% canola-based blend and 95% low sulfur petroleum diesel on 90% of its fleet in 2009, which helped contribute to a 5% savings in fuel consumption costs in just three years.

There may be ways to address concerns about of biofuels contributing to clogging in fuel systems on marine vessels. While this is an issue that must be monitored should this legislation move forward, there is available research suggesting that this challenge can be met accordingly. The Washington State Ferry (WSF) system, the second largest ferry system in the country, conducted a pilot biodiesel fuel test in 2004 and a subsequent Biodiesel Research and Demonstration Project implementation in 2008 (research
available here). WSF’s implementation project found excess sludge buildup in the fuel purifier of one of its vessels, but also identified remedies that this problem could be solved by adding biocides to the fuel. WSF strongly recommended the application of biocides to prevent microbial growth, with regular testing for microbes during fueling, and concluded that its research had “demonstrated the viability of using B20 biodiesel in year round marine conditions.” It also concluded that “the percentage of biodiesel (B5 – B20) used in the fuel did not impact vessel operations.”

**Increased ferry use should be part of an overall strategy to reduce fuel consumption.** New York City is the third most vulnerable major American city to the impacts of climate change. As climate change continues to fuel increasingly volatile weather patterns, New York City is likely to experience extreme weather events with greater frequency and severity, resulting in recurrent disruptions to safe and efficient transportation in New York City. Increased public support for ferry transit will produce corresponding ridership increases that have demonstrable public benefits. A shift in travel from private auto use to ferry transit would mean a fewer vehicle-miles traveled (VMTs) by motor vehicles on our already-crowded roadways, reducing congestion in addition to non-renewable fuel use. As we continue to re-engage with all the cultural and economic benefits the waterways that surround us can offer, we urge this Committee and the City Council to look to the “Blue Highways” as a vital component of our overall energy strategy.