

For Immediate Release: Monday, April 22, 2019

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**Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Earth Day Message, 2019:
Strengthening Bus Transit helps save our environment!**

By **Mark Henry**, Chair, ATU NYS Legislative Conference Board and President/ Business Agent, ATU Local 1056, and **Bennie Caughman**, President/ Business Agent, ATU Local 1179

As we observe Earth Day 2019 in this era of great concern of climate change, our policymakers and, frankly all of us, need to coalesce around sound policy that make a difference in our communities. After the chaos and devastation of Superstorm Sandy, New Yorkers experienced how ATU Locals 1056 and 1179 memberships and sister transit unions stepped up and helped New Yorkers get about on public buses while the MTA worked to resume subway service system-wide. ATU continues to promote bus public transit as a cost-effective and sound means to improve our environment. While ATU continues to remind our policymakers and decision-makers to include public bus transit options and strengthen existing bus capabilities in discussions on how best to improve mass transit including the so-called transit deserts that plague many NYC naves including in Queens, ATU urges the public to seize the opportunity presented by the commitments to improve transit as part of the new state budget and the Queens Bus Network Redesign announced just last week.

The MTA announced meetings throughout Queens and Queens Borough President Melinda Katz secured a commitment for presentations at each of the 14 Queens Community Boards. The public can make a difference by participating in this process and standing strong for enhancement to bus public transit. ATU urges those who cannot attend the public meeting or just want to offer more input to submit their comments and ideas online.

As we seek to protect and upgrade our environment, it remains important to recognize how public bus transit enhances our environment and reduces our carbon footprint while supporting our economy and investment. After Sandy, New Yorkers experienced how ATU Locals 1056 and 1179 memberships and sister transit unions stepped up and helped New Yorkers get about on public buses while the MTA worked to resume subway service system-wide. ATU Local 1056 represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division. ATU 1179 represents bus operators, mechanics and supervisors who work from the Far Rockaway and JFK Depots of the MTA Bus division (former Green Bus lines). Besides Sandy, the service our members provide – during periodic subway service shutdowns to allow repairs – demonstrate how buses matter both as a practical and flexible transit mode. Buses offer a cost-effective means to expand public transit options, including sensible bus rapid transit, where none or insufficient modes exist.

ATU relies on our extensive experience and knowledge of the MTA system. We emphasize rebuilding and enhancing bus service. ATU recently recommended several bus system improvements:

- 1) Restore overnight services on all lines in Southeast Queens; reduce wait times.
- 2) Expand Hours for Q42 past 10pm and include Saturday service.
- 3) Restore service to these cut lines: Q74, Q75, Q79.
- 4) Re-Route Q27 as SBS.

- 5) Create an SBS route along the north-south legs of the Q76 & Q77 lines to Provide North - South access in Queens and a connection to the Rockaways.
- 6) Expand hours for X63 and X68 - later hours during the week and provide Saturday service.
- 7) Introduce Express bus service from Southeast Queens to lower Manhattan.

ATU encourages input from the Queens. ATU also has advocated free transfer from buses to the LIRR (and Metronorth); this initiative proves self-sustaining!

As the need for public bus service increases the MTA must progress on its facilities that maintain buses. As a prime example, the MTA must finish an expanded and redesigned Jamaica Depot; this facility can be the epicenter of new technology and efficiencies that help our environment and commuters. The MTA must bolster the Casey Stengel Depot against flooding risks (Buses got moved to “higher ground” in advance of Sandy.), make repairs to the Far Rockaway Depot that sustained heavy damage by Sandy, modernize the 165st Street Bus Terminal and make it passenger-safe and develop a passenger-friendly Hub for a congested downtown Flushing bus terminus.

On this Earth Day 2019, ATU locals across New York State support public bus transit; it helps save our environment, creates jobs and builds communities.