

**New York City Transit Riders Council
Public Bus Forum
June 18, 2008**

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

The 12th Bus Forum sponsored by the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC) was held this year in Queens Borough Hall.¹ This was a particularly timely Forum as it closely followed the MTA announcement on May 7th regarding the integration of MTA Bus, NYC Transit Bus and LI Bus into what is now called Regional Bus Operations.

Council Chair Andrew Albert was joined at the dais by guest panelists from NYC Transit:

- Joseph (Joe) J. Smith, Senior-Vice President , Department of Buses
- Robert Newhouser, Senior Director, Bus Service Planning
- Norman Silverman, Vice-President, Operations Planning, MTA Bus and LI Bus
- John Hein, Executive Vice-President, Department of Buses
- Kenneth Daube, Vice-President and Chief Transportation Officer
- Paul Maresca, Assistant General Manager, Road Control

Also participating were Capt. Patrick Carney from NYPD and Joseph Barr from NYC DOT.

Joe Smith introduced his staff members and summarized the new bus organization and operation for the audience:

- The integration of bus operations is an opportunity to take “Best Practices” from all three companies in an effort to save money and improve performance.
- Last year, 99% of scheduled trips were provided.
- The MTA/NYCT Bus has the largest hybrid bus fleet, with 850 vehicles on order. Another 60 CNG buses are on order for LI Bus. Hybrids save \$50,000 in fuel costs over the life of the bus. The MTA is already \$17 million over their fuel budget for the year.
- Select Bus Service (SBS) will begin at the end of June 2008 in the Bronx. The SBS is a response to the system’s low average bus speed, which is the lowest in the country. SBS will enjoy the benefits of signal prioritization. In 2009, SBS is slated to begin on 34th Street.
- No-emission hydrogen-fueled buses are being looked at along with turbine buses (which will be the bus of the future).

¹ The Bus Forum venue is rotated among the New York City boroughs.

- Reliability of bus service in Queens is four times better since MTA took over the private companies.
- Charleston garage will open in 2010 and Transit is looking at additional depots.

Queens Borough President Helen Marshall made opening remarks and noted that higher bus demand requires more articulated buses on main routes, adding local buses in Southeastern and Northeastern Queens, and the retirement of older, dirtier buses. Chair Andrew Albert added that the NYCTRC has recommended that the Springfield Gardens station be rebuilt for the restoration of subway service to outer Queens.

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES EXPRESSED BY RIDERS

Customer Service Relations/Communications

1. Bronx express bus routes have Guide-A-Ride bus strips. When will Queens and Long Island buses be getting the same?

Response: Express buses in Brooklyn will be getting them next. There is no current plan to provide the strip maps for Long Island buses. We are looking at new technologies to alert riders of next bus arrival for Queens and Long Island buses.

2. NYCT buses do not announce major bus stops.
3. LI buses have audio/visual displays. The Hicksville/Freeport/169th Street stops should have bus displays.
4. The Bus Customer Relations Center needs to be overhauled. Its phone number should be on car cards.
5. You need to do a better job of communicating route changes at bus stops.
6. There aren't any Queens bus maps posted on buses.

Response: We will address the bus map issue.

7. There needs to be a regional call center open 24 hours to track buses.
8. When the F train is not running, bus drivers should announce this so that riders do not alight at F-train subway stations.

Response: We try to set up shuttle buses on Hillside Avenue as quickly as possible.

9. There should be more bus maps at libraries.

Driver Performance/Issues

1. Some drivers are unresponsive to passengers. Some don't bother pulling up to the curb.
2. Bus drivers are very passive when cars block their way and they don't use their horns.
3. The drivers need to be instructed on proper intercom usage.
4. Drivers are mean and discourteous.
5. Why are drivers so overweight? Some of them are 500 pounds.

Response: We are developing a health and safety program for drivers.

6. There needs to be more pay and benefits parity between bus drivers and other civil service workers. Bus drivers have to work twice as long for the same pension.

Fare Issues

1. A rider is made to pay a \$2 transfer from the N4 to the N15/N16 to Roosevelt Field plus \$.25 for a paper transfer.

Response: There are different fare tariffs across the three companies. This will be standardized with the integration. We will check out the transfer issue.

