

**Testimony of Joseph J. Lhota, MTA Chairman  
before the New York City Council's Committee on Transportation  
Thursday, March 8, 2018 at 9:30 a.m.**

Good morning, Chairman Rodriguez and members of the City Council. My name is Joe Lhota and I am joined by MTA Managing Director Ronnie Hakim. We are here at City Council Speaker Corey Johnson's invitation to discuss the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2018 Preliminary Budget as it relates to the MTA's budget.

This year, the MTA's operating budget is about \$16 billion. Close to one billion of that will come from New York City, representing about 6.5 percent of the MTA's budget. Funding from New York City—which is only used in New York City—supports the operations of MTA New York City Transit, MTA Bus, and the Staten Island Railway. It is also used to help us maintain commuter rail stations within New York City. The break-out of the one billion dollars in operating funding from New York City is as follows:

- \$45 million to partially offset free or reduced fares for New York City school children. This amount has remained flat since 1996, and we have had numerous fare increases since then.
- \$14 million for our reduced-fare program for the elderly. This amount has remained flat since 1978.
- \$189 million for paratransit, representing only 35 percent of its cost;
- \$95 million for station maintenance at the 36 commuter rail stations in the city;
- \$161 million to pay the local match for State aid payments;
- \$498 million to reimburse the MTA for the cost of MTA Bus—the agency the MTA created at the city's request to run the private bus lines; and
- \$64 million to reimburse the MTA for the cost of the Staten Island Railway.

In general, much of what we get from New York City's budget is tied to inequitable formulas. As a result, the percentage burden borne by the city has decreased dramatically over the years. Paratransit funding is a perfect example. The money we get from New York City to finance our paratransit operations is capped at the lesser of 33 percent of eligible operating expenses, or 120 percent of prior year reimbursement. Here's what this formula has meant for the MTA over the years.

In 1994, paratransit service cost a total of nearly \$15 million. The MTA paid nearly \$8 million of that, representing 53 percent of the total. In 2017, these costs reached \$474 million, and the MTA paid about \$288 million—an increase of about 3,500 percent, and over \$100 million more than the City's share.

Along with weakening operational support to the MTA, New York City's budget does not fund New York City Transit's Subway Action Plan, despite our request last July, when we introduced the plan to combat declining subway performance. After Governor Cuomo declared a State of Emergency to deal with the crisis, our first course of action was clear: We had to start by reversing the decline. That's why, as one of my first acts as Chairman, we introduced this plan—to first stabilize and then modernize our subway system.

We are implementing the plan's first phase now, and it is working. We are improving wait times, increasing the distance between subway train breakdowns, and reducing the number of major incidents resulting from signal, track, and power failures. We are tracking our progress and reporting it to the public on our new dashboard. But let me be clear: I know we are far from finished. I know we have a long way to go before New Yorkers experience and feel the improvement. And I will not be satisfied until they do.

There are two main reasons why the plan is working. First, the improvements we are seeing can be directly attributed to the extraordinary efforts of our transit workers and managers, working day and night under the plan to install miles of new track and repair thousands of right-of-way and station defects. Second, our new leadership team—in place for less than a year—has dramatically improved the way we schedule and coordinate work along and within our tracks. We revamped this entire process to maximize productive work time and reduce unnecessary overtime. We are saving even more time by ensuring that we have all the necessary people and equipment ready to go at a job site, exactly when they're needed.

The end result is that we are getting more work done, more efficiently, and saving hundreds of millions of dollars in the process. The best part is, we are expanding these new work rules to other subway work. All new contracts will have these new rules. We are accomplishing meaningful, productive work on weeknights. And we are going to get years' worth of deferred work completed this year.

Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget includes capital and operating support to fully fund the State's half of the \$836 million Subway Action Plan. New York City's budget makes no such commitment. As a result, the benefits of this plan—as strong as they are to date—have been muted, and we are unable to implement the plan as quickly as we originally envisioned it.

This lack of support is especially disappointing in light of an analysis issued in August from the City Comptroller showing a thriving city economy. New York City's economy grew 3.3 percent in the second quarter of 2017. That out-performed the nation's 2.6 percent growth rate in the quarter, and it more than doubled the city's growth rate in the second quarter of 2016. The number of employed New Yorkers jumped by more than 87,000, the largest increase in more than three decades.

These new New Yorkers—and newly-employed New Yorkers—are using our subway and bus system every day, just like most New Yorkers who have been here forever. And it makes me wonder, Councilmembers: What better time than now to invest in our transit system? What better time to invest in a plan that's working—that's fixing our subways? And if we can't invest more now, when can we?

The challenges facing our nation's oldest transit system stem in no small part from decades of underinvestment. But if there's any good news in these challenges, it is that they have spurred a much-needed broader look at the weaknesses inherent in the MTA's financing model. They have clearly shown that the MTA needs new and consistent revenue sources, because we simply cannot keep limping from crisis to crisis.

In this regard, we are encouraged by the robust conversation happening now about congestion pricing as a solution to both New York City's traffic woes and the MTA's financing needs. The Governor has also proposed legislation that would allow the MTA to capture some of the real estate value that results—undeniably and directly—from the renewal, enhancement, and expansion of our city's indispensable transit system.

Collaboration with the City is essential, and we want to build on our strong partnership with the City Council to address these long-term challenges. Because as everyone here knows, our transit network is fundamental to the economic well-being of New York City. It is what allows New York City to have about four times the job and population density of the next largest city in the nation. It enables the most valuable real estate market in the nation. It is, quite simply, the fuel that powers our \$1.4 trillion regional economy, which makes up 11 percent of our nation's GDP. Overall, I'd say the city gets quite a bargain from its investments in our subway and bus network.

To wrap up, Councilmembers, I want to thank Speaker Johnson for the invitation to join you today. Mr. Speaker, the MTA very much looks forward to working with you, with Chairman Rodriguez, and with

all the members of this Council to strengthen the partnership between the MTA and New York City that contributes so much to this whole region's success. And I want to once again assure you all: I will not be satisfied until the MTA is back on track. Now, my colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions you may have.

