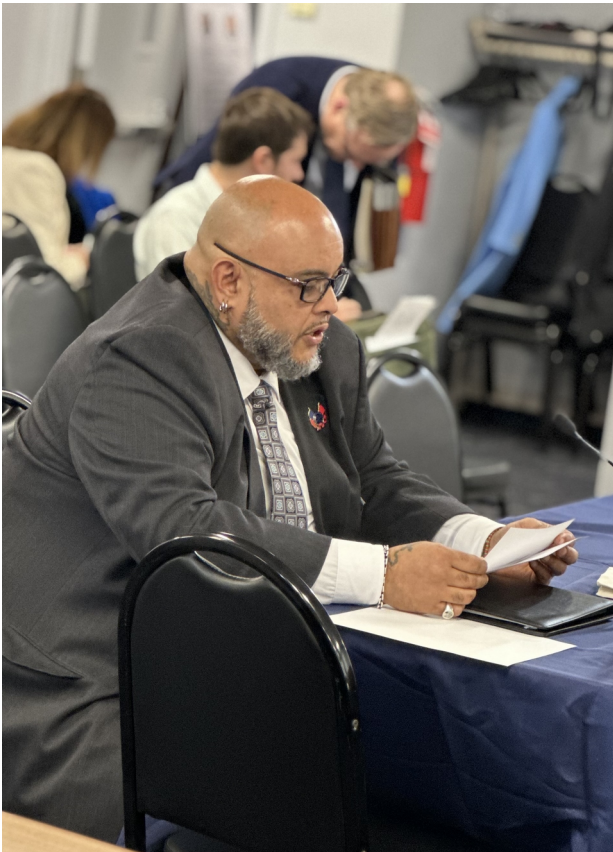


**Testimony  
of  
Jose DeJesus, President/Business Agent, ATU Local 1179 &  
Luis Alzate, President/Business Agent, ATU Local 1056  
to  
New York State Senate’s Standing Committees on Corporations & Transportation  
on the  
MTA budget forecast, post-pandemic analysis of ridership and safety concerns, and  
the Penn Station Revitalization Plan  
March 3, 2023**



Thank you Chairpersons Leroy Comrie and Tim Kennedy for this opportunity for Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) to testify on the MTA budget forecast, ridership and safety concerns and more. I am Jose DeJesus, President/Business Agent of ATU Local 1179. I testify also on behalf of my labor brother Luis Alzate, 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.

As a mass transit professionals and users 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. This keys into resiliency and maximizing the use of Federal dollars for our transportation infrastructure.

The buses our members operate provide not only your “Green Alternative” that adequately resourced helps induce those who rely on less efficient transportation modes to use public transit, but more quickly and efficiently address capacity and service shortfalls and the transit inequities which often go hand in hand. As a result our buses offer a key means to ensure resiliency and the flexibility needed during crises, including major storms.

Our bus operators and maintainers stood on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19; some – too 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 contracts due to expire this year through a successful Arbitration.

ATU had advocated the MTA use the significant financial support received through emergency and stimulus funding to address several critical issues facing its public transportation workforce. The apparent delay of the congestion pricing program points to the need for stable funding mechanisms to resource our transit system in a manner that introduces real equity in the delivery of public transit.

Too often, subways or railroads benefit more from resources for transit improvements. Buses which serve many communities underserved by rail and/or subway, receive insufficient funding to better serve these communities. Where speed of service is concerned, Queens suffers greatly from its inferior bus network. In other forums, including before this committee, we focused on the specific service enhancements.

ATU remains concerned about the progress on major projects and improvements in the MTA Capital Plan essential to ensuring the transit riding public enjoys reliable public transportation. In Queens, two projects that need attention include the (NEW) Jamaica Depot and Casey Stengel Depot (Flooding). The MTA NYCT Jamaica bus depot in central Jamaica lagged decades behind schedule to improve underserved communities in Southeast Queens; work has started; it needs to be completed. Improvements still lag to protect the Casey Stengel Depot in Flushing against storm flooding. The Far Rockaway Depot sits in a Flood Zone where its buses serve an underserved part of Queens. The buses from these depots service transit starved Queens neighborhoods. In Staten Island, where our sister local ATU 726 represents transit workers, massive flooding afflicts the Castleton Depot. Lack of equipment remains an ongoing issue; ATU 1179 maintainers at the Far Rockaway depot lost their tool kits during Hurricane Sandy; replacements awaits – still! Providing fully-functioning depots to repair buses – new and existing – remains essential.

The MTA needs to overhaul existing and/or create new create terminals to facilitate commuter transfer between transit modes. Downtown Flushing still needs a site identified for a full-scale bus terminal before development there makes it impractical. We have long pointed to this need; it may get to the point where a Flushing terminal may need to be sited and Willets Point or Citi Field; the authority needs to work with the City to ensure any development includes this priority; our elected adding their voices here certainly helps. The Jamaica Bus Terminal across from the Main Queens Library is slated for replacement as part of a development; the temporary site requires conversations with the community to help mitigate unintended adverse impacts.

The MTA needs to introduce 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); further, the bus system requires net new buses, not the current replacement scheme; some one thousand more net new buses would empower the authority to provide the service levels all clamor for.