2. The 44" height requirement is not being enforced for payment. Non-paying children are taking up seats. Minors should either pay or sit on lap.
3. If your MetroCard is broken, maybe there can be a location in each borough where customers can go for an immediate replacement.

Response: There is a customer service center at 2 Broadway and broken cards can be mailed in. The Smart Card pilot currently underway will eventually replace MetroCards and will be much more durable.

4. Why can't bus passes be bought on buses?
5. Why is it so much more difficult to put money on a Disability MetroCard compared to regular MetroCards?

Response: We will forward your issue to the MetroCard people.

6. Why aren't there bill changers on the buses?

Response: We will never go back to dollar bills.

Service Issues

1. There should be articulated buses along Northern Boulevard and Queens Boulevard.

Response: Articulated buses could result in lower frequencies.

2. Drivers are bypassing the 168th Street/Hillside Avenue stop on the westward side. They drive on the left side of the road and don't stop.

Response: We will look into why drivers are not stopping there.

3. Off-peak bus schedules need to be better synchronized with subway service to minimize off-hour waiting.
4. Buses do not sufficiently service Queens cultural institutions.
5. The Q18 is frequently late. There are no Guide-a-Ride maps or bus shelters.

Response: Guide-a-Rides will be added to Express lines first and then local routes. Old shelters will be replaced before they are placed in additional locations. Shelter requests go through the Community Boards.

6. The dispatcher is turning the Q56 around at Alabama Avenue, stranding passengers at Broadway Junction. Sometimes 75–100 people are left waiting.
7. The N6 is the worst bus in the system. It is overcrowded and it runs lights to stay on schedule.
8. Why aren't there more 24/7 routes on Long Island?

Response: The new integration will look at that.

9. The Q46 is very crowded.

10. The N23 is the second-worst line. Why is it so crowded?

Response: We are looking at improvements to the N6 and the N23 lines.

11. Buses should not bypass stops on Sutphin Boulevard.

12. The Q46 passes by waiting passengers at the 3rd stop on route.

Frequency/Headway Enhancements

1. More Q40 buses are needed on Saturdays.

2. The Q76/77 routes need Sunday service.

3. The QM15 needs at least one bus on Sunday leaving by 11am and returning at 7pm to accommodate Broadway matinees. Saturday service needs to be adjusted. The current 4:30pm departure from Manhattan is too early; 7pm would be better.

Response: Unfortunately we would need more than one trip per day in order to warrant the consideration of additional service.

4. The Q31 route should be adjusted. There is a half-hour wait post-rush hour.

Response: All schedules are set to ridership guidelines. We will look into adjustments.

5. There should be an increase in weekday and weekend service on the Q60, with a connection to Merrick Boulevard.

Bus Bunching

1. The Q6 experiences significant bunching in the morning hours, especially in the winter.

2. The Q6 has 15–30 minute waits with bus bunching.

Response: This is one of the highest volume routes. We receive a lot of complaints about this route. It requires a lot of supervision. Road operations will pay particular attention to this line.

3. The B44 has too many buses terminating at Flushing.

4. The Q34 and the Q25 share 90% of their routes yet they always arrive at the same time. There is significant bus bunching occurring. They are leaving the depot at the same time. Their start times should be staggered.

Response: The routes have split headways, but some of the limited-stop service may be creating bunching. We will look at when they are leaving the depot.

5. There is bunching on the Q24, Q54 and Q56.

Response: Road operations will look into it.

Limited Service Requests

1. There should be more B15 limited service to JFK Airport.
2. Limited service should be provided on the M9 and M21 routes.

Response: M9 and M21 increases in hours and frequency were part of the planned service enhancements that are now in jeopardy due to a shortfall in funds.

3. The Q44 limited-stop all-day service is “fantastic”.
4. The Q43 route on Hillside Avenue needs all-day limited-stop service.

Response: Suggestion was included in the service enhancements package. We are looking for opportunities to provide limited-stop service.

