

**ATU Opposes Council Int. Nos. 939 & 950 which threaten MTA bus service,
including in Southeast Queens;**

Urges DOT, MTA, TLC, NYPD to Address Illegal Van Operations

**Testimony to City Council Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
September 27, 2024**

by

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1056 President and Business Agent Luis Alzate

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) thanks Majority Whip Selvena Brooks-Power and the Council Committee on Transportation and for Infrastructure for this opportunity to share ATU's concerns on the impact of Int. Nos. 939 and 950 on MTA bus service, particularly for the residents of Southeast Queens. I am Luis Alzate, ATU Local 1056 President and Business Agent and ATU NYS Legislative Conference Board Financial Secretary. I also deliver this testimony on behalf of ATU Locals 726, 1179 and 1181 – all of our members serve the riding public.

ATU 1056 members – bus operators and mechanics – work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus division with depots in Flushing (Casey Stengel), Jamaica and Queens Village. ATU Local 726 represents bus operators and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Staten Island 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). ATU Local 1181 represents bus operators and mechanics who work for the MTA Bus division (former Command Bus lines) in Brooklyn's Spring Creek Depot (and paratransit operators and Yellow School Bus drivers and escorts. Statewide, the ATU represents more than 25,000 hard-working transit workers throughout ATU cities including Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, New York City, Rochester, and Syracuse.

If enacted these harmful bills would effectively allow commuter vans to replace bus public transit, especially in Southeast Queens.

Already, vans licensed and unlicensed illegally and unsafely operate along bus routes and deprive the MTA of revenue that it can re-invest in bus service. This de facto privatization of public bus service in Southeast Queens especially impacts, students, our seniors, working people and bus riders who benefit from the Fair-Fares program.

Public transit serves as the lifeline for many New Yorkers to shop, see their doctor, attend worship services, visit family members, and do many of the things that enrich their lives. Working families need safe, equitable and efficient transportation. More often than not, including in Queens, that means reliance on our existing bus public transit system operated by the MTA. Illegally operating vans – unlike MTA buses – remain ADA inaccessible and foster more congestion along bus routes and at already heavily congested bus and subway transit hubs; these vans often race along city streets putting all at risk and causing many pedestrian accidents.

ATU 1056 and our sister MTA locals oppose Int. No. 939 which would authorize commuter van to “accept” street hails. Our unions also oppose Int. No. 950 which would effectively decriminalize illegal van operations by doubling the number of violations that would cause illegally operating van drivers to their driver’s license.

Currently, if a commuter van has an operating license but operates along a bus route and picks up and discharges passengers at bus stops, it operates ILLEGALLY. Few vans follow ANY rules. Commuter vans making illegal pickups in bus stops and along bus routes continues to be a major concern. Bus ridership directly influences how the MTA deploys service along its existing bus routes. To the extent that commuter van take riders from public transit, lawmakers perform a disservice to those bus riders who depend on MTA buses regularly operating on bus routes.

Instead of looking to pass these bills harmful to public transit, our public transit unions call on the Council to press City and State agencies to work together address the scourge of commuter vans that operate unregulated, unlicensed or illegally – and unsafely – in many City communities including southeast Queens. That informs our strong objections for these pieces of legislation.

A majority of commuter vans operate unregulated, unlicensed or illegally. These vehicles offer a commuting straphangers a dangerous alternative to MTA bus service. The van services already duplicate existing bus service provided by the MTA. Illegally operating commuter vans prey on bus routes, picking up and discharging passengers at MTA bus stops.

So-called commuter vans, unreliable, often unsafe and many more times than not operating illegally, offer straphangers a dangerous alternative to MTA bus service. The City's woefully inadequate response to illegal, unregulated and unsafe vans allows these commuter vans to ply bus routes, pick up passengers at bus stops and the subways, deprives the MTA of revenue it can reinvest to enhance bus service and reduces passenger counts that the MTA uses to cut service. The vans' operation *de facto* recreates the two-fare zones we fought to eliminate some 30 years ago.

The MTA and NYPD need to work with the TLC to address the outright theft of fares by these vans and the blatant disregard for regular vehicle traffic laws. The ATU supports enforcement against UBER and LYFT; vehicles that operate outside the labor laws, it appears that there is no significant enforcement occurs where vans operate outside the law.

Unlike the drivers such as ATU (and TWU Local 100) members who operate MTA buses in Queens, drivers of commuter vans face no requirement to maintain a Commercial Driver's License, receive no recurrent training, do not find themselves subject to drug testing and periodic medical evaluations while they race along city streets putting all at risk. If a van has an operating license but operates along a bus route and picks up and discharges passengers at bus stops, it operates ILLEGALLY. Few vans follow ANY rules. The Council must work to make sure that NYPD and TLC, and not just intermittently, address this safety issue.