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. This goes to the essence of the authority's bus redesign schemes. The Queens scheme saddles Bus Riders with less service, longer walks to reach their buses, and frequent needs to transfer to another bus or more when they previously took one route. It no new service; it merely reshuffles the deck; it unnecessarily includes longer walks for commuter, many of them seniors, by removing hundreds of bus stops. Find our 14 concerns about this scheme appended (pages 4 and 5 of this PDF) to this testimony.

Our legislators can prove helpful by joining ATU and advocating for public transit 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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## **MTA Queens Bus Redesign Plan Plots Longer Trips, Less Service Why not plot a Redesign that provides Frequent, Reliable 24-hour Service?**

The Authority's redesign scheme saddles Queens Bus Riders with less service, longer walks to reach their buses, and frequent needs to transfer to another bus or more when they previously took one route. As bus operators and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division, the members of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1056 raise the following 14 concerns that we continue to discuss with our elected official, advocates, and the community:

1) When first released pre-COVID, all made our voices heard. We raised how that plan failed to recognize currently underserved neighborhoods. It ignored the borough's necessary mobility needs with longer rides to areas not part of typical commutes. The new plan, packaged with claims of reduced travel times, still ignores the transit needs of many parts of Queens, especially transit deserts with its emphasis on greater access to revitalized or gentrified neighborhoods.

2) Most commutes within the Borough remain challenging for the average Queens rider.

3) It appears that the consultants who view Queens, treat it as a "car borough," not necessarily a "transit borough" with real needs for improved public transit; this dynamic clearly orchestrated the redesign scheme. They failed to recognize Queens as a diverse borough with challenging connectivity issues. The plan neither acknowledges nor answers what plagues transportation in our Queens Neighborhoods. In many ways it masks a money-saving pitch when the public interest request that MTA invest in enhancing bus service, instead this scheme tinkers with a re-deployment of existing resources for bus public transit in Queens.

4) Many routes involve longer commutes and/or two- and three-step transfers to connect to other buses, rail, subways, or major destinations of choice.

5) Restoring a few of nearly 1200 bus stops proposed for elimination offers no solution or olive branch and we hope the MTA recognizes this.

6) The workshop Zoom-format the MTA uses currently in public meetings, and did pre-COVID, fails to ensure that riders make their voices truly heard. Under this process, Queens Riders may not know they share concerns and thus lack the support they'd find in common cause to raise ideas, concerns, or objections. The in-progress presentations to Community Boards need to shift to open forums. The outreach must be expanded outside of MTA's targeted audience.

7) Any re-design needs to look at more than just the Queens bus map. Look first at the underserved parts of Queens, the transit deserts not served by subways and with limited if any rail access. Recognize the capacity limits on subway service that bus service can solve. The MTA only needs to add buses. Currently, there is no appetite to build new tunnels, stations, and railway above or below grade. Moreover, growth in the borough, existing and planned, suggests a further enhancement in service levels. The plan fails to meet existing expansion and future growth in the borough.

8) Any discussion on speeds needs to equate to the existing vehicular traffic and has a lower priority than addressed in the plan.

9) The plan fails to address service to schools, and summer capacity issues when more folks seek access to Queens beaches.

10) While this design scheme allows some passengers able to make their trips using fewer buses, it leaves many others facing additional transfers. The MTA must provide estimates of whether the number of riders its scheme benefits exceeds the number of passengers the scheme harms. It remains unclear if this scheme requires those making additional transfers to pay additional fares.

11) The new scheme fails to provide access to important locations. Southeast Queens residents, for example, lack any direct bus route to the Main Branch of the Queens Public Library in Jamaica (which lies across Merrick Boulevard from a bus terminal).

12) Few if any of the 1,193 local and express bus stops require removal. Eliminating lightly used bus stops offer no time savings; buses usually skip such stops. Eliminating heavily used bus stops just increases loading dwell times at the remaining stops; this obviates any average 20 seconds per stop savings for acceleration and deceleration. A review of riders' needs, and usage finds most well-balanced routes with most spacing every two or three city blocks and every city avenue is accurate and does what it intention, service a public need. Significantly reducing bus stops risks reducing ridership, especially among seniors and those with mobility issues. It imposes a hardship during inclement or extremely hot weather. Many stop eliminations in the current scheme require walks up to 3/4 of a mile.

13) Faster does not mean better nor does it deliver better customer service. The more varying service models included in the redesign scheme only breed frustration and confusion for those who truly depend on bus public transit. Reliability, Frequency and Accessibility always trump speed.

14) Finally, rather than all-day busways, a smart plan looks at creating bus-only paths during rush hours with appropriate enforcement. This makes sense when comparing speeds for car and buses on local streets; cars average 9-12mph; local buses which make stops average between 8.5 and 10mph. The 3.3% decline in bus speeds since 2015 represents not traffic but the Vision Zero 25 MPH speed limit. This makes plain that no need exists for midday busways that merchants claim diminish business. Indeed, cars and delivery trucks double-parking and blocking bus stops causes traffic congestion that delays buses; the re-design fails to address this! In addition, legislation giving preference to buses as is the case with emergency vehicles, would help buses re-enter traffic from bus stops.