

Testimony
of
Mark Henry, Chair, Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) NYS Legislative
Conference Board & President/Business Agent, ATU Local 1056
and
Jose DeJesus, President/Business Agent, ATU Local 1179
to
City Council Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
jointly with
The Committee on Resiliency and Waterfronts
on
Assessing New York City’s Infrastructure:
Laying the Foundation for Federal Infrastructure Funding
April 19, 2022

Thank you Chairpersons Selvena Brooks-Powers and Ari Kagan for this opportunity for Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) to testify on Transportation Equity. I am Jose DeJesus, President/Business Agent of ATU Local 1179. I testify also on behalf of my labor brother, Mark Henry, chair of the ATU NYS Legislative Conference Board and President/Business Agent of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1056 in Queens.

ATU members operate and maintain NYC Transit bus routes serving primarily Queens and Staten Island residents with some routes extending into The Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan. ATU Local 1056 represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division with depots in Flushing (Casey Stengel), Jamaica and Queens Village. ATU 1179 represents bus operators, mechanics and supervisors who work from the Far Rockaway and JFK Depots of the MTA Bus division (former Green Bus lines).

Our members primarily provide the best transit options in transit desert areas of Queens. We are also the transit option – during periodic subway service shutdowns to allow repairs; this demonstrates how buses matter both as a practical and flexible transit mode. Buses offer a cost-effective means to expand public transit options, including sensible bus rapid transit, where none or insufficient modes exist. This allows policymakers to deliver transit improvement early and most cost-effectively.

As a mass transit professionals and users of public transit in this city, the members of 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, restores neighborhoods, mobility and assist in job creation. This keys into resiliency and maximizing the use of Federal dollars for our transportation infrastructure.

The buses our members operate provide not only your “Green Alternative” that adequately resourced helps induce those who rely on less efficient transportation modes to use public transit, but more quickly and efficiently address capacity and service shortfalls and the transit inequities which often go hand in hand. As a result our buses offer a key means to ensure resiliency and the flexibility needed during crises, including major storms.

After the chaos and devastation of Superstorm Sandy, New Yorkers experienced how ATU Locals 1056 and 1179 memberships and sister transit unions stepped up and helped New Yorkers get about on public buses while the MTA worked to resume subway service system-wide. Fast forward to today, our bus operators and maintainers stood on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19; some – to many --losing their lives; and we stepped up despite our members working under an expired contract that the MTA REFUSED to update when similar transit public servants already work under a new contract, forcing ATU to win our contract – which we did through a successful Arbitration.

Given the significant financial support that the MTA received through emergency and stimulus funding, we believe that it is imperative that the MTA use this funding wisely and address several critical issues that are facing the public transportation workforce. Even with the upcoming congestion pricing program these funding mechanisms must resource the current transit system in a manner that introduces real equity in the delivery of public transit. AND produces and ensures resilient public transit for all New Yorkers and those who visit or work here.

The focus of transit improvements must not only be on subways or railroads; 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. In other forums, including before this committee, we focused on the specific service enhancements.

ATU remains concerned about the progress on major projects and improvements in the MTA Capital Plan essential to ensuring the transit riding public enjoys reliable public transportation. In Queens, two projects that need attention include the (NEW) Jamaica Depot and Casey Stengel Depot (Flooding). The MTA NYCT Jamaica bus depot in central Jamaica 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. The Far Rockaway Depot sits in a Flood Zone where its buses serve an underserved part of Queens. These depots' buses service underserved, including transit starved, Queens neighborhoods. In Staten Island, where our sister local ATU 726 represents transit workers, massive flooding afflicts the Castleton Depot. Lack of equipment remains an ongoing issue. Providing fully-functioning depots to repair buses – new and existing – remains essential, including for system resiliency.

The MTA needs to 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. We have long pointed to this need.

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.

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

It remains very important that the riding public, those who they depend on and the communities and interest served by transit all make their voices heard on bus redesign.

As we seek to protect and upgrade our environment, and discuss a Green New Deal, it remains important to recognize how public bus transit enhances our environment and reduces our carbon footprint while supporting our economy and investment.

Our legislators can prove helpful by joining ATU and advocating for public transit priorities outlined today and in many prior testimonies at city and state legislative hearings. ATU urges our policymakers and, frankly all of us, to coalesce around these sound policies that make a difference in our communities.

Thank you!

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