These anti-public transit bills ought to get pulled pending an intelligent redrafting. ATU also recommends the City Council enact legislation to restore its review, oversight and approval of any privatization of transit services, including these Commuter vans.

In conclusion ATU stands ready to work with the sponsors, the committee, its chair, and the Council to draft appropriate legislation to protect the riding public.

Thank you.

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[Note: On next three pages please find personal testimonies of three ATU bus operators on the impact of the commuter vans.]



Representing all hourly rated Employees of the Queens Division, Who safely Operate and Maintain Buses for MTA New York City Transit.

Serving the communities of Queens, Manhattan, and the Bronx since January 23rd, 1935.

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For Further information:
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September 25, 2024

To Whom it may concern,

My name is Edward Franke and I have been a Bus Operator for 32 years starting with the private bus lines (Green Bus Line) now MTA Bus. I've been servicing South Queens and the Jamaica hub area my entire career as well as Ozone Park, Howard Beach and the Rockaways. As a Bus Operator we are held to a higher standard with multiple medical checkups every year to assure our health for the riding public. Also we have post-accident and random drug and alcohol testing. We get retraining every year with a written test every two years reminding us of the rules of the road. After all my years of service to this day I never stop learning and that keeps me sharp and safe. What training do Dollar van drivers receive? What kind of medical exams do the Dollar van drivers get? Do any of them get drug and alcohol tested before or after they take people in their vans? In my course of driving, I've seen countless incidents with dollar vans and noticed more accidents occurring with Vans where innocent people on or near the vans get injured. The Dollar vans drive reckless without a care for the customers or the pedestrians around them, most due to the all mighty dollar that they chase on a regular. They will cut off any vehicle just to get a fare causing other cars, trucks and even buses to stop or swerve to avoid a collision with them. I am asking for you think long and hard about this before putting this on the ballot. As this will forever change a very already congested city making it unsafe for all New Yorkers.

Thank You,


Edward Franke

Bus Operator

Date: 09-23-2024

To: Whom It May Concern

From: MTA Bus Operator Floyd Oliver B05805

RE: Dangers of legalizing Dollar Vans.

My name is Floyd Oliver, I am a bus operator with the transit authority for 16 years.

We are held to the highest professional Standards.

We are re-certified every 2 years to maintain our licenses.

We are trained ever year to keep up to date with new laws concerning CDL Operations with passengers.

We are trained how to operate safely with passengers.

We are trained not to speed.

We are trained how not to run red lights when operating a Vehicle with passengers.

We are trained how to pull into a bus stop safely.

We are trained how to pull out of bust stops safely.

We are trained to be Operators not drivers of buses.

We operate our buses to high standard of CDL law and above.

Most of all we are trained how to give customer service to the public.

Dollar vans are very reckless on the road.

Dollar vans cut in front of buses.

Dollar vans block bus stops when picking up people.

Dollar vans do not ensure the safety of the passengers.

Dollar vans pull off in front of buses with the doors still open.

Dollar vans run red lights which endangers the passenger's safety.

Dollar van drivers are not vetted every two years to be drivers.

Dollar van drivers are not medically clear to operate with passengers for their safety.

Dollar van drivers are not vetted to see if their license is valid.

Dollar van drivers are not vetted to see if it legal for them to drive in the country or state of New York.

Why would we allow unvetted, medically certified, reckless drivers to operate in the state of New York.

We as Bus operators understand that the public are our primary concern and safety. I believe that the safety of the public should be the primary concern when making decision concerning Dollar Vans.

Sincerely yours.

MTA Bus Operator

BO 5805 Floyd Oliver

September 23,2024

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Angela Stanley, I have been a Bus Operator for the MTA since 2013. I work on multiple bus routes within Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan. I have 11 years of experience working within the MTA as a bus operator. Dealing with traffic is a daily part of my job but this proposed bill would not be a good idea for bus operators. The dollar vans and cars are a consistent obstacle for bus operators. They park and block our bus stops which make it hard to get to the curb to pick up our intending customers many of whom are disabled, elderly or children who use the bus as their only means of transportation. It causes us (bus operators) to have confrontations with customers because we can't get to the curb properly. Due to these dollar vans and cars short stopping, stopping suddenly without warning and turning, not signaling when in motion to turn or when parked, stopping short and U-turning in front of the bus, many of our co-workers including myself have gotten into accidents with these vehicles due to there negligence. These vehicles cause a danger to the public because the operators of these vehicles are reckless. They have no regard to the publics' safety, there only object it to try to get the next fare by any means even if they put peoples lives at risk with their reckless driving habits. I strongly suggest to not vote in favor of this bill.

Thank you,

Angela Stanley