**NYC DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TESTIMONY  
PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CAPITAL BUDGET  
March 8, 2018**

Good afternoon Chair Rodriguez and Chair Gibson and members of the Transportation Committee and the Subcommittee on Capital Budget. I am Polly Trottenberg, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation. With me today are Elisabeth Franklin, Associate Commissioner for Budget and Capital Program Management, and Rebecca Zack, Assistant Commissioner for Intergovernmental and Community Affairs.

I am pleased to be here on behalf of Mayor Bill de Blasio to testify on DOT's Fiscal Year 2019 Preliminary Expense Budget and Capital Plan. We are also very happy to be testifying today before the Council's new Subcommittee on Capital Budget.

**Introduction**

This proposed budget will support DOT in its mission to provide for the safe, efficient, and environmentally sustainable movement of people and goods in the New York City. And it will maintain and enhance the transportation infrastructure crucial to our economic vitality and the quality of life of our customers—City residents, commuters, and visitors. This budget also comes at a time when we are responding to a number of major transportation challenges facing our City.

First, our continued work on Vision Zero. I want to acknowledge this week's tragic crash in Park Slope in which we lost two young children and three others were injured. We are all mourning this heartbreaking loss and will be taking action.

I have directed my planning and engineering experts to analyze and redesign the 9th Street corridor, including protected bike lanes and other pedestrian safety treatments. We will have a more detailed plan to unveil in the next few weeks. We will then present our plan to local residents, businesses and the community board next month to gather valuable input, and plan to implement as soon as the weather permits.

At the same time, the Mayor has promised to roll out a set of legislative proposals to address the legal loopholes that allow deadly drivers to remain on New York's roads.

This terrible crash is reminder that even after four straight years of declining roadway fatalities under Vision Zero, our work is far from done.

I will also discuss the impending L train tunnel closure, now a little over a year away, tackling increased congestion as our City experiences record growth, and how DOT and NYCT can work together to improve bus service and reverse the trend of declining bus ridership.

And I will discuss some of our major capital challenges, including the need to reconstruct the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway from Atlantic Avenue to Sands Street, including the famous

Robert Moses-era triple-cantilever. And we are doing all of this while operating and maintaining the vast roadway and bridge network which New Yorkers rely on every day.

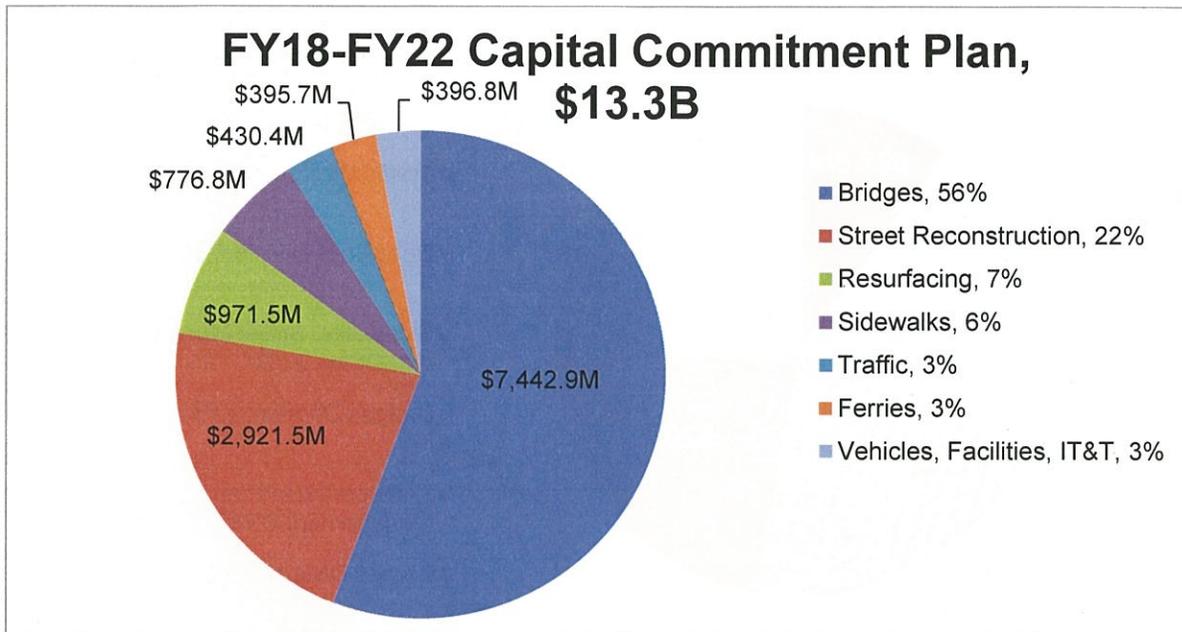
In the FY18-FY22 capital budget, the Mayor commits to historic investments in infrastructure with a focus on both Vision Zero and maintaining a state of good repair. DOT has dramatically increased the size of our capital program while we have doubled the rate at which we initiate construction. And we continue to improve our delivery of capital projects to save time and taxpayer dollars.

To that end, I will also be talking today about several areas where we have identified savings and efficiencies.

