

ATU Local 1056 Questions Response to Winter Storm Avery

Testimony to the New York City Council Committees on Sanitation & Solid Waste Management,
Transportation & Education
by Mark Henry, President/ Business Agent, ATU Local 1056

On behalf of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1056, thank you for this opportunity to share the perspective of bus operators in the aftermath of Winter Storm Avery. I am ATU LOCAL 1056 President and Business Agent Mark Henry. ATU LOCAL 1056 represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens bus division. Many of my members were on the front line during the storm. On their behalf and that of our riding public, I want to make clear what we all know: the lack of adequate response to this Pre-winter storm in the borough of Queens represented a gross disappointment in both planning and response.

This Thursday, November 15, 2018 snow event, while short of horrific and unsafe conditions, left many of the communities we serve with no access to public transportation in outlying or transit desert areas of Queens. Main arteries where buses operate were not treated (with salt) in the first place to endure this type storm. Locations well inland to experienced the same impact much earlier; that gave us a warning of what we would face. Still, no midday efforts got salt spreaders and other equipment deployed along bus routes and other roads. Queens remains a transit desert without ready access to rail or subway (without a bus ride first). This makes reliance on buses all the more important. Further snow accumulations and street based snow removal often leave bus stop sidewalks and bus shelters totally inaccessible; this leave the riders we serve without a safe place to wait for a bus or to disembark.

This question comes to mind: After this small storm with big impact, what happens when a big storm occurs? Will conditions delay, limit or cause a cessation in bus service? Riders of public transit often lack knowledge of their preferred and regular transit options. No one ought to experience any wait in vain. What happened November 15: Apparently no early decision to deploy equipment to spread salt and clear snow. Ditto on personnel to clear sidewalks and curbs along bus stops and bus shelters. Decisions on preparation, response, budget and deployment fall first on City Hall and then the MTA.

Queens is not Manhattan. Queens primarily depends on more on buses than subway and rail to move about. Many main roads, including bus routes, include declines and inclines that require appropriate attention to maintain bus operations. With too many storms, planners fail to take terrain into account. Bus routes in Queens traverse across several community districts with many serving as feeder lines to subway lines. This requires a snow (and salt-spreading) plan that clears bus routes that often involves otherwise secondary and tertiary streets. Some inclines require special attention in extreme snow conditions or buses will not be able to complete their runs.

Hundreds of ATU members stuck on their buses for hours, remained unable to serve the riding public the way we prefer. Riders waiting for buses much longer than reasonable – even in these difficult weather condition. We want and demand answers. We look to this hearings to help get at the truth. We also call on City Hall to publicly release its (community/sanitation) district by district snow response plans and the actual implementation. Thank you.

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