5. The Q46 route needs limited-stop service extended until 9:30am.

Response: Suggestion was included in the service enhancements package. We are looking for opportunities to provide limited-stop service.

6. Why is there no limited-stop service on the Q60?

Response: The Q60 needs more ridership before it can support limited-stop service.

Route Enhancements

1. The M14 should be extended down Avenue C.

Response: The M14 was going to be extended down Avenue C as part of the package of service enhancements the MTA had planned. These enhancements were suspended due to lack of funding.

2. Would it be possible to run the QM1/1A up 23rd instead?
3. The Q32 should be extended to Flushing to relieve crowding on the #7 subway line.
4. Three routes use Broadway in Elmhurst but none of them go the full length of the road. More routes need to be straightened out.

Response: A lot of the routes are old trolley routes. We will try to reduce turns etc.

5. There needs to be a bus route straight down Linden Boulevard between Rahway Junction and Green Acres Mall. People need this route. Possibly the Q81 could be used for this.
6. The Q112 should be extended to Broadway Junction and should be a 24/7 route.
7. The Q58 makes unnecessary stops.
8. The Q37 should be extended to Merrick Boulevard for better connections.
9. There should be more Queens-Long Island routes on Union Turnpike.

Response: The new integrated organization will look into this.

Station/Facility Conditions/Improvements

1. Eating and drinking prohibitions on buses on consistently flouted. Are drivers not charged with policing this behavior? A missive to Lee Sander was cited.

Response: It would not be safe to have drivers policing what is going on behind them. They should be focused on the road in front of them. There are enough assaults on drivers without adding other potential circumstances for conflict. Note: It was suggested by NYCTRC Chair Andrew Albert that perhaps advertisement cards can be posted on buses similar to those on the trains.

2. Why does the 169th Street Terminal in Jamaica not have any seating?

Response: We lease that building and are negotiating with the property owner for upgrades. If an acceptable agreement cannot be reached, we will have to look for another location.

3. Catch basins at Archer Avenue are clogged with newspapers and creating flood situations.
4. The Washington Plaza Terminal needs to be cleaned.
5. Why are there bus shelters in Queens but not on Long Island?

Response: Nassau County is responsible for their bus shelters.

Bus Design

1. Hybrid buses are not rider-friendly. There is no room for standees. Seats are too close too each other. The seats should be longitudinal. Why buy buses that are ill-designed?
2. The buses on the M60 route to/from LGA are not properly designed for luggage.

Response: The newer buses will have longitudinal seats in the back for luggage-toting passengers.

3. Bike racks are needed on buses.

Response: Folded bikes only are allowed on buses.

4. Air-conditioning is needed on the Queens routes.
5. When are double-decker buses expected to be added to the fleet and will they be handicapped-accessible?

Response: They will first be introduced at the end of August on the M5 and on a Staten Island route. They will be handicapped-accessible.

6. Coach buses are not comfortable or safe.

Passenger Safety and Accessibility

1. Buses are dropping people off in the middle of the street at Parsons/Archer Avenue.

Response: We are looking at changes to the Parsons Avenue drop-off area.

2. It is a concern that Shea Stadium/Willets Point will not be handicapped-accessible.
3. Drivers don't pull up close to the curb and do not automatically kneel the buses without being asked.
4. Q16 buses cannot properly pull up to the curb due to illegal parking at Queens Center Mall.

Response: Road operations will look into this.

5. Q2 drivers pull up too far from the curb and don't automatically lower the bus.

Response: We will re-instruct drivers on this matter. More low-floor buses may be added to the route.

Chair Andrew Albert thanked everyone for attending and closed the Forum at 6:30pm.

Addendum

The following pages contain submitted comments by those who did not arrive in time to speak or who could not attend. These remarks have been passed on to Transit staff.