## **BUDGET OVERVIEW**

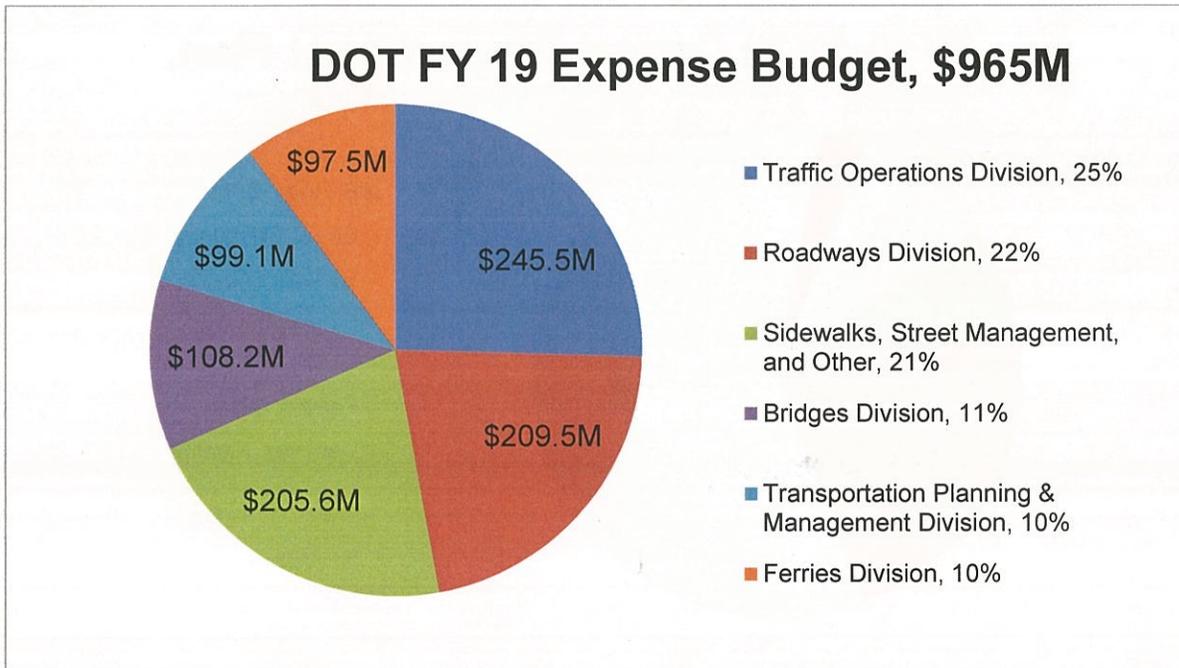
DOT's proposed capital plan for FY18-FY22 is \$13.3 billion and includes:

- \$7.4 billion for bridge reconstruction and rehabilitation, the largest component of our capital portfolio.
- \$3.9 billion for street reconstruction and resurfacing. Street reconstruction projects are initiated and scoped by DOT and then designed and constructed by DDC. These projects address degraded or deficient streets that require more than resurfacing. Street reconstructions are also by their nature very disruptive, complex and costly.
- \$776 million for sidewalk and pedestrian ramp repair and reconstruction. This includes an increasing commitment to upgrade the City's 300,000 plus pedestrian ramps to A.D.A. standards.
- \$396 million for the Staten Island Ferry, including funds to drydock our ferryboats and keep our docks, terminals, and piers in good repair.
- \$430 million for streetlights and signals. This includes upgrades to LED lighting, and new signal installations as part of Vision Zero.
- \$397 million for the facilities and equipment needed to support DOT's growing operations.



For DOT's \$965 million FY19 Preliminary Financial Plan the Mayor is proposing:

- \$245 million for traffic operations, including signals, streetlights, and parking;
- \$209 million for roadway maintenance;
- \$206 million for other DOT operations, including sidewalk management and inspection;
- \$108 million for bridge maintenance and inspection;
- \$99 million for transportation planning and management, including installation of street signs and roadway markings; and
- \$98 million for ferry operations and maintenance.



### **CHALLENGES AHEAD**

Now, I want to walk through some of the challenges I mentioned.

#### ***Vision Zero***

Thanks to our great partnership with the NYPD and our other sister agencies as well as the Council, as you all know, traffic deaths have declined by 27 percent in the last four years, with pedestrian fatalities down 44 percent. And New York City has bucked the national trend where fatalities have increased 15 percent over the same time period. However, as we saw with the tragic crash this week, more remains to be done: 217 people lost their lives in vehicle crashes last year and we are committed to continuing the aggressive pace of our safety work under Vision Zero.

DOT's proposed Vision Zero capital budget is \$1.5 billion in FY18-22, including \$57.5 million in new funding approved in this January Plan. The expense budget contains nearly \$270 million over that same time period.

This past year we completed 114 safety improvement projects—up 138 percent over the pre-Vision Zero five year average—installed nearly 25 miles of protected bike lanes, implemented left turn calming treatments at 110 intersections, and installed 832 pedestrian head start signal timings.

With the release of our *Safer Cycling* report in July 2017, DOT has committed to building 75 bike lane miles in ten Priority Bicycle Districts by 2022. These areas represent neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens, outside of the City central core, such as Bed-Stuy, East New York, Sheepshead Bay, Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, and Ridgewood, that have comparatively less

cycling infrastructure but where we discovered that a full 25 percent of the City's serious bicycle crashes were concentrated.

And overall, as part of our Strategic Plan, we will continue to implement at least 50 miles of bike lanes a year citywide, including at least 10 protected miles.

On the capital side several exciting projects are moving forward. This budget adds \$13.4 million for the Downtown Far Rockaway project, bringing the funding for the project up to more than \$31 million. Work will be underway this calendar year on portions of the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway and the second phase of the reconstruction of Tillary Street.

And our Great Streets initiative will continue:

- Working with DDC, Atlantic Avenue Phase 1 was registered in late Fall 2017, with the construction start anticipated in Spring 2018.
- Meanwhile, the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, formerly the borough's highest-fatality street, has gone nearly three years without a traffic death—and Phase 3 of its reconstruction was registered in FY17, with Phase 4 slated to begin in FY19.
- The plan for Brooklyn's Fourth Avenue is being re-designed to include protected bike lanes, with DOT's work expected to begin there this year—and anticipated capital construction start in Fall 2019.
- Of course, the Great Street that has gotten the most transformative makeover is Queens Boulevard. The "Boulevard of Death" is no more—we have now seen three years without a cyclist or pedestrian fatality. DDC's work to make our fixes there permanent will begin in FY2020.

These comprehensive overhauls of four critical corridors once known for their sky-high rates of pedestrian injuries and fatalities have allowed us to do more than make permanent safety enhancements. The changes have brought livable, vibrant, green, and high-quality streets to underserved neighborhoods—an invaluable contribution to the long-term culture change needed to support Vision Zero.

