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## The Public Ought to Know: Bus travel in Queens poses ultimate challenge

By Corey Bearak

08/21/2003

This column owes itself to former Bronx Deputy Borough President Anthony Suber, now a key aide to Nassau County's Tom Suozzi.

Still a Queens resident, Tony worked also for U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks, D-St. Albans and former U.S. Rep. Floyd Flake, D-St. Albans.



Corey Bearak

Somehow, we talked about a funeral we both attended and it reminded me of my inability to transfer to a bus to get me there, and to address bus service in Queens.

Our bus transportation can be problematic. When it works, it proves only a bit less convenient than a car. Other times, the ride makes you wish you drove yourself.

When I take the Q76 after leaving my car for repair in Whitestone, I enjoy a quick ride to Union Turnpike. At rush hour, I must take a local bus to Springfield Boulevard where I can catch the express which then runs local.

To avoid the extra transfer, I can ride to Hillside Avenue for the Q43, and endure a longer wait since that bus runs to the Sutphin Boulevard LIRR station, and Hillside Avenue at rush hour gets congested from Jamaica through western Queens Village.

Most know Q76 travels Francis Lewis Boulevard; if a rider wants to continue south of Hillside Avenue to Hollis or Rosedale, you need to transfer there for the Q77. I suspect most readers know that while both the Q76 and Q77 go in the same terminal in Jamaica, the demographics of the neighborhoods they serve could not be more different.

The Q79, which runs along Little Neck Parkway, providing a vital north-south link, ceases to run after 7 p.m. and never operates on Sunday. Political muscle prevented the extension of its southern terminus to the LIRR main line station in Floral Park Village. This would increase ridership on a route often threatened with elimination, if not cutbacks. A group of civic leaders, supported by our elected officials prevailed on the New York City Transit Authority to extend the Q79 to the Floral Park LIRR.

However, Long Island legislators got the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to block it. I argued that Queens residents should demonstrate on Hillside Avenue at the city line and block the Long Island buses that run to our subways in Jamaica. Some even argue that the Mayor should order the NYPD to turn those buses back at the City line. Bottom line: the Q79 ought to run to the Floral Park LIRR. I hope civics press this issue again.

Then there's access to our library. If you live in northern Queens, you easily access the new Flushing Library which functions as a main branch in addition to the Main Library on Merrick Boulevard in Jamaica. You can take the subway or a multitude of buses. If you live near Hillside Avenue or in parts of Whitestone, Flushing and points east, you can easily get to the Main Library by bus, giving a lot of northern Queens residents a choice of "Main" library branches.

If you live in Rosedale, South Ozone Park, Rochdale or St. Albans, try to take a bus to the Main Library in Jamaica. Most times you can't. I learned that the hard way. I was then working for Councilman Sheldon Leffler in the same building where my friend David Weprin maintains his Council office. My wife had our car; I needed to attend a funeral in St. Albans at Rev. Flake's A.M.E. Cathedral for Gloria Saunders, a wonderful lady who touched a lot of us. I had the choice of buses along Hillside Avenue - Q43, Q76, Q77, Q1, Q36 - to reach the 165th Street terminal or within a block of it. I get there and I learn the bus I need to complete my trips does not run mid-day. I ended up walking, not a bad thing for me. But I also realized the terminal lies across from the Main Library; I wondered how kids from south of Jamaica Avenue could conveniently reach this important resource center. I still do.

I suspect readers can supply their own anecdotes. Please do.

This situation needs a fix; Yes MTA NYC Transit must be part of the solution; so does the City Transportation Department, which oversees the private franchise buses that Mayor Mike wants the MTA to take over. We keep hearing it's in the works.

Well, look back to the column on the strategic borough presidency. Transportation planning in Queens certainly requires a strategic look. A borough hall task force can bring the aforementioned players, the bus drivers' unions, riding public and our elected leaders together and press for the fixes, and more importantly, improvements. This can't happen too soon. And while they're at it, this BP task force should look at commuter vans and airport access.

Corey Bearak is an attorney and adviser on government, community and public affairs. He is also active in Queens civic and political circles.