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Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Earth Day Message, 2026:

Strengthen Bus Public Transit Both Green & Clean

By **Luis Alzate**, President/ Business Agent, ATU Local 1056

As we observe Earth Day 2026 needing to stem climate change, reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and foster the development of green and sustainable industries and jobs, ATU urges our policymakers and, the public at large, to support sound policies that sustain, protect and enhance our communities. First following the devastation of Superstorm Sandy and later experiencing how COVID shut down our subways and the chaos that ensued, New Yorkers experienced how the members of ATU Local 1056 and our sister transit unions stepped up and helped New Yorkers get about on public buses while the MTA worked to resume subway service. As our bus operators and maintainers stood on the frontlines against COVID-19, some – too many – lost their lives. On this Earth Day 2026, we urge policymakers and the public to focus on bus public transit as a cost-effective and sound means to address transit deserts, improve our environment.

ATU recognizes, as do most experts, that, without a fully functioning transit system, we cannot expect the New York City – and thus our state and national – economy to grow. Most – indeed all – should acknowledge that public transit fuels the economy of New York City, thus New York State, therefore, perhaps most importantly, the economic well-being of the United States of America.

Let us start with smart investment in our human and basic infrastructure. Through ATU International, we strongly supported the inclusion of \$32 billion in emergency operating aid for public transportation in the federal Coronavirus relief package. We also supported the funding for state and localities knowing that funding shored up the support we receive from the State and the City. ATU maintains its advocacy to ensure the MTA bus redesign for Queens improves service for all Queens communities; ATU follows its implementation closely.

This explains while ATU advocates for improvements to public transit that extend beyond just subways or railroads. We advocate for improvements to bus public transit infrastructure to better serve many communities, especially the transit deserts. This includes the MTA acquiring more new buses, not merely replace buses scheduled to be taken out of service, and providing the infrastructure to support the buses needed to adequately improve bus public transit.

We continue to advocate and testify on the need for progress on major projects and improvements in the MTA Capital Plan essential to ensuring the bus riding public enjoys reliable public transportation. In Queens, ATU reminds notes the need to address storm flooding risks at Casey Stengel Depot across from Citi Field. We welcome work on the (New) MTA NYCT Jamaica bus depot in central Jamaica that lagged decades behind schedule; its completion will improve service in underserved Southeast Queens communities. 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. 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. Providing fully-functioning depots to repair buses – new and existing – remains essential, both for system resiliency and to maintain basic and extend bus service.

Finally, an important word about the ongoing efforts to flood communities across our nation with so-called autonomous operated vehicles (“AVs”). Apart from the serious and documented safety issues involved, this practice ill-serves our environment. AVs rely on artificial intelligence (“AI”); that means data centers that require and eat up humongous amounts of electrical energy. This impacts the energy grid; it gobbles up energy resources and requires new energy generation resources that impact the climate and the environment. Just totally unsound.

ATU Local 1056 represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division. ATU members provide additional transit options – 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. The allows policymakers to deliver transit improvements early and most cost-effectively.

On this Earth Day 2026, ATU locals across New York State support bus public transit; it helps save our environment, creates jobs and builds communities.

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