Lastly, on the topic of Vision Zero, I want to remind the Council that state authorization for our life-saving speed camera program expires on July 25<sup>th</sup> of this year. Since the program began over four years ago, it has reduced speeding violations by an average of 63 percent where cameras are deployed.

The City is working hard to advocate for the re-authorization and expansion of this vital program this session up in Albany. Last year, the Council sent a strong signal of support with a Home Rule message, and we ask for your help and support again this year. Speed cameras have saved lives, and this law must not be allowed to lapse.

### ***L Train Tunnel Closure***

As you know, starting in April of next year, 275,000 daily L Train customers will be deeply affected by the 15-month closure of the L line from 8th Avenue in Manhattan to Bedford Avenue

in Brooklyn. Hundreds of thousands more who may not now ride the L will nonetheless experience significant spillover effects—through increased congestion on alternative subways and streets.

As you may recall from the testimony I offered here at the Council in December with MTA Managing Director Ronnie Hakim, DOT has been working closely with our partners at New York City Transit. We have proposed an aggressive menu of travel options including increased subway service, alternative buses that will use bus-priority lanes, and HOV restrictions on the Williamsburg Bridge. All of this will be complemented by protected bicycle lanes in Brooklyn and Manhattan, and a new ferry route connecting the two boroughs.

At our presentation in December we laid out detailed proposals for a busway on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and a protected two-way bike lane on 13<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan. Since then, at the request of the Speaker and other elected officials representing affected Manhattan neighborhoods, we have publicly provided the traffic analyses that undergirded those plans.

We have also now announced our proposed plans for protected bike lanes on Grand Street in Williamsburg. Because Grand Street offers the best route to link the Brooklyn terminus of L service to the Williamsburg Bridge, we know we have to get it right. Our plan provides for protected bike lanes in both directions on Grand, allows for local deliveries, and keeps buses moving to and from the Williamsburg Bridge by effectively preventing Grand's use by through traffic.

DOT and New York City Transit have also continued an extensive and spirited public outreach campaign. Our open houses in Manhattan and Brooklyn, attended by nearly a thousand people, have been supplemented by dozens of smaller stakeholder meetings with elected officials, local residents, businesses, and major institutions.

NYCT President Andy Byford and I have spoken to a lot of very passionate people who both support and oppose our proposed mitigation plans. We are taking everything we have heard into account, and in the weeks ahead, plan to host more town hall events before we present the next set of refinements to our plan.

DOT's work on the necessary street changes will begin this summer, and our goal is to be substantially complete before winter. Throughout the 15-month period of the closure we will closely monitor and evaluate the effects of our traffic management plans—and we will make adjustments along the way. We are committed to working closely with all stakeholders to address any unanticipated effects.

### ***Congestion***

Now, let me turn to congestion. As you know, the City, with its thriving economy, has attracted more visitors, workers, and residents than ever before. Since 1990, we have added 1.2 million people to our population—the equivalent of a city nearly the size of Dallas. Our subways, streets, sidewalks and crosswalks are busier than ever, and construction and increased deliveries have added even more to the mix.

It is also now quite clear that the rapid growth of the for-hire vehicle industry has contributed to congestion, particularly in the Manhattan core. And in all boroughs except Manhattan, the number of registered passenger vehicles has risen faster than the rate of population growth.

We have heard loud and clear—from community boards, elected officials, businesses, motorists, bus riders, and pedestrians—that New Yorkers are frustrated by congestion and its impact on their daily lives.

For the City's part, DOT has moved forward with the Mayor's congestion plan announced last October—using the tools at our disposal to aggressively address key congestion hotspots.

Earlier this week, NYPD Chief Thomas Chan and I announced installation of new “Don't Block the Box” markings and signage at 50 targeted locations, with aggressive enforcement by NYPD.

Later this month we will be rolling out new “Clear Curb” delivery restrictions on two key corridors, Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn and Roosevelt Avenue in Queens, restricting curbside parking and loading on both sides of the street during peak morning and evening hours.

Subsequently, in Midtown Manhattan, similar restrictions during peak morning and evening hours will go into effect in a zone from 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue to Madison Avenue, and 45<sup>th</sup> Street to 50<sup>th</sup> Street. In addition we will streamline curb regulations to allow loading on only one side of the street from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. weekdays on 11 crosstown streets, along with new turn lanes at intersections. In a move we know will particularly make cabdrivers happy, we have also lifted a number of banned turns that we think were contributing to Midtown congestion.

Turning to Albany, we welcome the robust discussion that has grown out of Governor Cuomo's commission on congestion, including a focus on commercial and for-hire vehicles, and the Mayor has expressed some openness to the latest set of congestion proposals.

As Mayor de Blasio has said, any congestion pricing plan that charges New Yorkers must prioritize the needs of the New York City subway and bus system. This includes a requirement that all proceeds are invested in mass transit and a mechanism for real input by the City of New York on transit projects and priorities—and not just a “nuclear option” veto at the end of the process. The Mayor has also said that any pricing scheme for passenger vehicles must take the needs of those who are low-income and those with disabilities.

I have been to both London and Stockholm and talked to those cities' experts who successfully implemented their pricing systems. Should the legislature pass some form of congestion pricing, DOT will diligently implement whatever is enacted.

In addition, the Mayor has urged the Legislature to consider expediting a surcharge on for-hire-vehicles and taxis as long as it is done in an industry-wide, equitable way.

Going back quickly to the subject of block-the-box, I also want to note that we were especially encouraged by the inclusion of new *automated* enforcement of block-the-box in Manhattan, among the Governor's 30-day budget amendments last month. This would empower New York

City to tackle and further expand enforcement of a violation that contributes to gridlock, especially in Midtown.

As Chief Chan and I noted Monday, manual policing of violations like block-the box can be effective, but automated enforcement is much more comprehensive. Cameras would allow violations to be issued without worsening congestion when summonses are written to drivers in a traffic lane.

