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ATU Locals 1056 & 1179 Oppose Van Applications
Impact Q3/ Q6/ Q7/ Q8/ Q85/ Q111/ Q113
Urge DOT, MTA, TLC, NYPD to Address Illegal Vans
Not Just How Vans Get Licensed At Issue; How Vans Operate Matters!

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Locals 1056 and 1179 questioned applications for commuter van services from Rosedale and Laurelton to the Parsons/ Archer Subway, when the MTA already operates several bus routes that service the community and others that connect residents with another subway route. “The vans would duplicate existing bus service provided by the MTA – particularly the Q3, Q85, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q111 and Q113 routes, and, like most other so-called commuter vans, prey on bus routes, picking up and discharging passengers at MTA bus stops,” stated ATU Presidents and Business Agents Mark Henry (1056) and Bennie Caughman (1179) in testimony presented at a NYC Department of Transportation hearing at Queens Borough Hall, Wednesday, December 21, 2016, at 2:00 p.m. Rather than consider new van services, the public transit unions use this opportunity to call on City and State agencies to work together address the scourge of vans that operate illegally and unsafely in many City communities including southeast Queens.

“Whether or not vans get licensed remains a small part of the equation,” explained Mr. Henry. “Vans licensed and unlicensed operate illegally and unsafely – in contravention of the City’s Vision Zero initiative – along bus routes and deprive the MTA of revenue that it can re-invest in bus service. These 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.” ATU 1056 and 1179 members – bus operators and mechanics – work respectively for MTA New York City Transit’s Queens bus division and the MTA Bus Company and serve the riding public.

“In particular, NYPD, the Taxi and Limousine Commission and the MTA really need to coordinate their activities at such transit bus hubs as Parsons Archer and 179th Street/Hillside Avenue,” added Mr. Henry. “Just as the MTA and NYPD have focused on farebeating by some who ride our buses, these agencies need to work with the TLC to address the outright theft of fares by these vans,” added Mr. Caughman. “These often unregulated vans’ drivers – unlike MTA bus operators drivers – face no drug testing and regular oversight and cause many pedestrian accidents. These hearings really need to include the MTA because vans directly impact revenues at a time when communities seek bus service restorations and enhancement. DOT’s responsibility in determining bus stops with the MTA and the safe flow of traffic and overall pedestrian safety – again think Vision Zero – also must be part of any deliberations.”

“So-called commuter vans, unreliable, often unsafe and many more times than not operating illegally, offer straphangers a dangerous alternative to MTA bus service,” Mr. Henry said. “The woefully inadequate response to illegal, unregulated and unsafe vans allows these unsafe vans to prey upon bus routes, pick up passengers at bus stops and the subways, deprive the Authority of revenue and reduce passenger counts that the Authority uses to cut service. Their operation *de facto* recreates the two-fare zones we fought to eliminate over 20 years ago.”

“Unlike the drivers such as ATU members who operate MTA buses in Queens, these van drivers receive no recurring training, get subjected to no drug testing and face no periodic medical evaluations while they race along city streets putting all at risk,” added Mr. Caughman. “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 Authority must work with NYPD and TLC, and not just intermittently, to address this safety issue.”

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