

## **Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Advocates Bus Service Improvements**

**Testimony to NYS Senate Standing Committee On Corporations, Authorities & Commissions and Standing Committee On Transportation**

**by**

**Mark Henry, President and Business Agent, ATU Local 1056 and Chair, ATU NYS Legislative Conference Board**



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Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for necessary improvements to 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 NYS Legislative Conference Board. I represent ATU Local 1056 which represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division and ATU Locals across the State of New York on their legislative concerns.

Transit in this city operated by MTA focuses primarily on economics, income level and not the population's needs; it's the Tale of Two Different New York's.

As a mass transit professionals, ATU Locals across this city and state offers unique and valuable insights. We serve the riding public.

At almost every opportunity discussing public transit, the ATU Locals in this city emphasizes that smartly investing in public transit keys growth in the economy and job creation. Moreover at this hearing on the MTA and transit network effectiveness, ATU emphasizes that cost-effective improvements in bus service offers the smartest and most effective means to deliver public transit improvements, including to the many so-called transit deserts identified in the City of New York.

Public transit serves as the lifeline for many true New Yorkers – especially those people of lower incomes – to shop, see their doctor, attend worship services, visit family members, and do many of the things that enrich their lives. Working class families need safe, equitable and efficient transportation, not just subways but viable bus service. More often than not, including in Queens, that means reliance on our existing bus public transit networks system that must be ADA compliant operated by the MTA. Our buses serve as the backbone of many communities – the transit deserts – that are without a subway or rail stop within a few blocks of their homes. The reality is that your income level can dictate where you live or how far you must commute to get to work, school or other basic necessities. The focus of transit improvements is not only on subways but must significantly include Bus Service to better serving these communities.

Too often policymakers and advocates ignore the utility of **bus public transit**; instead they implement BIKE LANES, Pedestrian malls and VISION ZERO initiatives which, while healthy alternatives, contradict and impede the growing need for PUBLIC Transit to operate, specifically reliable Bus Service. Ferries and light rail must be incorporated and connect with our Bus, Rail and subway networks.

We need to end this impractical mindset against buses and commit to expand bus service – especially in Queens which suffers greatly by the inferior bus network that currently exists there.

Let's face facts, NEW subway lines are not in the plans for the “Outer Boroughs” such as Queens. The quickest and most impactful move involves investment in an improved and expanded bus service network. This network needs to offers the quickest and most cost effective and flexible means to get more people out of cars, help protect our environment and enhance service to the transportation deserts of our city.

I begin with the clear premise that the MTA's current schedules to replace existing buses remains woefully inadequate, it's costly and impactful on operational needs. The purchasing of multiple types of buses has an impact: from ergonomics Bus Operator Work Stations that impose unnecessary costly health claims; to servicing issues of that equipment. I move to support bus service changes, expansions, and enhancement with collective thought and input. Bus expansion requires many more buses than are budgeted. Indeed, more net new buses introduced sooner enables an array of service enhancements. This includes better use of MTA bus lines to serve intra-borough and inter-borough public transit 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” – City Councilman I. Daneek Miller.

**Look at some existing bus service issues and examples for improvement:**

The MTA NYC Transit must understand that reductions in scheduled service impact working families greatly. Many years ago the riding public knew the difference between a Saturdays, Sunday or Weekday schedules. Today's transit runs a reduced weekday, Holiday or curtailment schedule on top of the aforementioned schedules. The average rider does not know what that is or when a bus will arrive. That impacts their family and employment directly. Communication is lacking on Buses for the average transit rider.

In New York City, ATU submits that Department of Transportation (NYCDOT), Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC), Departments of Buildings and Housing Preservation and Development and MTA transit planners need to re-think their focus and recognize how their decisions and planning impact public transit and bus service, especially using Select Bus Services (SBS).

Studying current SBS metrics makes clear the need to look at the larger picture not cookie cutter approach. New York remains different than any other city in the world and must be treated as such. ATU favors Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Select Bus Service (SBS) approaches as part of any plan to improve bus service system-wide when used correctly. Unfortunately, the current deployment of this substantial human and money resources to date diverts attention from the actual public need of accessible transit in places – like Queens – that need transit to do more- incorporating current service with the introduction of new bus service. In ATU's experience, especially in Queens, SBS hurts communities; since its inception where the MTA introduced SBS, communities experienced an overall service reduction; the implementation of SBS often just replaces Limited (bus stop) service not new service. Extending SBS features to other local and express routes offers real opportunities to enhance service. Off-board fare payment and all-door boarding reduces time to get on a bus and overall travel times. This would work particularly well at subway and other terminals. Technology enhancements in fare collection needs implementation ASAP to generate revenue for service improvements.

### **Foresight**

Buses, new and existing, require fully-functioning depots to repair equipment timely, and in many cases, overhauled or newly created terminals to facilitate commuter transfer between transit modes.

Service delays are often related to management decisions that take buses and/or bus operators out of service or creating schedules that are not realistic or lack human impact to facilitate those schedules. Management decisions lean towards increased productivity which are often reactionary or retaliatory actions towards its employees. Its impact effects riding public travel plans, creating these voids lead to assaults or unnecessary confrontations with the riding public. The public expects a climate control ride and reliable bus or transit service.