In addition the City would also strongly support receiving broad authorization for the use of bus lane cameras in the proposed congestion zone. As members of this committee and others have said, speeding up buses in the midtown core is such an important priority and automated enforcement, which cities like London use, is a key element of that.

### ***Keeping buses moving***

On behalf of Mayor de Blasio, I want to say thank you to Chair Rodriguez and many of your colleagues for your letter of January 24 on the improvement of local bus service, which is a priority that the City shares. In my written response, I have provided a program update. I also want to today extend an offer for members of this committee to join me and DOT staff for a field trip to a future Select Bus Service (SBS) route—that will allow us to together experience some of the implementation opportunities and challenges first-hand. For today, I want to highlight several ways the City and the MTA are committed to working together for faster and more reliable bus service citywide.

SBS has been the best example of that partnership: over ten years and 15 SBS routes, our agencies have together improved travel times for over 300,000 daily riders by 10-30 percent, boosted ridership by 10 percent, provided more reliable service, generated very high customer satisfaction, and reduced crashes. To continue this progress, Mayor de Blasio announced in October that DOT and the MTA would grow SBS further with 21 new routes selected as part of a new *Bus Forward* plan.

As part of *Bus Forward* DOT and MTA also identified *local* non-SBS route segments that have low speeds, poor reliability, or particularly long and slow trips. Our two agencies will work together to target these segments using some of our best established techniques from both agencies, some of them learned from SBS: new dedicated bus lanes, queue jumps, and other traffic engineering changes.

As an MTA board member, I have also consistently pushed for the substantial expansion of all-door boarding on busy bus routes around the City, and am looking forward to the next generation contactless fare-payment system that will ease the technological conversion to all-door boarding for *all* buses.

We are also looking to enhance our efforts on Transit Signal Priority or TSP, where buses communicate with traffic signals to hold green lights or turn them green early. While we plan to quadruple our pace of TSP installations, we also want to make sure we do high quality work. Our traffic engineers need to do the data collection and analysis that will ensure bus riders the greatest travel-time benefits, while still promoting good overall traffic flow and protecting pedestrian safety.

## **PROJECT DELIVERY AND CAPITAL PROCESS**

Now I would like to discuss steps we have taken to improve capital project delivery while acknowledging more needs to be done. As a result of streamlining DOT's internal procedures and more advanced project management IT, I am proud we doubled our annual capital project commitment rate over the last three years from an average of 41 percent in FY08-14 to 79 percent in FY15-17. This greater efficiency comes as our entire capital plan doubled under Mayor de Blasio, from \$6.7 billion for FY13-FY17 in the April 2013 Capital Plan, to its current level of \$13.3 billion for FY18-FY22 in this January plan.

Of course, no discussion of capital projects would be complete without once again underscoring the importance of state design-build legislation, which would allow us to use a widely recognized, innovative best practice with the potential to reduce costs and project delivery times for our largest and most complicated capital construction projects.

Thanks to Speaker Johnson for joining Senator Kavanagh, Assemblywoman Simon, and so many others on the Brooklyn Heights Promenade to make the case last month. As I said then, design-build remains a top priority for the City, and the issue is particularly urgent right now, as time has almost run out on our most important capital project, the \$1.9 billion reconstruction of the BQE triple cantilever. Design-build is not only critical for the BQE, but could also be utilized for building new jail facilities in order to be able to close Rikers Island, and speed up repairs on NYCHA buildings.

When it comes to capital delivery, in addition to the street reconstruction work I highlighted earlier, I am happy to say that this past year we opened two new bridges. The City Island community has embraced the brand-new City Island Bridge, which opened on October 29, 2017. And the new Mill Basin Bridge along the Belt Parkway, which fully opened in December 2017, will maintain navigability for boats while replacing a moveable drawbridge that previously caused frustrating traffic back-ups each time it was raised.

And this past fiscal year DOT continued its record level of in-house street resurfacing with 1,324 lane miles resurfaced in FY17. We are on track to continue that record pace in FY18, and this budget maintains the previously increased funding to continue at 1,300 lane miles in FY19. As the Mayor noted when he joined a paving crew on Valentine Avenue in the Bronx last October, more paving means fewer potholes: pothole complaints are down 50 percent since 2014 and response times are down to less than two days.

Let me close by saying I believe there is much the Administration and the Council can do together to improve project delivery. Individually each step in the process for executing capital projects had an understandable and reasonable purpose at one time. But now the accumulation of each of these additional requirements taken together has made New York City's procurement and capital delivery process arguably the most complicated in the world. DOT stands ready to be a helpful and engaged participant in this discussion.

## **EFFICIENCIES**

Finally, I would like to talk about the combined total savings of \$14.9 million in FY18 and \$11.6 million in FY19 identified in this Preliminary Budget and the November Plan. The Mayor has again challenged City agencies to identify ways to reduce expenses, and DOT has worked

closely with the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget to find efficiencies in our operations.

For instance, using new technology, we have replaced many of our manual traffic counts with video, which is more accurate and produces better data. We are also continuing to shrink the amount of curbside signage, reducing clutter to make information clearer and more noticeable to drivers. We are replacing a graphic design contract with a new in-house staff position. Finally, we have taken additional steps to limit overtime. In total these efforts will save \$367,000 in FY18 and \$701,000 in FY 19 and beyond.

We have also recognized savings in the Parking Pay-by-Cell program that went Citywide in 2017. The vendor provided a no-cost bid, and we realized additional savings by delaying a new facility for our camera enforcement program, and other small contract savings. In total, these efforts will save \$3.1 million in both FY18 and FY19.

We found savings in our personnel budget as well. Due to the replacement of many older vehicles with newer models, we can delay filling some mechanic vacancies. The Citywide partial hiring freeze, delaying hires to fill many administrative and managerial vacancies, has also resulted in budget savings. Taken together, these efforts will collectively save \$2.6 million in FY18 and \$1.9 million in FY19.

