The Public Ought To Know

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By Corey Bearak

Not just anyone can operate a bus

When a transit union leader and transportation advocate engage in back and forth across the twittersphere, it attracts attention. When transit union presidents caution their members to proceed with caution when operating buses, to not worry about keeping pace with schedules or causing traffic tie-ups and take special care, you know an issue needs to be addressed.

This came to ahead this past holiday weekend after police arrested a bus driver in Brooklyn. City legislation to make our roadways safer for those who drive, ride or walk (or run) got implemented in a way lawmakers did not intend. The vision zero legislation in question makes it a misdemeanor for a driver to "make contact" with a pedestrian or cyclist who has the right of way. It very clearly did not apply to MTA bus operators: "This section shall not apply to persons, teams, motor vehicles, and other equipment working on behalf of the city of New York, the state of New York or the federal government while actively engaged in work requiring the presence of a motor vehicle in a location that interferes with the right of way of a pedestrian or person riding a bicycle."   Nevertheless MTA unions learned that drivers would face arrest – as occurred last week and in two other incidents. Council Member I. Daneek Miller introduced a bill last week to clarify the original local law and its clear intent not to apply to bus drivers.

Clear distinctions exist between qualifying for a license to drive a car and getting approved to operate a bus. Unlike most drivers, NYC Transit Bus Operators – must undergo ongoing supervision and training – and drug-testing. No doubt absent the availability of public bus transportation, many more vehicles – with drivers held to a much lower standard than bus operators – would be on the road.

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