This requires continued progress on the new MTA NYCT Jamaica bus depot which is decades behind schedule to improve underserved communities in Southeast Queens and the Casey Stengel Depot in Flushing. In Downtown Flushing this means identifying a site for a full-scale bus terminal serving its downtown area before development there makes it impractical.

Frankly, a MTA capital budget that smartly invests in bus public transit options not also assists many residents who currently rely on personal vehicles, it enables more bus routing alternatives that relieve stress on subways and roadways.

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The capital investment in buses and related infrastructure ATU recommends facilitating an overall strategic approach involving greater use of buses:

- ▶ In the absence of any plan to revamp lines servicing southeast Queens to address both population increases and existing and projected public transit needs;
- ▶ Identify bus depots which need repair or replacement and schedule such, with a focus on real progress on Jamaica Depot;
- ▶ Identify any need for new bus terminals – downtown Flushing plagued by congestion and related issues – remains a prime candidate;
- ▶ 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 – 200 additional per year over ten years beyond what’s proposed in Fast Forward, to deploy on existing, revised and/or new routes – a key component of any improvement plan
- ▶ Address congestion on local bus lines particularly during rush hours; this means using the data from the “Bus Trek” system to address bus schedules in a shorter time table than currently exists;
- ▶ Make standard on every new bus not just outfitting 1,000 buses – audible pedestrian turn warning systems and specify additional cameras on all new vehicle orders;
- ▶ Include long overdue ADA-compliant audible announcements on all buses;
- ▶ Introduce off-bus fare collection not just for SBS in Queens ASAP but all routes;
- ▶ Introduce dedicated bus lanes for local and limited bus routes such as enjoyed in Manhattan, with proper enforcement; explore cameras in bus stops and use of cameras in lanes that limit parking during rush hours; to generate revenue for service enhancements;
- ▶ Include enforcement against illegal Commuter Van operations as part of the existing plan that advocates increased enforcement presence on bus routes where needed, including identifying times and areas of more frequent operator assault and streamlining communications between (the MTA’s) Department of Buses and law enforcement;
- ▶ Integrate into the command center where it empower staff to providing real-time service and schedule information to all bus operators by 2020 and deployment of on-street dispatchers to targeted locations and terminal points to help keep buses moving and resolve issues;

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- ▶ Implement free transfers between commuter rail and public bus transit – as currently exist between buses and subways and local and express buses – which pays for itself (see Analysis A below);
- ▶ Management employment practices – including inconsistent discipline – remain an issue and require re-thought when it results in a need to hire and train someone new to replace someone already trained and experienced;
- ▶ Charge the entity looking at BQX – to also review linking the waterfront neighborhoods via buses, which can occur almost instantaneously. (All the more important as funding issues remain with the rail version); and
- ▶ In future planning, provide for more electric bus purchases and charging stations for the transition to a zero-emissions fleet, rather than current small pilot that introduces 60 all-electric buses.

## **Funding Issues**

The current NYC Hotel Network could generate \$100 million with a simple \$5 per day assessment that must be directed to transit service improvements.

The Federal government needs to change the formula for public transit needs in New York State. ATU talks not only of funding for transit service but capital projects as well.

MTA has a hiring freeze but there has been multiple new positions created within the MTA at various salary ranges. A focus on Managerial titles functions is needed. Salaries are discriminatory and not in line with pay policy or legal practices like other state agencies pay practices. In short, the same title pay varies unlike on the union side where salaries are fixed, the lawsuits against MTA should be examined.

Outsourcing is a skeptical process that the MTA has fallen into; it is costly and needs to be examined for its need.

Ridership is not down in the outer boroughs; it remains constant despite illegal transit options that have greatly impacted the transit networks. Enforcement is needed to generate funding at Fare boxes or turnstiles.

Congestion pricing connected to Lock Box Legislation all nice ideas but real transit funding legislation similar to the passed legislation in California or Georgia is needed to address the needs of public transit. It has had great outcomes for public transit in those states.

**In Closing**, improving bus service offers the smartest, quickest, easiest and most strategic path to effectively upgrading public transit infrastructure and most importantly, public transit service, including in Queens. Bottom line, reliable and viable transit like more buses better used help decrease if not eliminate the transit deserts. Thank you. I am available for questions and available to the committees upon request.

Thank you.

*Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1056,  
211-12 Union Turnpike  
Hollis Hills, NY 11364  
(718) 949-6444  
[www.Local1056.org](http://www.Local1056.org)*

For more information:  
Corey Bearak  
ATU 1056 & 1179 Policy & Political Director  
(718) 343-6779/ (516) 343-6207



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#### Analysis A:

Currently no bus to rail or rail to bus transfer exists.

So many **opportunities** exist to connect bus riders to rail. It just may relieve some the parking strain that nabes near rail hubs experience; moreover, that helps local merchants in places such as Queens Village and Bayside where committed patrons often drive around looking for parking; others might drive to Long Island malls.

So why not apply the cost of the bus fare to offset part of the LIRR fare? If 1,000 commuters take advantage of this, it involves \$5,000 per day, \$25,000 per week, \$1.3 million. Perhaps one-half take the subway or drive. That means additional revenue. 500 monthly ticket LIRR fares from Zone 3 totals \$1,308,000. Interesting math. A wash.