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Testimony
of
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To
The City Council Committees on Economic Development & Transportation
Council Members Dan Garodnick & Ydanis Rodriguez, Chairs
November 3, 2014, 10:00 a.m.

Thank you for this opportunity to address this committee and comment on the Transportation Infrastructure. I am Mark Henry, President and Business Agent for Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local No. 1056. Local 1056 represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division. As such, Local 1056 comments on the plan's failure to adequately provide for current and future needs of Queens public transit.

Investments in transportation infrastructure remains critical to our economy. Investing smartly in public transportation keys growth in the economy and job creation. Real estate and economic development interests recognized this when they supported extending the "7" Line from Times Square to the Far West Side and the Javits center or the LIRR east side access project. Smart investments that support bus service improvements can realize improvements and growth sooner than those aforementioned and similar mega-projects.

As we stated at past Council and Assembly hearings on the MTA capital plan we question the current investment to date. The current infrastructure falls woefully short when so much of Queens, including many of the neighborhoods served by constituents and the members of our local, receive inadequate transit service. Unlike an investment in the mega-projects I alluded to above, many of the investments involving bus service offers immediately relief. That's right, buses.

In addition to providing commuters with a way to go to and from work, mass transit, especially our buses, offers a vital link to the outside world for seniors, young people, people with disabilities, and people without cars.



*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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Public Transit is the only way many can shop, go to the 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. In Queens, more often than not, that means buses.

Let's look at our state of investment in infrastructure for our buses. Currently, Queens lacks sufficient buses to meet existing and planned service needs. The current fleet of buses in Queens includes just too many deteriorated, old and inefficient buses that operate beyond their expected useful life and often disrupts service. The State Comptroller noted that NYCT currently has a fleet of 4,428 buses, and it plans to purchase more than 7,000 buses through 2034 at a cost of nearly \$6.2 billion. Buses have a useful life of 12 years, and NYCT's goal is to maintain an average fleet age of between 6 and 7.5 years. As of April 2014, the average age of the fleet was 8.37 years (30 percent of the NYCT buses were 12 years or older). The MDBF for buses declined from 4,100 miles in 2007 to 3,340 miles in 2011, but then increased to nearly 5,000 miles in 2013. While NYCT attributes the improvement to newer buses and improved maintenance, those results lag when it comes to Queens.

While planners focus on subway and rail mega-projects, they ignore a real need for modernized bus terminals. The congestion and related issues that plague downtown Flushing cry for a Hub Bus terminus that Member of Congress Grace Meng has proposed. The Flushing Area continues to have an ever increasing ridership as development increases throughout Flushing. We need the leadership from transit and transportation planners.

We must also bolster the Casey Stengel Depot (a NYCT Queens Bus Division Depot that serves Flushing communities) against flooding risks (We recall the urgent movement of buses there to "higher ground" in advance of Sandy.)

Our local has long advocated that the MTA modernize and expand its (NYCT Queens Bus Division) Jamaica Depot. The current depot functions at only 70% of the capacity needed to provide consistent and adequate bus service. While the MTA finally and recently acquired the land required for the project, the capital plan must accelerate this project to help the neighborhoods of Southeast Queens; at the Council hearing the MTA promised to disclose those details. The modernization and redesign of the 165th Street Bus Terminal across from the Jamaica Main Library will offer the many commuters who use this terminus a safe and accessible facility; the MTA plan does not address this infrastructure need.

Investing in bus infrastructure empowers the MTA to focus on better use of its bus lines to serve intra-borough needs rather than just funneling riders to subways and rail. As you may not be aware Queens can be a two fare zone if the MTA fails to make Metro Cards available to more vendors in the neighborhoods as residents often still pay two fares to commute about Queens or to New York City. The MTA must continue to add service in areas of Queens that desperately need the mobility that public transit affords taxpaying New Yorkers. Two Center for Urban Future reports evidence the need to expand public transit options needs for residents in Queens, Brooklyn and Far Rockaway. The MTA also needs to reconsider plans to deploy more "articulated" buses. During rush hour the MTA must deploy more buses to meet service needs;

this includes starting some buses further along a route to allow more riders get a timely ride. We also need more buses to implement service the underserved residents of Queens; this requires the MTA to buy more buses. And to do represents a smart investment in infrastructure.

ATU continues to be at the forefront of advocating transportation infrastructure investment at the national, state and local levels. ATU sponsored National Transit month and rallied in Washington, D.C. last May to call attention to this need. We welcome the Council's advocacy in support of our effort to secure the needed public investments in transportation infrastructure.

In summary, based on our experience and knowledge of the MTA system especially in Queens, ATU 1056 emphasizes the need to invest in the infrastructure necessary to keep our buses running, rebuild and enhance bus service and deliver the best service possible to the residents of Queens and those who visit or work here. **Let's face it...the current transit administration knows they will not be building any train services in Queens.** ATU Local 1056 will continue to advocate a better scheduled service for Queens and so should these committees and the Council as a whole. Thank you for this opportunity to share my local's views and advocacy for the community we serve. I can be reached at the number above at any time.