

**Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Advocates Bus Service Improvements
Testimony to City Council Committee on Transportation on MTA Budget**

by

**Mark Henry, President and Business Agent, ATU Local 1056 and
Chair, ATU Legislative Conference Board**

&

Bennie Caughman, President and Business Agent, ATU Local 1179

March 8, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for necessary improvements to public transit in the City of New York. I am **Mark Henry**, President and Business Agent for Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local No. 1056; and Chair, ATU Legislative Conference Board. Local 1056 represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division. And I am **Bennie Caughman**, President/ Business Agent, Amalgamated Transit Union Local No. 1179.

As mass transit professionals, ATU offers unique and valuable insights. ATU 1056 and ATU 1179 members – bus operators and mechanics – work respectively for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus and the MTA Bus division; we serve the riding public.

At almost every opportunity discussing public transit, the ATU emphasizes that smartly investing in public transit keys growth in the economy and job creation. Moreover at this City Council hearing on the MTA Budget, ATU emphasizes that cost-effective improvements in bus service offers the smartest means to deliver public transit improvements, including to the many so-called transit deserts identified in the City of New York.

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.

Too often policymakers and advocates ignore the utility bus public transit; instead they talk up ferries, more rail and subways, light rail and, inexplicably, a trolley. We need to end this impractical mindset and commit to expand bus service. **Improved and expanded bus service offers the quickest and most cost effective and flexible means to get more people out of cars and help protect our environment.** We note and welcome how grassroots transit improvement effort also focuses on a “bus turnaround” and supports the reforms ATU consistently advocated in prior [testimony](#) and [commentary](#). Indeed a “NYC Bus Coalition” [report](#) on improving bus service basically advanced MTA bus union [recommendations](#).

Let's start with the clear premise that the MTA's current schedules to replace existing buses remains woefully inadequate. Indeed, to support bus service changes, expansions, and enhancement requires many more buses than budgeted. More net new buses introduced sooner enables a better use of MTA bus lines to serve intra-borough and inter-borough public transit needs rather than just using most bus routes to funnel riders to subways and rail. A holistic approach to bus service will help remedy “transportation deserts” that elected officials such as Council Member I. Daneek Miller clearly identify.

Look at some existing bus service issues and examples for improvement:

New York City Department of Transportation (NYC DOT) and MTA transit planners need to re-think their focus on Select Bus Service (SBS) – their version, more commonly known as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) - involves no significant service upgrades.

Studying the SBS metrics makes clear the need to look at the larger picture. ATU favors BRT and SBS approaches as part of any plan to improve bus service system wide. Unfortunately the deployment of substantial human and money resources to date diverts attention from the needed holistic approach to public transit in places – including Queens – that need more, better and the introduction of bus service. In ATU's experience, especially in Queens, SBS hurts communities; since its inception where the MTA introduced SBS communities experienced an overall service reduction; the implementation of SBS often just replaces Limited (bus stop) service.

Extending SBS features to other local and express routes offers real opportunities to enhance service. Off-board fare payment and all-door boarding reduces time to get on and overall travel times. This would work particularly well at subway and other terminals.

Issues involving delays and longer than expected waits often relate to management decisions that take buses and bus operators out of service. MTA's bus divisions opt not to replace a driver out sick and or a disabled bus.

When MTA managers allow longer than appropriate bus inspection schedules, unsafe equipment often leaves a route short on buses; this only puts drivers and riders at risk in buses that may break down, often unsafely.

Change these MTA policies that allows management decisions that take buses and bus operators out of service; this leaves routes uncovered and longer wait times for riders, often at the worst times. It impacts passengers facing the summer heat, blustery rain and as the weather becomes colder and more frequently inclement.

Buses, new and existing, require fully-functioning depots, and in many cases terminals to facilitate commuter transfer between transit modes.

This requires continued progress on the new MTA NYCT Jamaica bus depot and improvement at its existing Queens Village depot.

In Flushing this means identifying a site for a full-scale bus terminal serving its downtown before development there makes it impractical.

Frankly, a MTA capital budget that smartly invests in bus public transit options not also assists many residents who currently rely on personal vehicles, it enables more bus routing alternatives that relieve stress on subways.

The capital investment in buses and related infrastructure ATU recommends facilitates an overall strategic approach involving greater use of buses:

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Advocates Bus Service Improvements; Testimony to City Council Committee on Transportation, March 8, 2018, page three

- *restore remaining bus service cuts from 2010.
- *expand (all) bus service to operate 24 hours.
- *introduce express bus service in Southeast Queens at the level that exists in Northeast Queens.
- *acquire more buses to deploy on existing, revised and new routes – a key component of any improvement plan.
- *identify any need for new bus terminals – as mentioned above downtown Flushing plagued by congestion and related issues – remains a prime candidate.
- *identify bus depots which need repair or replacement and schedule such.
- *address congestion on local bus lines particularly during rush hours.
- *deploy more buses to meet service needs during rush hours; this includes starting some buses further along a route to allow more riders get a timely ride.
- *institute off-bus fare collection not just for SBS.
- *looking at dedicated bus lanes for local and limited bus routes such as enjoyed in one borough, with proper enforcement.
- *implement free transfers between commuter rail and bus public transit, as currently exist between buses and subways and local and express buses.
- *charge the entity looking at BQX – “the rail to nowhere” – to also review linking the waterfront neighborhoods via buses, which can occur almost instantaneously.

Improving bus service offers the smartest, quickest, easiest and most strategic path to effectively upgrading public transit infrastructure and most importantly, public transit service, including in Queens.

Thank you.

*Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1056, 211-12 Union Turnpike
Hollis Hills, NY 11364 * (718) 949-6444 * www.Local1056.org*

*Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1179, 214-53 Jamaica Avenue, Queens
Village NY 11428 * (718) 736-1179 * www.atu1179.com*

For more information:
Corey Bearak, ATU 1056 & 1179 Policy & Political Director
(718) 343-6779/ (516) 343-6207

