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Testimony
of
Mark Henry
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To
The NYS Assembly Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions
James F. Brennan, Member of Assembly, Chair
August 7, 2014, 1030 a.m.

Thank you for this opportunity to address this committee and comment on the MTA 2015-2019 Capital plan and the needs for a marked increase in emphasis on the current and future needs of Queens public transit. I am Mark Henry, President and Business Agent for Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local No. 1056. Local 1056 which represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division.

Public Transit is Queens Backbone

New York City's transit system, especially its bus service, truly serves as the backbone of our region. Millions of people rely on it every day to access an area of their community or another part of the city, or even parts outside. Super Storm Sandy brought to light THE essential service which is public transportation, and particularly our buses; when subways remained flooded, in disrepair or out of service following Sandy, the buses got people moving. Despite the extraordinary service provided by buses in Sandy's aftermath, today we find Queens tremendously underserved when it comes to public transportation service.

Access / Mobility

In addition to providing commuters with a way to go to and from work, mass transit, especially our buses, offer a vital link to the outside world for seniors, young people, people with disabilities, and people without cars. Transit is the only way many can shop, go to the doctor, attend worship services, visit family members, and do many of the things that enrich their lives.



*Representing all hourly rated Employees
of the Queens Division, Who safely Operate and
Maintain Buses for MTA New York City Transit.*

*Serving the communities of Queens, Manhattan,
and the Bronx since January 23rd, 1935.*

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Working Families need safe, equitable and efficient transportation. In Queens, more often than not, that means buses.

Investing smartly in public transportation keys growth in the economy and job creation. Real estate and economic development interests recognized this when they supported extending the “7” Line from Times Square to the Far West Side and the Javits center or the LIRR east side access project.

Yet we question the investment to date which falls woefully short when so much of Queens, including many of the neighborhoods served by the members of our local, receive inadequate transit service. And unlike an investment in the mega-projects I alluded to above, many of the investments involving bus service offers immediately relief. That's right, buses.

Let's look at our buses. Currently, Queens lacks sufficient buses to meet existing and planned service needs. The current fleet of buses in Queens includes just too many deteriorated, old and inefficient buses that operate beyond their expected useful life and often disrupts service. The State Comptroller noted that NYCT currently has a fleet of 4,428 buses, and it plans to purchase more than 7,000 buses through 2034 at a cost of nearly \$6.2 billion. Buses have a useful life of 12 years, and NYCT's goal is to maintain an average fleet age of between 6 and 7.5 years. As of April 2014, the average age of the fleet was 8.37 years (30 percent of the NYCT buses were 12 years or older). The MDBF for buses declined from 4,100 miles in 2007 to 3,340 miles in 2011, but then increased to nearly 5,000 miles in 2013. While NYCT attributes the improvement to newer buses and improved maintenance, those results lag when it comes to Queens.

While planners focus on subway and rail mega-projects, they ignore a real need for modernized bus terminals. The congestion and related issues that plague downtown Downtown Flushing cry for a terminal that Member of Congress Grace Meng has proposed. The Flushing Area has an ever increasing ridership as development increases throughout Flushing. We need leadership from transit and transportation planners.

We must also bolster the Casey Stengel Depot (a NYCT Queens Bus Division Depot that serves Flushing communities) against flooding risks (We recall urgent the movement buses there to “higher ground” in advance of Sandy.)

Our local has long advocated that the MTA modernize and expand its (NYCT Queens Bus Division) Jamaica Depot. While the MTA finally and recently acquired the land required for the project, the capital plan must fund and accelerate this project to help the neighborhoods of Southeast Queens. The modernization and redesign of the 165st Bus Terminal across from the Jamaica Main Library will offer the many commuters who use this terminus a safe and accessible facility.

Long term, the MTA must focus on better use of its bus lines to serve intra-borough needs rather than just funneling riders to subways and rail. As you may not be aware Queens can be a two fare zone if the MTA fails to make Metro Cards available to more vendors in the neighborhoods as residents often still pay two fares to commute about Queens or to New York City. The MTA must continue to add service in areas of Queens that severely need the mobility that public transit affords taxpaying New Yorkers. Two Center for Urban Future reports evidence the need to expand public transits options needs for residents in Queens, Brooklyn and Far Rockaway. The MTA needs to reconsider plans to deploy more “articulated” buses. During rush hour the MTA must deploy more buses to meet service needs; this includes starting some buses further along a route to allow more riders get a timely ride. We also need more bus to implement to service the underserved residents of Queens. Enforcement of illegal transportation must be discouraged and made punitive.

A Civil Right

Martin Luther King Jr., famously declared, “Public transportation is a civil right.” When so many benefits of society denied to people who cannot afford their own personal transit, we need to recognize access to public transit as a civil right. Without access to mass transit, many cannot get to a job and provide for their families. Public transit thus becomes an essential element in lifting people out of poverty and into the mainstream of society.

Public Transportation preserves our way of life as a climate change solution, economic growth solution, a job creator.

In summary, based on our experience and knowledge of the MTA system, ATU 1056 emphasizes the need to rebuild and enhance bus service and invest in the infrastructure necessary to keep our buses running and deliver the best service possible to the residents of Queens and those who visit or work here. ATU Local 1056 will continue to advocate a better scheduled service for Queens and so should this committee. Thank you for this opportunity to share my locals’ views and advocacy for the community we serve. I can be reached at the number above at any time.