

Testimony of
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Chair, ATU Legislative Conference Board
to the NYS Assembly
Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions
James F. Brennan, Member of Assembly, Chair
August 7, 2014, 10:30 a.m.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the MTA's 2015-2019 Capital Plan with regard to evaluating transit priorities for Brooklyn Queens and Staten Island. I am John Lyons, President/ Business Agent, Amalgamated Transit Union Local No. 1179. In my role as Chair of the ATU NYS Legislative Conference Board, I lead of coalition of transit locals with particular interests in Brooklyn Queens and Staten Island: My own local ATU 1179 represents bus operators and mechanics who work from the Far Rockaway and JFK Depots of the MTA Bus division (former Green Bus lines). ATU 1056 members – bus operators and mechanics – work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens bus division. ATU 1181 represents the paratransit drivers of MTA's access-a-ride) and about 200 MTA Bus division drivers and mechanics of buses that operate along the routes of the former private Command Bus line in Brooklyn (and the school bus drivers and matrons). ATU 726 represents bus operators and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Staten Island bus division.

Public transportation remains key to economic growth and the creation of jobs in New York. Real estate developers and economic development organizations recognized this when they promoted the Far West Side station between Javits and Times Square.

For just that same rationale – economic growth and meeting the public's transit needs and, based on our experience and knowledge of the MTA system, ATU Locals advocate a better bus replacement schedule, with particular regard to Queens. Currently, the MTA fails to deploy enough buses to adequately serve the borough. The current fleet includes many old buses that continue to operate beyond their expected useful life; these buses remain breakdown prone which disrupts service. NYCT currently claims a fleet of 4,428 buses; it plans to purchase more than 7,000 buses through 2034 at a cost of nearly \$6.2 billion, but it needs to assure us on the deployment of enough new and replacement buses to assure Queens residents enjoy reliable bus service. While buses have a useful life of 12 years, and NYCT asserts its goal to maintain an average fleet age of between 6 and 7.5 years, through this past April (2014), its bus fleet 8.37 years average age indicates how many routes face a plague of breakdown from buses operating beyond their useful life. Some 30% of NYCT buses operate beyond 12 years or older. Similar issues plague many local bus routes in MTA Bus.

Since useful life continues to remain an issue, it places even greater importance on state of the art depots. The Far Rockaway (MTA Bus) Depot replacement/ rehabilitation remains priority for a facility still at risk to storms; bus operators and maintainers still work from trailers rather than appropriate locker facilities; no plans exist to get this facility that was closed from Oct 2012-Feb 2013 up to pre-Sandy capacity; five new lifts built to service buses based there got “appropriated” when MTA built permanent office space for bus management there; roof work supposed to start July 2013, remains in limbo for 13 months with no clear start date. The lack of post Sandy improvements at Far Rockaway also inhibits the MTA's ability to provide service needed for the peninsula; this facility maintains limited ability to store or repair buses; instead

MTA Bus currently uses its JFK depot in Jamaica on the mainland for the bulk of repair work.

The new Jamaica (NYCT Queens Bus Division) Depot project should move now that the MTA assembled the land required for the project. The MTA must complete this depot project; it will help the neighborhoods of Southeast Queens. The MTA also needs to bolster NYCT's Casey Stengel Depot location against flooding risks (Managers moved buses to “higher ground” in advance of Sandy.).

We face a need for modernized bus terminals – such as in the Downtown Flushing area that Member of Congress Grace Meng proposed at our behest – to meet the ever increasing ridership capacities and development in the area.

Longer 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.

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, one recently released, highlight the need to look at public bus transit to expand options needs for residents in Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island.

ATU also 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 New Yorkers and those who visit or work here.

Between the MTA NYC Transit bus division and MTA Bus, very little of the MTA Capital Plan covers bus needs. Under \$11 billion, not even approaching 10% of the total plan goes to buses. Most of that sum covers buses with little allocated for depots and terminals. With Brooklyn Queens and Staten Island more dependent on surface transit, this needs a re-thinking and a clear allocation of surface transit monies to these boroughs.

Finally, MTA needs to more carefully scrutinize its intention to introduce more “articulated” buses. Alternative bus deployment in rush hour, including starting some buses further along a route can make a better difference. According to the MTA plan, NYCT intends to shift its bus fleet toward articulated buses and convert additional high-volume routes to these larger models. Working with the City's Transportation Department, the MTA also plans to expand Select Bus Service, which uses these larger buses, dedicated bus lanes and other features; based on existing data, we remain skeptical of any ability to realize any meaningful increases to frequency and speed of service. We believe more buses better deployed can realize meaningful differences; it did in years past.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our view; I stand ready to answer any questions.

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