#### **CONCLUSION**

We have many important challenges and opportunities to continue to keep New Yorkers moving safely, equitably, and sustainably while supporting our City's economic growth and prosperity. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and I will now be happy to answer any questions.

**Bus Turnaround Coalition Testimony  
New York City Council  
March 8, 2018**

**Panelists**

Jaqi Cohen, Straphangers Campaign  
Stephanie Veras, Riders Alliance

My name is Jaqi Cohen and I am the Campaign Coordinator for the Straphangers Campaign. I'm joined by my colleague Stephanie Burgos-Veras, Senior Organizer for the Riders Alliance. Our organizations, as well as TransitCenter and Tri-State Transportation Campaign, are members of the Bus Turnaround Coalition, dedicated to reversing the decline in bus service to get bus riders back on board. We thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

New York's subway system is in crisis. Today, the Council heard a request from MTA Chair Joseph Lhota for the city to contribute to the MTA's \$800 million Subway Action Plan. The Subway Action Plan is a set of short-term fixes designed to enhance maintenance and stabilize a faltering system. Actually restoring reliability to the subway will require full scale modernization of signals and subway cars and cost many billions of dollars.

When New Yorkers so sorely need a modern, functional, reliable subway, Chair Lhota's request for Subway Action Plan money is something of a red herring. Governor Andrew Cuomo controls the MTA and state budget process and he alone can lead us out of this crisis. Before having a conversation about an appropriate City contribution, Governor Cuomo should lay out and fund a credible plan to modernize our transit system.

The City doesn't control the subway, but it can make a huge difference in improving public transit, particularly by focusing on what the City can do to improve bus service.

In addition to its vaunted subway system, New York City is also home to the largest bus system in the country, providing more trips on average each day than Los Angeles, Chicago, and Philadelphia combined. Yet despite the size of its network, New York City's buses are some of the slowest and least reliable in the country, with overall performance declining year after year.

Bus service is a vital mode of transportation for 2.5 million New Yorkers, many of whom are low-income, live in outer boroughs without proximity to rapid transit, and do not have access to other modes of transportation. Additionally, New York City's entire bus fleet is ADA-compliant, unlike its subway system which is largely inaccessible for riders with disabilities. Bus service provides a critical link for these New Yorkers to access jobs, education, health services, and new opportunities.

New York City's buses have been in perpetual crisis. For years, bus riders have been subjected to longer waits and slower service. And for years, the MTA and NYC DOT have largely avoided this mounting crisis, failing to act to improve service or to reinvision a bus network that would bring New York City into the future.

This February, our coalition released route report cards that graded each local bus route on its average speed and reliability. Our findings? Out of 246 local bus routes, over 75% of received letter grades of D's or F's. New York City once again broke its own dismal record for slow bus service, with bus speeds declining from 7.3 miles per hour in 2015 to just under 7 miles per hour in 2017. "Bus bunching" (when multiple buses arrive at a stop at the same time after passengers have waited for delayed buses) has also continued to worsen. While 9.4 % of buses arrived bunched in October 2015, that number rose to 11.8% in October 2017.

Poor and unreliable service has resulted in riders abandoning bus service despite a growing city population. There were 6% fewer trips on buses in 2017 than the year prior, representing the worst single-year drop in bus ridership over the past 15 years.

Fortunately for riders, poor bus service doesn't have to be the norm. There are a myriad of solutions the City can take to turn around bus service and make it a viable transit option for all New Yorkers. Our coalition has outlined three key short-term solutions the City should take in 2018 to provide faster, more reliable, and overall better service for bus riders. They include:

**1. Installing more enforced bus lanes.** The use of dedicated lanes allows buses to travel faster and more efficiently on our city's most congested streets. The City should install bus lanes on the 10 local routes the Bus Turnaround has identified as priorities during the 2018 painting season, including:

- **B41** (Livingston Street, Cadman Plaza, Flatbush Avenue below Lincoln Ave)
- **Bx19** (Harlem 145th Street, 149th Street in the Bronx)
- **Q58** (Broadway, Corona, 108th Street)
- **Bx28/B38** (Gun Hill Road)
- **M57 and M31** (57th Street)
- **Bx9** (West Kingsbridge)
- **M101** (3rd Avenue bus lane)
- **Q66, Q69, Q100** (21st Street in LIC/Astoria)
- **B35** (Church Avenue)
- **S48** (Victory Boulevard)

Effective enforcement measures are critical to ensuring the success of bus lanes. NYPD and DOT should work together to jointly enforce lane restrictions with Quick-Curb traffic barriers, bus lane enforcement cameras, and strategic patrols.

**2. Expedite the rollout of transit signal priority.** Optimizing traffic signals with transit signal priority will allow buses to keep to schedule by reducing the amount of time they spend at red lights. The City should accelerate the rollout of Transit Signal Priority to 60 routes by 2020.

**3. Expand the number of countdown clocks** (with real-time passenger information) to the 1,000 busiest stops by 2020. Bus riders are often left in the dark, waiting for an indeterminate amount of time for their bus to arrive. Installing countdown clocks and adding useful customer resources, like bus maps and route information, to each bus stop citywide makes taking the bus easier and more intuitive for riders, and helps provide for an all-around better travel experience.

As New York City continues to grow, improving and expanding bus service is riders' best chance for a better commute. Building new subways or other rail systems is simply too slow and too costly to be the only solution, or even the main solution. In order to accommodate future population growth, reduce our carbon footprint, and increase transportation equity, New Yorkers need a robust bus system that prioritizes people.

Bus service in New York City hasn't changed much in 40 years, so there's plenty of room for improvement. It's time for New York City to re-envision its bus system and provide riders with the fast, reliable, and accessible service they deserve.



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## Energy Vision Testimony

### NYC Transportation Committee; Preliminary Budget Hearing March 8, 2018

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By Matthew P. Tomich, President, Energy Vision

Thank you to the Chair and the Committee for this opportunity to testify on the MTA's bus transit fleet procurement plan. I am here on behalf of Energy Vision, a New York-based national non-profit environmental organization recognized as a leading expert on alternative fuels for heavy-duty vehicles. I hope our perspectives will be useful.

