

**Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Advocates Bus Service Improvements  
Testimony to City Council Committee on Transportation**

by

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&

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the need to improve public transit in the City of New York. I am **Mark Henry**, President and Business Agent for Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local No. 1056; and Chair, ATU Legislative Conference Board. Local 1056 represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Divisions. And I am **Bennie Caughman**, President/ Business Agent, Amalgamated Transit Union Local No. 1179.

As mass transit professionals, ATU offers unique and valuable insights. ATU 1056 and ATU 1179 members – bus operators and mechanics – work respectively for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus and the MTA Bus division; we serve the riding public.

At almost every opportunity discussing public transit, the ATU emphasizes that smartly investing in public transit keys growth in the economy and job creation.

For many New Yorkers public transit serves as their lifeline to 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.

More often than not, including in Queens, that means buses. Thus we welcome this hearing to remind everyone concerned about public transit in New York City and its surrounding counties to think beyond just the state of our subways – the focus of this hearings.

When discussing how best to improve public transit, policymakers and advocates talk up ferries, more rail and subways, light rail and, inexplicably, a trolley. They often give short thrift to resources to expand bus service – which offers the quickest, most cost effective and flexible means to get more people out of cars and help protect our environment. Any discussion of subways requires a focus on buses as well.

Buses offer a quick means to address 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. Bus routing can also provide alternatives that relieve stress on subways.

Frankly, building in smarter public transit options using buses also assists 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.

Indeed, many communities that require transit or more of it clamor for better options.

We need leadership from transit and transportation planners.

City Hall and the City Council should support advocacy by ATU and others for more buses that the MTA needs to maintain and expand service; this includes a focus on better use of MTA bus lines to serve intra-borough and inter-borough needs rather than just using most bus routes to funnel riders to subways and rail. A holistic approach to bus service will help remedy "transportation deserts" that elected officials such as Council Member I. Daneek Miller clearly identify.

Let's look at some existing bus service and identify a few examples for improvement.

New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) and MTA transit planners need to re-think their focus on Select Bus Service (SBS) – their version, more commonly known as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) - involves no significant service upgrades.

Studying the SBS 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 from the needed holistic approach to public transit in places – including Queens – that need more, better and the introduction of bus service. In ATU's experience, especially in Queens, SBS hurts communities; since its inception SBS reduced overall service to communities; the implementation of SBS basically replaces Limited (bus stop) service.

Extending SBS features to other local and express routes offer real opportunities to enhance service. Off-board fare payment reduces time to get on and overall travel times. This would work particularly well at subway and other terminals.

Issues involving delays and longer than expected waits often relate to management decisions that take buses and bus operators out of service.

Often, MTA's bus divisions opt not to replace a driver out sick and or a disabled bus.

When MTA managers allow longer than appropriate bus inspection schedules, unsafe equipment often leaves a route short on buses; this only puts drivers and riders at risk in buses that may break down, often unsafely.

The above scenarios means buses out of service either lacking a driver or unable to operate, runs on routes going uncovered and longer wait times for riders, often at the worst times. When fewer buses run blowing published schedules, it impacts passengers facing the summer heat, blustery rain and as the weather becomes colder and more frequently inclement.

Change these MTA policies that allows management decisions that take buses and bus operators out of 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 needs to look at identifying a site for a full-scale bus terminal serving downtown Flushing before development makes it impractical. Flushing continues to have an ever increasing ridership as development increases there. Member of Congress Grace Meng proposed it in 2012.

The focus by advocacy groups, including the Riders Alliance, on buses helps change a conversation that gave greater priority to ferries, more rail and subways, light rail and, recently, a trolley; buses still offer the quickest, most cost effective and flexible means to get more people out of cars and help protect our environment.

The so-called NYC Bus Coalition [report](#) on improving bus service basically adopted [recommendations](#) advanced by MTA bus unions including in [testimony](#) and [commentary](#).

The MTA, the city, the state and advocates need to look at funding for more new buses to support bus service changes, expansions, and enhancement. This goes beyond current schedules to replace existing buses.

ATU recommends a strategic look at public bus transit. City, Transit and elected officials need to come together with business and community leaders to explore greater use of buses.

This planning approach, whether it include borough task forces and/or DOT/MTA driven planning group(s), can bring the aforementioned players, the bus operator unions, the riding public, community groups and our elected leaders together and press for the fixes, and more importantly, improvements.

ATU's strategic approach includes some basic needs and options which make sense:

- \*restore remaining bus service cuts from 2010.
- \*expand (all) bus service to operate 24 hours.
- \*introduce express bus service in Southeast Queens at the level that exists in Northeast Queens.
- \*acquire more buses to deploy on existing, revised and new routes – a key component of any improvement plan.
- \*identify any need for new bus terminals – downtown Flushing plagued by congestion and related issues – remains a prime candidate.
- \*identify bus depots which need repair or replacement and schedule such.

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Advocates Bus Service Improvements; Testimony to City Council Committee on Transportation, Tuesday, August 8, 2017, page four

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- \*address congestion on local bus lines particularly during rush hours.
- \*deploy more buses to meet service needs during rush hours; this includes starting some buses further along a route to allow more riders get a timely ride.
- \*institute off-bus fare collection not just for SBS.
- \*looking at dedicated bus lanes for local and limited bus routes such as enjoyed in one borough, with proper enforcement.
- \*implement free transfers between commuter rail and bus public transit, as currently exist between buses and subways and local and express buses.
- \*charge the entity looking at BQX – “the rail to nowhere” – to also review linking the waterfront neighborhoods via buses, which can occur almost instantaneously.

A city which puts a premium not only on planning but engaging the community ought to embrace this holistic approach to ensuring improved bus service.

Bottom line, improving bus service offers a quick, simple and strategic path to effectively upgrading public transit infrastructure, including in Queens.

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 helps the cause and benefits so many New Yorkers including those who live in those transportation deserts.

Thank you.



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