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### **Transit Unions: Buses Matter Too; MTA Plan Needs Improvement**

Full funding of the MTA Capital Plan matters less than correctly funding the projects that matter, argues Mark Henry, President and Business Agent for Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local No. 1056 and John Lyons, President/ Business Agent, Amalgamated Transit Union Local No. 1179 and Chair, ATU Legislative Conference Board. “Calling for funding the plan without regard for what it includes makes little sense,” explained Mr. Henry whose local represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division. “Frankly, the plan still fails to adequately provide for current and future needs of Queens public transit; this especially relates to public bus transit.” Mr Lyon, whose local represents bus operators, mechanics and supervisors who work from the Far Rockaway and JFK Depots of the MTA Bus division (former Green Bus lines), said: “When folk gather – as some do this morning at a rail and subway terminal – to support a plan in its entirety without making sure it meets the needs of bus riders, we must speak out for those our members serve.” The ATU Legislative Conference Board includes transit locals with particular interests in Brooklyn Queens and Staten Island and many across New York State.

President Lyons stated: “Investments in transportation infrastructure remains critical to our economy. 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. Smart investments that support bus service improvements can realize improvements and growth sooner than those aforementioned and similar mega-projects.”

President Henry urged a look at the state of public investment in bus infrastructure. “Queens lacks sufficient buses to meet existing and planned service needs,” Henry noted. “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.”**



That's why at City Council and Assembly hearings on the MTA capital plan both ATU locals questioned the current investment to date. The current infrastructure falls woefully short when so much of Queens, including many of the neighborhoods served by members of our local, receive inadequate transit service. Unlike an investment in the mega-projects I alluded to above, many of the investments the ATU proposes involving bus service offers immediately relief. **That's right, buses.**

In addition to providing commuters with a way to go to and from work, mass transit, especially our buses, offers a vital link to the outside world for seniors, young people, people with disabilities, and people without cars.

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

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 Flushing cry for a Hub Bus terminus that Member of Congress Grace Meng originally proposed. The Flushing Area continues to have an ever increasing ridership as development increases throughout Flushing. Transit and transportation planners need to step forward and show leadership here.

The MTA must also bolster the Casey Stengel Depot (a NYCT Queens Bus Division Depot that serves Flushing communities) against flooding risks (Local 1056 recalls the urgent movement of buses there to “higher ground” in advance of Sandy.)

ATU Local 1056 has long advocated that the MTA modernize and expand its (NYCT Queens Bus Division) Jamaica Depot. The current depot functions at only 70% of the capacity needed to provide consistent and adequate bus service. While the MTA finally and recently acquired the land required for the project, the capital plan must accelerate this project to help the neighborhoods of Southeast Queens; at the Council hearing the MTA promised to disclose those details. The modernization and redesign of the 165st Street Bus Terminal across from the Jamaica Main Library will offer the many commuters who use this terminus a safe and accessible facility; the MTA plan does not address this infrastructure need.

ATU 1179 emphasizes the need to replace or rehabilitate The (MTA Bus) Far Rockaway Depot, 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 October 2012--February 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 more than a year 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 Rockaway 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.

Investing in bus infrastructure empowers the MTA to focus on better use of its bus lines to serve intra-borough needs rather than just funneling riders to subways and rail. 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 desperately 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 also 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. The MTA also need to deploy more buses to implement service the underserved residents of Queens; this requires the MTA to buy more buses. And to do represents a smart investment in infrastructure.

ATU continues to be at the forefront of advocating transportation infrastructure investment at the national, state and local levels. ATU sponsored National Transit month and rallied in Washington, D.C. last May to call attention to this need. ATU welcome advocacy in support of its effort to secure the needed public investments in **bus transportation infrastructure**.

Mr Henry concluded: “Based on our experience and knowledge of the MTA system especially in Queens, ATU emphasizes the need to invest in the infrastructure necessary to keep our buses running, rebuild and enhance bus service and deliver the best service possible to the residents of Queens and those who visit or work here.” Mr. Lyons concluded, “Let's face the facts: the current transit administration knows it will not be building any train services in Queens. ATU will continue to advocate a better scheduled service for Queens and so should all concerned about the state of public transit.”

Editor's note ATUs 1056 and 1179 released this statement to coincide with a new conference this morning at Grand Central Terminal on the MTA capital plan.