Four years ago, New York City committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including from transportation: 40% by 2030 and 80% by 2050 from a 2005 benchmark. The City also committed to having the cleanest air of any major city in the country by 2050. Yet, unfortunately, the MTA's 2017 commitment of roughly \$360 million for the purchase of more than 600 new NYCT buses — 590 of which were to be diesel — would take our City in the opposite direction.

Fortunately, there are non-diesel options that exist. The MTA has successfully operated over 800 natural gas buses which are fully commercial. These buses generate 22% lower greenhouse gas emissions than diesel, and over time remain lower emitters of health-threatening pollutants including particulates, nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide than diesel. So why continue to buy diesel models when better alternatives exist?

Piloting electric buses, as many have suggested, is one good idea to see how well the technology works in NYC, and how high up-front costs of electric buses can be addressed.

But new natural gas buses, equipped with advanced "Near Zero" emission engines would give you even better results than the natural gas buses MTA currently operates. This new engine, certified by the California Air Resources Board and the US EPA, cuts greenhouse gas emissions by 30% (rather than 22%) and its emissions of particulates and NOx are 90% below EPA allowable levels for health-damaging nitrogen oxides and particulates. The engines are also 50-80% quieter than diesels. All these benefits would improve the quality of life for New York City residents and for those who drive and maintain the vehicles.

The City also has the opportunity to use a fuel with even more advantages than conventional natural gas in these new buses. That is "biomethane," also called renewable natural gas (RNG). Today, it is a fully commercial choice as is the "Near Zero" engine.

Biomethane is made by collecting and purifying the methane-rich biogases emitted by decomposing organic wastes, such as food waste and municipal wastewater, of which there is plenty in New York City. This waste-derived fuel is chemically similar to conventional natural gas, but it is not a fossil fuel.

Its benefits include:

- Since it is made from a renewable resource, it requires no drilling. It in fact turns what Americans have long considered “garbage” (organic wastes) into a valuable energy feedstock.
- It is as clean burning as CNG.
- Its lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions are the lowest of any commercial fuel today. It cuts these from 70%-300% compared to diesel. How is more than 100% possible? That is the case when food waste or manure are the source of the biogas. With these feedstocks, the amount of biogas captured to make the fuel exceeds tailpipe emissions by the vehicles using it, making it a “net-carbon-negative” fuel!
- A recent UC Riverside study found that a biomethane vehicle over its lifecycle can actually have cleaner air and lower life-cycle greenhouse gas emissions than an electric vehicle powered by grid electricity.
- And there is a lot of biomethane fuel available. While many Americans do not realize this, more than 20,000 buses and trucks in the US run on biomethane fuel right now.

While Near Zero engine buses or trucks cost somewhat more than diesel models (\$40,000 or more depending on models and features), their many benefits, especially when run on biomethane, are inspiring fleet owners and operators to make a switch. Los Angeles Metro just purchased 295 of them, in parallel with a pilot of 95 all-electric buses. LA Metro has an option to convert its entire 2,200 bus fleet to RNG. Santa Monica’s “Big Blue Bus” fleet has committed to converting completely, and more municipalities are following suit.

Biomethane could be delivered to NYC buses from refueling stations that dispense conventional natural gas today, at cost parity and likely from the same vendor. Not only can new buses use it, but the 800 existing MTA buses running on conventional natural gas could as well. That would require just a simple change in fuel procurement contracts.

In the foreseeable future, the City’s own organic waste streams could be converted to biomethane fuel. By capturing and utilizing waste-derived methane, RNG is the only fuel option that offers a combined climate, clean air *and* solid waste solution for municipalities.

In the short-term, MTA’s Spring Creek Depot natural gas refueling facility is already serving buses in East New York, Brooklyn, convenient to the L Line. Running additional buses needed during the L train shutdown on biomethane and Near Zero engines would be a great opportunity for the City to demonstrate this technology, and its commitment to clean air and climate change mitigation.

Energy Vision’s research clearly shows that the combination of biomethane and Near Zero engines is a clean, heavy-duty fueling solution ready to go today. We encourage the Transportation Committee to urge the MTA to pursue this kind of zero and near-zero emission technology during the L train shutdown and beyond. Without them, the City will be hard pressed to meet its important and ambitious sustainability goals.



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#garmentdistrict

**Barbara A. Blair, President Garment District Alliance  
Testimony at the Committee on Transportation Committee and  
Subcommittee on Capital Budget  
Thursday, March 8, 2018**

Good evening. Thank you chair persons Rodriguez and Gibson. My name is Barbara Blair. I am the president of the Garment District Alliance and I am here this evening to urge you to support the request of DOT for funding for an approved permanent plaza in the Garment District.

The Garment District embraced the permanent plazas when they were created by DOT in 2009 for several reasons. The plazas addressed a desperate need for public space in the district. Over the last 20 years we have seen tremendous growth in the number of jobs in the Garment District, the number of pedestrians on our avenues and the construction of 37 new hotels. The Garment District plazas on Broadway between 36<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Streets are the only public space in a 38 block area that is bursting at the seams with tenants and visitors alike. There was literally no place to sit before the establishment of these public spaces. Likewise, this corridor is the pedestrian connection between Times Square and Herald Square and should appropriately blend these midtown-west districts.

Since the temporary plazas were created, we have noted some unintended, negative consequences which need to be addressed.

The narrow sidewalks in the Garment District have created an unsafe condition as pedestrians are forced to walk in the traffic lanes due to lack of capacity on the sidewalks.

The plazas are unlit at night, and as a result we have homeless encampments during the warm months. Because the area is dark, the planters provide a sheltering-type of environment, and because late at night the plazas are not as populated as, for example, Times Square, they have become a magnet for the homeless. On warm nights we can have between 50-60 homeless sleeping on the Garment District Plazas. We believe that illuminating the plazas will, at the very least, mitigate this problem.

