

**Testimony of Mark Henry, Chair, Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) NYS  
Legislative Conference Board & President/Business Agent, ATU Local 1056  
to NYS Senate Corporations, Authorities and Commissions And  
Transportation Committees & Assembly Corporations, Authorities and  
Commissions Committee Hearing on the Metropolitan Transportation  
Authority (MTA) 2020-2024 Capital Program**

**November 12, 2019**

Chairs Comrie, Kennedy and Paulin, and respective committee members, thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony for your consideration as you review the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) 2020-2024 Capital Program. My name is Mark Henry, and I serve as Chair of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) NYS Legislative Conference Board and as President/Business Agent of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1056 in Queens. 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.

I testify today on behalf of the four locals in the New York City area: my local – Local 1056 in Queens, Local 726 in Staten Island, Local 1179 also in Queens and Local 1181 in Brooklyn. The members of our four locals would be greatly impacted by the proposed MTA Capital Program. This program is touted as creating a faster, more accessible and more reliable public transportation system for the New York City. This proposed Capital Program would be the largest in MTA history. We find these statements generally positive, but we hope that the MTA can deliver on the ideas contained in this plan.

Currently, there are 5,771 buses in the MTA fleet and over 16,000 bus stops. The 2020-2024 Capital Program envisions a total investment of \$3.5 billion in NYCT and MTA buses over the four-year period of the program. \$2.3 billion of the proposed plan will go to replace 2,200 aging buses in the fleet. The goal is to have 500 of these new buses be 100% electric buses. The plan also includes \$217 million for the purchase of an additional 175 buses to expand the overall fleet, which would be designed to allow network redesign and provide better service.

Further, the Capital Program envisions \$880 million for bus depots including the reconstruction of the Jamaica Depot a project that has been sidelined in Capital projects dating back to 2010. This money would also be used to replace maintenance equipment at the depots to keep the buses running.

Finally, the Capital Program contemplates \$109 million to improve the customer experience by providing on-board real time digital information. There will also be efforts to improve traffic enforcement using bus lane cameras and provide faster and frequent service with traffic signal priority for buses. The plan must have enhancement to its bus design to reduce pedestrian accidents and operator safety.

The focus of transit improvements must not only be on subways and rail; it must include Bus Service to better serve disenfranchised communities. The MTA redesign of the Bus Networks specifically in Queens is still in its infancy but is flawed and the direction envisioned leans towards a developer's needs, not giving Queens residents from all walks of life the ability to move about the borough. I emphasize this only to remind the committees that operational funding cannot be defunded or shifted to capital projects. Missing from the plan is any funding to provide or upgrade the current bus transit hubs across the city especially in ever expanding Flushing and Jamaica Queens areas.

This committee needs to be mindful of the reorganization that has not been revealed, the constant outsourcing and additional consultants that infringe on the Capital Plan's budget; it deserves a closer scrutiny.

An additional Bond Referendum is needed to the needed improvements and repairs to fund the Bus network system. There are many areas that are woefully decimated by years of cuts in services and neglect. A reviewing of the capital plans from the past versus the present, shows another vision of public transit but not a clear one to average New Yorker.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) 2020-2024 Capital Program. This proposed program will have a major impact on the members of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), and I hope you will consider the points I have raised as you move forward with your review of the Program. Following this testimony, I include additional observations that I commend to your attention. As always, I am happy to serve as a resource and offer advice and guidance on how the proposed Capital Program will impact the bus drivers of the MTA.

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### **Additional Commentary**

Transit in this city operated by MTA focuses primarily on economics, income level and not the population's needs; it's the Tale of Two Different New York's. The reality is that your income level can dictate where you live or how far you must commute to get to work, school or other necessities.

As a mass transit professional and a rider of public transit in this city, the ATU Locals across this city and state offers unique and valuable insights. ATU Locals have always emphasized that smartly investing in public transit keys growth in the economy and job creation. We are your "Green Alternative" that properly resourced can induce those who rely on less efficient transportation modes to public transit.

The focus of transit improvements must not only be on subways; it must significantly **MUST** include Bus Service to better serve these communities. Where speed of service is concerned, Queens suffers greatly from its inferior bus network. Queens residents need a commitment to expand bus service and remove the impediments that slow the movement of buses. This includes enforcement of traffic restrictions that apply to vehicles and pedestrians. This especially includes SMART traffic planning.

Let's face facts: No plans include NEW subway lines for the "Outer Boroughs" such as Queens. This makes efforts to improve bus service essential when it comes to moving New York forward. Look at the MTA Plan spread sheet; all you see for buses involve these acronyms: "SGR" (state of good repair), "NR" (normal replacement) and "SI" (system improvement as in improved quality replacement bus). What you see not at all in Queens: "NE" (network expansion.... expanding service).

Too often policymakers and advocates ignore the utility of bus public transit; instead they implement BIKE LANES, Pedestrian malls and VISION ZERO initiatives which, while healthy alternatives, contradict and impede the growing need for PUBLIC Transit, specifically reliable Bus Service, to operate. Ferries and light rail must be incorporated and connect with our Bus, Rail and subway networks.

