

**Statement  
of  
Mark Henry, Chair, Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) NYS Legislative  
Conference Board & President/Business Agent, ATU Local 1056  
and  
Jose DeJesus, President/Business Agent, ATU Local 1179  
to  
City Council Transportation and Infrastructure Committee  
on  
Transportation Equity  
March 7, 2022**

Thank you Chairperson Selvena Brooks-Powers for this opportunity for Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) to testify on Transportation Equity. I am Jose DeJesus, President/Business Agent of ATU Local 1179. I testify also on behalf of my labor brother, Mark Henry, chair of the ATU NYS Legislative Conference Board and President/Business Agent of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1056 in Queens.



ATU members operate and maintain NYC Transit bus routes serving primarily Queens and Staten Island residents with some routes extending into The Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan. ATU Local 1056 represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division with depots in Flushing (Casey Stengel), Jamaica and Queens Village. 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).

Our members primarily provide the best transit options in transit desert areas of Queens. We are also the transit option – during periodic subway service shutdowns to allow repairs; this demonstrates 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. This allows policymakers to deliver transit improvement early and most cost-effectively.

The focus of our testimony is Transit in Queens. As a mass transit professionals and user of public transit in this city, the members of ATU locals across this city and state offers unique and valuable insights. ATU locals have always emphasized that smartly investing in public transit keys growth in the economy, restores neighborhoods, mobility and assist in job creation.

The buses our members operate are your “Green Alternative” that properly resourced can induce those who rely on less efficient transportation modes to use public transit; the buses we operate can also be used to address service shortfalls and most importantly transit inequities which often go hand in hand.

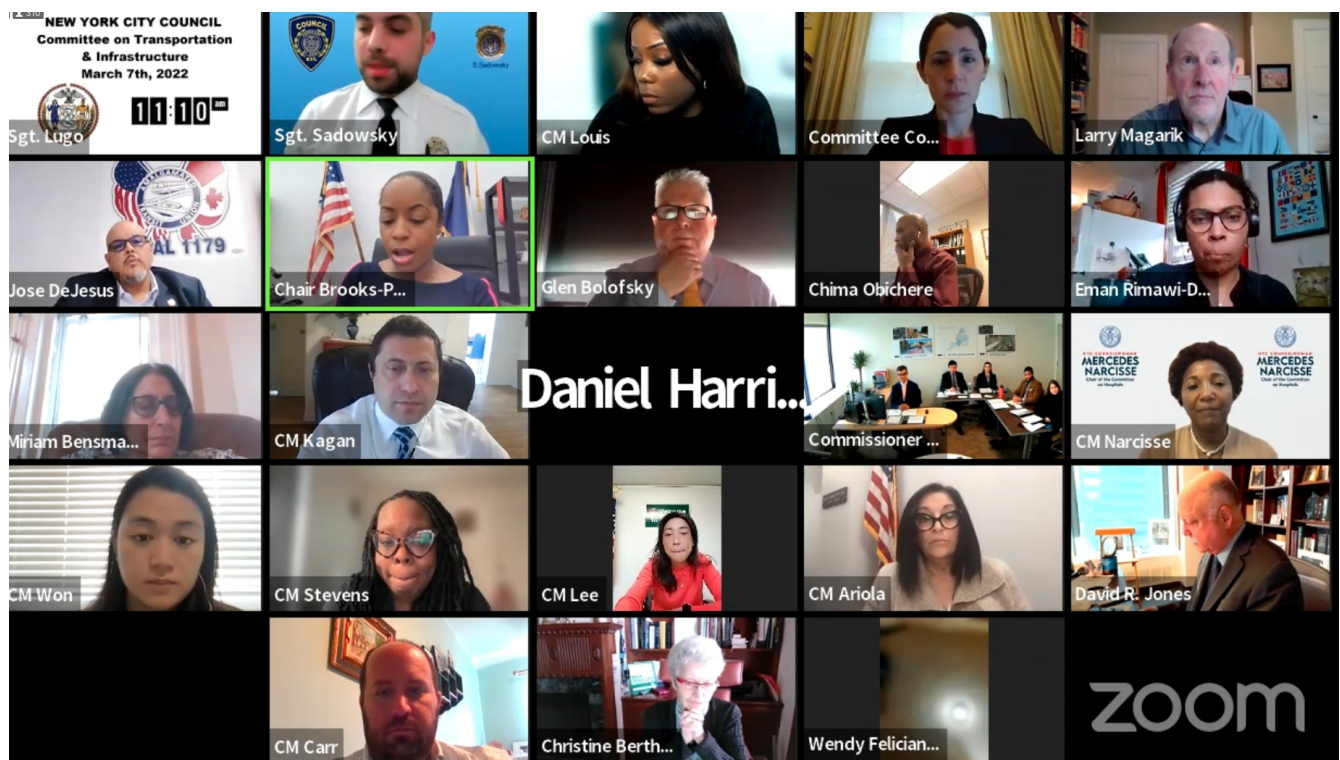
We know firsthand how many people rely on our services to get to and from work and school, and to and from doctors’ appointments, the grocery store, and other essential services.

ATU recognizes, as do most experts that, without a fully functioning transit system that is safe, we cannot expect New York City's – and thus our state and national – economy to fully recover and achieve growth beyond.

