

June 22, 2017

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Lhota appointment at MTA draws praise—and questions

Joseph Lhota takes over as chairman of the MTA, but how much time does he have for the ailing agency?



Photo: Buck Ennis

Joseph Lhota is back at the MTA.

By [Daniel Geiger](#)

Joe Lhota's appointment as chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority is drawing praise from construction and real estate executives. But questions remain about the MTA's leadership, including how much time Lhota can dedicate to the beleaguered transit agency.

According to a statement from Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who announced the nomination Wednesday, Lhota will serve as chairman in a part-time capacity and retain his full-time job as senior vice president, vice dean and chief of staff at NYU Langone Medical Center. His employer's [990 form](#) for a nine-month period through August 2015 shows he was paid more than \$1.35 million.

Neither Lhota nor a spokeswoman at the MTA immediately responded to a request for comment on how much of his schedule he would be able to dedicate to the MTA.

Business leaders across the city praised Lhota's nomination, which was quickly confirmed by the Republican-controlled state Senate. Lhota is a known quantity, having led the MTA for two years until leaving to run for mayor in 2013.

"Joe knows the good and the bad of the MTA, he's very trusted and he has run major organizations and he's someone who lives in Brooklyn and knows what it's like to commute," said Carlo Scissura, the president and CEO of the New York Building Congress. "Joe will assemble the right team and the right plan for the agency."

Scott Rechler, a major landlord in the city who this week was [named by Cuomo to the MTA's board](#), also hailed Lhota.

"I think he is the perfect person for the job," Rechler said. "He understands the nuances of the MTA, knows how to lead in a crisis, is well respected by civic and business leaders and has a mandate to do what needs to be done to bring the MTA into the 21st century."

According to a press release from Cuomo's office, day-to-day operations at the MTA will be overseen by a yet-to-be-hired executive officer.

"There is much hard work to be done to address the MTA's current failures, and the level of service and [daily frustrations commuters](#) are experiencing are completely unacceptable," Gov. Cuomo said in a statement. "I know Joe will move to address these issues immediately and ensure a reliable and effective transportation system worthy of the city it serves."

John Raskin, the executive director of the transit watchdog group the Riders Alliance, said that regardless of the leadership at the MTA, Cuomo remains responsible for the agency's plans to address its failing infrastructure and the money needed to improve the system.

"The questions about MTA leadership or board governance are just distractions from the core issue—that Cuomo needs to take the lead and put together a plan to fix the subways and find the funding to make it work," Raskin told *Crain's*.