

For Immediate Release: Earth Day eve Friday, April 21, 2023

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

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Earth Day Message, 2023: Strengthening Bus Transit Green & Clean

By **Luis Alzate**, President/ Business Agent, ATU Local 1056, and **Jose DeJesus**, President/ Business Agent, ATU Local 1179

As we observe Earth Day 2023 needing to stem climate change, reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and foster the development of green and sustainable industries and jobs, ATU urges our policymakers and, the public at large, to support sound policies that sustain, protect and enhance our communities. First following the devastation of Superstorm Sandy and later experiencing how COVID shut down our subways and the chaos that ensued, New Yorkers experienced how the members of ATU Locals 1056 and 1179 and sister transit unions stepped up and helped New Yorkers get about on public buses while the MTA worked to resume subway service. As our bus operators and maintainers stood on the frontlines against COVID-19, some – too many – lost their lives. Despite our ATU members then working under an expired contract, we stepped up (Our member now work under a new contract secured in a successful arbitration.). On this Earth Day eve, we urge policymakers and the public to focus on bus public transit as a cost-effective and sound means to address transit deserts, improve our environment and to support our continued recovery from the effects of COVID-19.

ATU recognizes, as do most experts, that, without a fully functioning transit system, we cannot expect the New York City – and thus our state and national – economy to fully recover and achieve growth beyond.

Let us start with smart investment in our human and basic infrastructure. Through ATU International, we strongly supported the inclusion of \$32 billion in emergency operating aid for public transportation in the federal Coronavirus relief package. We also supported the funding for state and localities knowing that funding shored up the support we receive from the State and the City. ATU maintains its advocacy to ensure the MTA bus redesign for Queens improves service for all Queens communities (Please view the addendum.). It explains while ATU advocates for improvements to public transit that extend beyond just subways or railroads. We advocate for improvements to bus public transit infrastructure to better serve many communities, especially the transit deserts. This includes the MTA acquiring more buses and providing the infrastructure to support the buses needed to adequately improve bus public transit.

We continue to advocate and testify on the need for progress on major projects and improvements in the MTA Capital Plan essential to ensuring the bus riding public enjoys reliable public transportation. In Queens, ATU reminds notes the need to address storm flooding risks at Casey Stengel Depot across from Citi Field. We welcome work on the (New) MTA NYCT Jamaica bus depot in central Jamaica that lagged decades behind schedule; its completion will improve service in underserved Southeast Queens communities. 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, both for system resiliency and to maintain basic and extend bus service.

ATU Local 1056 represents drivers and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division. 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 provide additional transit options – 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 improvements early and most cost-effectively.

On this Earth Day 2023, ATU locals across New York State support public bus transit; it helps save our environment, creates jobs and builds communities.

-30-



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

{Addendum on MTA Bus Redesign in Queens}

**MTA Queens Bus Redesign Plan Plots Longer Trips, Less Service
Why not plot a Redesign that provides Frequent, Reliable 24-hour
Service?**

The Authority's redesign scheme saddles Queens Bus Riders with less service, longer walks to reach their buses, and frequent needs to transfer to another bus or more when they previously took one route. As bus operators and mechanics who work for MTA New York City Transit's Queens Bus Division, the members of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1056 raise the following 14 concerns that we continue to discuss with our elected officials, advocates, and the community:

1) When first released pre-COVID, all made our voices heard. We raised how that plan failed to recognize currently underserved neighborhoods. It ignored the borough's necessary mobility needs with longer rides to areas not part of typical commutes. The new plan, packaged with claims of reduced travel times, still ignores the transit needs of many parts of Queens, especially transit deserts with its emphasis on greater access to revitalized or gentrified neighborhoods.

2) Most commutes within the Borough remain challenging for the average Queens rider.

3) It appears that the consultants who view Queens, treat it as a "car borough," not necessarily a "transit borough" with real needs for improved public transit; this dynamic clearly orchestrated the redesign scheme. They failed to recognize Queens as a diverse borough with challenging connectivity issues. The plan neither acknowledges nor answers what plagues transportation in our Queens Neighborhoods. In many ways it masks a money-saving pitch when the public interest requests that MTA invest in enhancing bus service, instead this scheme tinkers with a re-deployment of existing resources for bus public transit in Queens.

4) Many routes involve longer commutes and/or two- and three-step transfers to connect to other buses, rail, subways, or major destinations of choice.

5) Restoring a few of nearly 1200 bus stops proposed for elimination offers no solution or olive branch and we hope the MTA recognizes this.

6) The workshop Zoom-format the MTA uses currently in public meetings, and did pre-COVID, fails to ensure that riders make their voices truly heard. Under this process, Queens Riders may not know they share concerns and thus lack the support they'd find in common cause to raise ideas, concerns, or objections. The in-progress presentations to Community Boards need to shift to open forums. The outreach must be expanded outside of MTA's targeted audience.

7) Any re-design needs to look at more than just the Queens bus map. Look first at the underserved parts of Queens, the transit deserts not served by subways and with limited if any rail access. Recognize the capacity limits on subway service that bus service can solve. The MTA only needs to add buses. Currently, there is no appetite to build new tunnels, stations, and railway above or below grade. Moreover, growth in the borough, existing and planned, suggests a further enhancement in service levels. The plan fails to meet existing expansion and future growth in the borough.

8) Any discussion on speeds needs to equate to the existing vehicular traffic and has a lower priority than addressed in the plan.

9) The plan fails to address service to schools, and summer capacity issues when more folks seek access to Queens beaches.

10) While this design scheme allows some passengers able to make their trips using fewer buses, it leaves many others facing additional transfers. The MTA must provide estimates of whether the number of riders its scheme benefits exceeds the number of passengers the scheme harms. It remains unclear if this scheme requires those making additional transfers to pay additional fares.

11) The new scheme fails to provide access to important locations. Southeast Queens residents, for example, lack any direct bus route to the Main Branch of the Queens Public Library in Jamaica (which lies across Merrick Boulevard from a bus terminal).

12) Few if any of the 1,193 local and express bus stops require removal. Eliminating lightly used bus stops offer no time savings; buses usually skip such stops. Eliminating heavily used bus stops just increases loading dwell times at the remaining stops; this obviates any average 20 seconds per stop savings for acceleration and deceleration. A review of riders' needs, and usage finds most well-balanced routes with most spacing every two or three city blocks and every city avenue is accurate and does what it intention, service a public need. Significantly reducing bus stops risks reducing ridership, especially among seniors and those with mobility issues. It imposes a hardship during inclement or extremely hot weather. Many stop eliminations in the current scheme require walks up to 3/4 of a mile.

13) Faster does not mean better nor does it deliver better customer service. The more varying service models included in the redesign scheme only breed frustration and confusion for those who truly depend on bus public transit. Reliability, Frequency and Accessibility always trump speed.

14) Finally, rather than all-day busways, a smart plan looks at creating bus-only paths during rush hours with appropriate enforcement. This makes sense when comparing speeds for car and buses on local streets; cars average 9-12mph; local buses which make stops average between 8.5 and 10mph. The 3.3% decline in bus speeds since 2015 represents not traffic but the Vision Zero 25 MPH speed limit. This makes plain that no need exists for midday busways that merchants claim diminish business. Indeed, cars and delivery trucks double-parking and blocking bus stops causes traffic congestion that delays buses; the re-design fails to address this! In addition, legislation giving preference to buses as is the case with emergency vehicles, would help buses re-enter traffic from bus stops.