Also, when it rains, Broadway has severe ponding conditions that force pedestrians unsafely into traffic and intersections to avoid being ankle deep in water. Reconstructing Broadway with a permanent plaza will address and mitigate these infrastructure, safety and social conditions.

We understand from DOT that their request to fund a permanent plaza, which was approved in 2016, was not allocated in the first round of negotiations. This is a significant setback for the area and is of concern to our businesses and property owners. Over the last nine years the Alliance has spent well over \$4 million to activate, beautify, and maintain the plazas so as to integrate this neighborhood into the midtown cityscape. We did this in the good faith belief that with DOT and the City, there was a shared vision and commitment to create a dynamic public space that benefits the local community, addresses congestion and safety issues and improves the district for all New Yorkers and countless visitors from around the world.

I, and the board of directors of the Garment District Alliance, strongly urge you to support DOT's request and fund the Garment District permanent plazas.



**Testimony of  
Matt Kerschner, Graduate Policy Intern  
AARP New York**

**New York City Council  
Committee on Transportation**

**Fiscal Year 2019 Preliminary Budget**

**March 8, 2018**

**City Hall  
New York, New York**

**Contact: Chris Widelo (212) 407-3737 | [cwidelo@aarp.org](mailto:cwidelo@aarp.org)**

Good morning Chairperson Rodriguez and members of the Transportation Committee. My name is Matt Kerschner I am a graduate policy intern at AARP currently working towards a Masters of Public Administration degree at Columbia University. On behalf of our 800,000 members age 50 and older in New York City, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the topic of unpaid family caregivers.

New York City's population is aging. Nearly one-third of residents in the five boroughs is over the age of 50 and that group is expected to grow by nearly 20 percent by 2040. The growth for the 65-plus age group is projected to be even more dramatic, with a whopping 40% increase.

And, our city is not just aging, we are becoming more diverse. African Americans, Blacks, Hispanics, Latinos, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders account for 62 percent of New York City residents 50-plus and half of all those 65-plus living here were born in a foreign country.

We know from our recent report, *Disrupting Racial and Ethnic Disparities: Solutions for New Yorkers Age 50+*, developed in partnership with New York Urban League, NAACP, Hispanic Federation and Asian American Federation, that people of color over the age of 50 experience stark disparities in the areas of health, economic security, and the ability to live and remain in their communities.

All this means we must make meeting the needs of older New Yorkers a bigger priority. We are grateful to the increased and baselined funding increases made to the DFTA budget last year, but aging is not just a DFTA issue.

That is why we are here today along with some of our 800,000 New York City members. And that is why we plan to attend budget hearings for a host of agencies. It is time for the needs of aging New Yorkers to be addressed across city government.

After all, meeting the needs of aging residents and helping them to stay in their neighborhoods is critical to retaining their tremendous economic, social, cultural and family contributions. And, it is also the right thing to do.

One of the keys to helping our older neighbors to continue to live in the neighborhoods they call home is having good, reliable, accessible transportation.

We have a long way to go.

AARP's "Livability Index" found that in low income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color accessible public transportation is inadequate or lacking. For aging New Yorkers to be able to get to doctor's appointments, work, to go grocery shopping, they need improved transportation options. That means more elevators and escalators at subway stations and more reliable buses.

But we also need to make other improvements, which will hopefully be addressed throughout the day today.

According to the City's latest update on the [Age-friendly NYC: New Commitments for a City for All Ages](#) initiative, the plan was to expand transportation options through a pilot program that gives seniors a \$1000/year credit for car service. Did the pilot launch? And how is the City tracking the pilot's success? The city also planned to expand dispatched wheelchair accessible taxi service across the five boroughs. Has that happened? Is it helping wheelchair-bound residents ages 50-plus?

And, our recent disparities report found that changes are needed at the street level: neighborhoods of color have more pedestrian accidents due to unsafe street crossings. Those crossings need to be addressed, beyond what Vision Zero is already doing. And other street scape improvements, including curb cuts, pedestrian islands, need to be made to make the streets safer for aging residents.

The bottom line is that we hope that all the discussion that will happen here today and at all budget hearings will consider the needs of aging New Yorkers. Let's disrupt aging together and help ensure all New Yorkers can age safely and happily in the city they love.

**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 Divisions. 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 (NYCDOT) 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.

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For more information:  
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I represent: MTA

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Name: Doug Johnson

Address: Budget Director

I represent: MTA

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Bonnie Hakim

Address: MANAGING DIRECTOR

I represent: MTA

Address: JOE KHOTA

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I represent: ENERGY VISION

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Name: MARIO GALVETT

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION

Address: LOCAL 100

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Name: JACI COHEN - STRAPHANGERS CAMPAIGN

Address: 9 MURRAY ST NY NY

I represent: STRAPHANGERS

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

ON PANEL w/  
STEPHANIE  
BUREOS-VERA  
BUSES

one panel w/  
Jaqi  
Cohen

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Name: Stephanie Burgos-Veras

Address: 121 Sixth Avenue, NY 10013

I represent: Riders Alliance

Address: " "

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Name: ~~Michele Carter~~ Sherlock Bender

Address: 195 Montague Street

I represent: Transport Workers Union Local 100

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: MARK KERSCHNER STRANGERS CAMPAIGN

Address: 106 W 186th St New York NY 10025

I represent: AARP New York

Address: 750 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

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Name: Michele Gillian

Address: 117-11 234th Street

I represent: Transport Workers Union Local 100

Address: 195 Matague Blk

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Name: Rebecca Zack

Address: Asst. Comm. for Intergov

I represent: and Community Aff.

Address: NYC DOT

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Name: Polly Trottenberg

Address: Commissioner

I represent: NYC DOT

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Elisabeth Franklin

Address: Associate Comm for Budget -

I represent: Capital Program Mngmt.

Address: NYC DOT

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Name: Barbara Blair

Address: Garment District Alliance

I represent: 209 W 39 St N, 10018

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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