Addendum to Bus Forum Proceedings

Submitted Comments

1. Please re-instate Q35 local stops in Brooklyn. They pass by mostly empty now because of the few stops they now make. The local stops for the Q35 were yanked away on March 24, 2007 without notice to the public. There are not enough buses on the B41 local route and the wait is long. Please re-evaluate this situation because it seems so inefficient considering how much gasoline costs now.
2. Why are Long Island bus depots closed on the weekends? Why are there no MetroCard balance readers at St. George, Eltingville Transit Center and Westchester County Center? Why can't city buses extend into Westchester the way Long Island buses extend into Queens?
3. There is poor scheduling and bus bunching on the Q60. A new bus is need for Queens Boulevard that is wheelchair-accessible.
4. The Q25 and Q34 are always late and exhibit bus bunching. This has been going on for more than a decade. Passengers wait 40 minutes and then 3 buses go by at the same time. Invariably only one of the buses is near capacity. They other two are empty – ALWAYS.
5. Who can I call to make some suggestions about escalators at Jamaica?
6. Why do I have to pay for waiting for a train for 45 minutes?
7. I ride the Q10, Q60, Q37, Q23 etc. There is a lack of service on the Q10 route because of limited service for Kew Gardens residents. Buses tend to bunch up. There is a lack of inspectors to make sure that schedules are followed. There are no schedules on the new bus shelters. There is more than enough room for just one sheet.
8. This is not a complaint but a suggestion. Bus routes in the boroughs outside of Manhattan don't make much sense. Instead of running along a single street or avenue, they often take a roundabout route which increases the time it takes to complete a trip. It also makes it difficult to plan a trip. It would be a big improvement if the MTA could streamline the present routes and avoid making too many detours.

For instance, there is no local bus route running the entire length of Broadway in Queens. There are 3 bus routes that use Broadway for brief stretches (Q104, Q18 and Q53). The Q53 makes limited stops only. I would like to see a new bus route running the entire length of Broadway from Vernon

Boulevard to Queens Boulevard, and perhaps to the Queens Center Mall. This route will make local stops.

If it is not practical to run a bus along the entire route then an additional free transfer should be made available to continue the trip. This transfer would be issued only at the end of the line and can only be used to a bus going in the same direction.

I would also like to see printed bus maps for Nassau and Westchester Counties.

9. I ride the BM1. Is Sunday service planned for the line? Why are we getting used buses instead of some new buses? On several occasions, the half hour schedule is not met, and instead a bus shows up instead for the next hourly slot.
10. I ride the #25 bus. The bus sometimes stops and doesn't wait for me to get in. Instead it drives away. The driver will shut off the engine at a bus stop and take a break. The bus bypasses a lot of bus stops. I have to wait a long time and then a couple of buses arrive at the same time. One bus will be very crowded with passengers while the other bus is empty. In the early morning, I have to wait over an hour for a bus. I have taken down all of the bus numbers and the time of occurrence. The #25 bus does not have any supervision.
11. Comments from Community Board #11 (on following page).

The City of New York

Borough of Queens

COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 11

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Steven Newman
Chair

Susan Seinfeld
District Manager

New York City Transit Riders Council

June 18, 2008

1. Increase existing QM3 Express Bus service from Northeast Queens, currently there are only six trips per day, three in the morning and three in the evening.
2. Expand QM3 Express Bus service from Little Neck Parkway running on Northern Boulevard to downtown Manhattan (similar to the QM1A).
3. Provide transportation hubs/Park and Ride lots for non-stop Express Bus service and/or LIRR service to Manhattan from Belmont and Shea Stadium/Tennis Center parking lots.
4. Provide Park and Ride lots for non-stop Express Bus service from the Aqueduct parking lot to Manhattan.
5. Improve service times for the Q31 from North Bayside to the Jamaica LIRR; it currently runs every 20-30 minutes but never on schedule.
6. Add buses on the Q28 line during school day afternoons due to increase in passengers from Bayside High School.
7. Improve Q79 service on Little Neck Parkway from the Little Neck LIRR station especially during evening rush hours. The MTA should again propose that the Q79 run south to the LIRR station in Floral Park. Use smaller buses here and in other low volume areas, to conserve energy.
8. Add bus service to link neighborhoods with the LIRR Stations at Douglaston and Auburndale.
9. During rush hours increase limited stop bus service in Eastern Queens so that the ride from the subway stops at Kew Gardens, Jamaica or Flushing is shorter.