Transportation remains the great equalizer in our society, a real difference maker, especially for already underserved communities. Strengthening our bus networks, especially in transit deserts offer the most cost-effective and clearly the fastest ways to introduce equity in transportation and improve existing, and introduce much needed more, service.

This makes the subject of this committee at the outset of this new administration and council an excellent opportunity to not only identify inequities but look at and promote sound solutions.

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. Fast forward to today, our bus operators and maintainers stood on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19; some – to many --losing their lives; and we stepped up despite our members working under an expired contract that the MTA REFUSED to update when similar transit public servants already work under a new contract, forcing ATU to win our contract through an Arbitration process.



COVID-19 had a significant impact on the MTA and its operations. The safety of the employees of the transit agency must be recognized as a priority and preparedness programs must be readily activated to maintain essential service, avoid layoffs, and to purchase PPE to keep our members safe.

Given the significant financial support that the MTA received through emergency and stimulus funding, we believe that it is imperative that the MTA use this funding wisely and address several critical issues that are facing the public transportation workforce. Even with the upcoming congestion pricing program these funding mechanisms must resource the current transit system in a manner that introduces real equity in the delivery of public transit.

The focus of transit improvements must not only be on subways or railroads; it must significantly **MUST** include Bus Service to better serve these communities. Where speed of service is concerned, Queens suffers greatly from its inferior bus network. Queens residents need a commitment to expand bus service and remove the impediments that slow the movement of buses. This includes enforcement of traffic restrictions that apply to vehicles and pedestrians. This especially includes “SMART” traffic planning.

ATU strongly supports sensible bus service changes, expansions, and enhancement with collective thought and input. 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. Protective bus lanes become an essential part of this planning. All this needs to result through a real collaboration and discussion with the communities we serve.

In Queens, we also need a clear understanding on the need to assign a priority to enhancing bus service. ATU offers our recommendations to address this important imperative.

We ask that the ATU locals city wide be part of the discussion to improve service and introduce equity. We share our major recommendation that must take priority;

\*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. And really ought to be part of the plan expanding the City Ticket.

\*Expand (all) local bus service to operate 24 hours/7days.

\*Introduce express bus service in Southeast Queens at the level that exists in Northeast Queens.

\*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.

\*Any Infrastructure and or housing or business Development must factor transit in the plans at the ground level of design, it can no longer be an afterthought. (I.e. Greater Jamaica and Greater Flushing in Queens).

\*Expand Bus Lanes: Any sound plan must improve rush hour movement by using existing parking or traffic lanes; this includes use of lanes with no-parking and no-standing restrictions during morning and afternoon/evening rush hours and ensuring enforcement including use of bus cameras. An easy way uses lanes where street cleaning or traffic consideration already bar parking or standing at these times.

\*Emphasize enforcement with respect to illegal operations of commuter vans.

\*Ensure progress on major projects and improvements in the MTA Capital Plan essential to ensuring that the transit riding public has reliable public transportation. In Queens, two projects that need attention include the (NEW) Jamaica Depot and Casey Stengel Depot (Flooding). The Jamaica Depot is supposed to be in the Capital Plan, but we have not yet seen any movement on this project yet. The Far Rockaway Depot sits in a Flood zone where its buses serve an underserved part of Queens.

These depots' buses service underserved, including transit starved, Queens neighborhoods. Lack of equipment remains an ongoing issue. And...

\*Re-think the pending allegedly cost neutral, Queens Bus Redesign. Bus redesign ought to enhance not diminish overall service. It must promote accessibility and mobility needs in transit deserts. Bike lanes offer no answer especially when the weather is a factor and must not take priority over bus lanes – Queens Boulevard serves as a major example here. Any redesign plan also must include the need for a Flushing bus terminal.

A bit more on Redesign; it should specifically target some of routes that fail to extend or intersect with subway or rail and must address connectivity with North and South Queens including the Rockaways. The plan, as it stands now, means significant changes in bus service, how we get to the subway, work, school, medical appointment and leisure activities. This committee and the Council must watch for changes in bus stop frequency which impacts seniors and others.

Transit in this city operated by MTA focuses primarily on economics, income level and not the needs of the population; it's the Tale of Two Different New Yorks. The reality is that one's income level can dictate where one lives or how far one must commute to get to work, school or other necessities. We need to change that mindset and ensure that bus redesign serves the riding public.

Indeed this so-called redesign attempts to mask a money-saving pitch that in no way represents a service enhancing remapping. The routes mean longer commutes and/or two and three step transfers to connect to other bus lines, rail or subways

It ignores the transit needs of many parts of the borough, especially transit deserts with its emphasis on greater access to revitalized or gentrified neighborhoods. Most commutes within the Borough will be challenging for the average Queens rider.

It remains very important that the riding public, those who they depend on and the communities and interest served by transit all make their voices heard on bus redesign.

With the help of the committee, the Council, our state and federal elected, advocates and your constituents, we propose to change that! The council must not be swayed and just litigate transportation alternatives. We need sound common sense approach to transportation needs in this city, a proper balance must be established.

As we seek to protect and upgrade our environment, and discuss a Green New Deal, it remains important to recognize how public bus transit enhances our environment and reduces our carbon footprint while supporting our economy and investment.

Our legislators can prove helpful by joining ATU and advocating for service priorities outlined today and in many prior testimonies at city and state legislative hearings. ATU urges our policymakers and, frankly all of us, to coalesce around these sound policies that make a difference in our communities.

Thank you!

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