

**Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Urges Council Look to Buses
to “Connect Transportation Deserts” Testimony to City Council Committee on
Transportation Int. Nos. 964 and 965 and Res. 670 and 903 by Mark Henry,
President and Business Agent, ATU Local 1056**

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on legislation – Int. Nos. 964 and 965 and Res. 670 and 903– that focus on improving public transit. As mass transit professionals, ATU offers unique and valuable insights. ATU 1056 and ATU 1179 members – bus operators and mechanics – work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus division and serve the riding public.

One thing the package de-emphasizes somewhat at the expense of capital-intensive rail approaches involves the use of buses.

Buses offer a quick means to addressing a dearth of service or improving what exists throughout the city and especially in Queens, where ATU members serve its residents, visitors, workers and students.

ATU takes no position on Int. 964 which would mandate NYC's Department of Transportation to study building a light rail system in the city with an emphasis on serving underserved communities. The street grid already exists; NYC, its DOT and the MTA just need to look at opportunities to effectively use the grid by deployment of more buses and establishing expanded and new routes. Any study to improve transit falls shorts without concurrently looking at bus utilization.

DOT's focus on Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) or Select Bus Service (SBS) routes involves no significant service upgrades; studying the metrics makes clear the need to look at the larger picture. ATU favors BRT and SBS approaches as part of any plan to improve bus service system wide. Unfortunately the deployment of substantial human and money resources to date diverts attention for the needed holistic approach to public transit in places that need more, better and the introduction of bus service.

ATU favors Res. 670's call on the MTA to allow riders traveling on commuter rail within the city to pay a fare equivalent to NYC Transit subways and buses. The express bus fare may offer an appropriate standard but ATU leaves that determination to others. ATU strongly recommends amending this resolution sponsored by Council Member I. DanEEK Miller to include a free transfer between each transit mode, as currently exists between buses and subways and local and express buses.

ATU has routes including the Q2, Q3, Q27, Q31, Q36, Q43, Q44 and Q88, that intersect with LIRR stations in eastern Queens. This transfer option could induce greater ridership and remove a more people from cars. In addition explore extending an appropriate transfer options to stations just outside the city limits that serve Queens residents, including the Hempstead LIRR line which includes stops in Floral Park and Bellerose Village running parallel to the city line just a few blocks beyond it. The bus routes formally known as the Q5AS Laurelton and Q5S (Q86) Rosedale Shuttles serviced LIRR stations during rush hours and similar opportunities exist with other routes in southeast Queens.

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ATU supports the need to identify “transportation deserts” envisioned every five years by Int. No. 965. Many communities that require transit or more of it already clamor for better options. Int. No. 965 works best as means to help drive needed improvements in bus service.

ATU offers no position on Res. 903 concerning unused and underused rail rights of way other than to re-emphasize the utility of buses as a service option.

Building in smarter transit options using buses could assist many residents who currently rely on personal vehicles.

Buses connect neighborhoods. City Hall's plans to develop more affordable housing units and housing with less or no parking requirements needs adequate public transit options in place, and not just to funnel commuters to subway and rail; the city needs buses in place to take residents to school, work, recreation and family within boroughs such as Queens. The Council should support advocacy by ATU and others for more buses that the MTA needs to maintain and expand service.

Buses, new and existing, require fully-functioning depots and in many cases terminals to facilitate commuter transfer between transit modes. The City needs to make sure progress continues on the MTA's Jamaica bus depot. The City really need to look at identifying a site for a bus terminal serving downtown Flushing before development makes it impractical; it may not be too late to incorporate it in the plans for the Flushing municipal lot, which may present the best location.

If this hearing can help direct attention to better use of buses, providing more buses and service, greater progress on depots and identifying needed bus terminal sites, it help the cause and benefits so many New Yorkers including those who live in those transportation deserts.

Thank you.



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