We need to end this impractical mindset against buses and commit to expand bus service – especially in Queens which suffers greatly by the inferior bus network that currently exists there.

ATU strongly supports bus service changes, expansions, and enhancement with collective thought and input. This includes 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. Protective bus lanes become essential part of this planning.

In Queens, we also need a clear understanding on the need to assign a priority to buses. Our legislators can prove helpful by joining ATU and advocating for service priorities outlined in many prior testimonies at city and state legislative hearings.

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 to Manhattan.

Provide fully-functioning depots to repair buses – new and existing – timely. The **MTA NYCT Jamaica bus depot** in Central Jamaica NY lags decades behind schedule to improve underserved communities in Southeast Queens; it needs to be completed. Improvements still lag to protect the Casey Stengel Depot in Flushing against storm flooding.

Overhaul existing and/or create new create terminals to facilitate commuter transfer between transit modes. Downtown Flushing still needs a site identified for a full-scale bus terminal before development there makes it impractical.

The MTA plan must provide for more electric bus purchases and charging stations for the transition to a zero-emissions fleet, rather than current small pilot that introduces 60 all-electric buses

Frankly, MTA's 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 and roadways. Please refer to Appendix A for the capital investment in buses and related infrastructure that ATU recommends in order to facilitate an overall strategic approach involving greater use of buses.

### **Funding Issues**

More transit funding is definitely needed. A bond referendum in support of Mass Transit will provide the necessary monies to keep the economic engine of New York attractive and running. ATU recommends increasing the current MTA surcharges by 2%.

The current NYC Hotel Network could generate \$100 million with a simple \$5 per day assessment that must be directed to transit service improvements.

The Federal government needs to change the formula for public transit needs in New York State. ATU talks not only of funding for transit service but capital projects as well.

**Appendix A:**

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

- ▶ In the absence of any plan to revamp lines servicing southeast Queens to address both populations increases and existing and projected public transit needs;
- ▶ Identify bus depots which need repair or replacement and schedule such, with a focus on real progress on Jamaica Depot;
- ▶ Identify any need for new bus terminals – downtown Flushing plagued by congestion and related issues – remains a prime candidate;
- ▶ 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 – 200 additional per year over ten years beyond what’s proposed in Fast Forward, to deploy on existing, revised and/or new routes – a key component of any improvement plan
- ▶ Address congestion on local bus lines particularly during rush hours; this means using the data from the “Bus Trek” system to address bus schedules in a shorter timetable than currently exists;
- ▶ Make standard on every new bus not just outfitting 1,000 buses – audible pedestrian turns warning systems and specify additional cameras on all new vehicle orders;
- ▶ Include long overdue ADA-compliant audible announcements on all buses;
- ▶ Introduce off-bus fare collection not just for SBS in Queens ASAP but all routes;
- ▶ Introduce dedicated bus lanes for local and limited bus routes such as enjoyed in Manhattan, with proper enforcement; explore cameras in bus stops and use of cameras in lanes that limit parking during rush hours; to generate revenue for service enhancements;
- ▶ Include enforcement against illegal Commuter Van operations as part of the existing plan that advocates increased enforcement presence on bus routes where needed, including identifying times and areas of more frequent operator assault and streamlining communications between (the MTA’s) Department of Buses and law enforcement;

- ▶ Integrate into the command center where it empower staff to providing real-time service and schedule information to all bus operators by 2020 and deployment of on-street dispatchers to targeted locations and terminal points to help keep buses moving and resolve issues;
- ▶ Implement free transfers between commuter rail and public bus transit – as currently exist between buses and subways and local and express buses – which pays for itself (see Analysis A below);
- ▶ Management employment practices – including inconsistent discipline – remain an issue and require re-thought when it results in a need to hire and train someone new to replace someone already trained and experience;
- ▶ Charge the entity looking at BQX – to also review linking the waterfront neighborhoods via buses, which can occur almost instantaneously. (All the more important as funding issues remain with the rail version); and
- ▶ In future planning, provide for more electric bus purchases and charging stations for the transition to a zero-emissions fleet, rather than current small pilot that introduces 60 all-electric buses.

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Analysis A:

Currently no bus to rail or rail to bus transfer exists.

So many **opportunities** exist to connect bus riders to rail. It just may relieve some the parking strain that neighborhoods near rail hubs experience; moreover, that helps local merchants in places such as Queens Village and Bayside where committed patrons often drive around looking for parking; others might drive to Long Island malls.

So why not apply the cost of the bus fare to offset part of the LIRR fare? If 1,000 commuters take advantage of this, it involves \$5,000 per day, \$25,000 per week, \$1.3 million. Perhaps one-half take the subway or drive. That means additional revenue. 500 monthly ticket LIRR fares from Zone 3 totals \$1,308,000. Interesting math. A wash.