

Bus Turnaround:

2018



FAST BUS, FAIR CITY



Achieving Mayor de Blasio's goal to make New York City "the fairest big city in America" will require creating more equitable access to the city for all New Yorkers. Improving bus service citywide will increase economic and social opportunity for more than two million daily bus riders and is a powerful tool for inclusion and equity. The release of the bus component of MTA's Fast Forward plan makes it more important than ever for MTA and NYC Department of Transportation to work hand in hand to improve citywide bus service.

Bus riders in New York generally have lower incomes and are more likely to be people of color and immigrants than subway riders. The average bus rider earns \$28,455 a year versus an average annual income of \$40,000 among subway riders. 75% of bus riders are people of color, 55% are foreign born, and 12% are elderly (US Census Bureau). Increasing housing costs have pushed many lower-income residents to the outskirts of the city, often far from the subway. Many riders endure commutes of more than an hour each way on slow and unreliable buses (Pratt Center for Community Development).

The cost of poor bus service is more than a few extra minutes at a bus stop. It's steadily diminishing access to the city and increasing social isolation. In a city where time is money, bus riders are unfairly penalized when buses show up late or take longer than they should to reach their destinations. As the City works to improve access and opportunity for all New Yorkers, creating a robust local bus system is essential. With 238 local bus routes, our bus system operates in every neighborhood--connecting two million bus riders to jobs, school, and healthcare.

New York City's buses are the slowest of any big city in the country, wait times are unpredictable, and by both measures things are getting worse. Average local bus speeds dropped from 7.0 mph to 6.7 mph from 2015 to 2017. A whopping 13.4% of local, frequent buses arrived bunched in October 2017, compared to 10.7% in October two years earlier (TransitCenter). When bunching occurs, bus riders have to wait longer than expected for a bus to arrive, most likely without a bench to sit on or a shelter to protect them from harsh weather.

In 2008, the City started its Select Bus Service (SBS) initiative, which includes bus lanes, off board payment collection and, in some cases, transit signal priority--to date, 15 local routes have been upgraded to SBS. The current average speed of SBS buses is 8.1 mph (May and October 2017), an improvement over regular bus service, but still unacceptably slow. The effectiveness of SBS is undermined by a lack of enforcement of bus only lanes, which are often blocked by cars and trucks and are used by the police for parking. Select Bus Service is an inadequate response to the systemwide crisis facing buses in New York, leaving millions of bus riders without access to reliable public transportation.

There is much more the City can do to improve service for two million daily bus riders, especially since its jurisdiction includes the city's streets and traffic signals. With the Fast Forward plan issued this spring by New York City Transit (NYCT), bus riders can expect ambitious reforms that will modernize our bus network. Changes planned by NYCT include a citywide redesign of bus routes, speeding up boarding by letting riders use all doors on local buses, equipping the entire bus fleet with transit signal priority software, and proactively managing buses on the road. But in order for these features to be successful, measures like bus lanes with effective enforcement, dedicated transitways, and transit signal priority at traffic lights are crucial. These are some of the most powerful tools the city can use to accelerate bus riders' trips and meet the administration's goals of fairness and access for all New Yorkers.

The Bus Turnaround Campaign has produced a bus plan for a fair city, detailing the steps that the City can take to dramatically improve access for bus riders. We suggest speed and reliability goals that, while ambitious, are achievable through the practical strategies outlined below and will make New York a more inclusive city.

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Turnaround 5-year bus service improvement targets:

Bus speed goal:

- **11 miles per hour (minimum) average speed for local routes. The current average local bus speed in NYC is 6.7 mph (TransitCenter).**

- In New York, buses are far slower than in peer cities like London, Chicago, and Boston, where local buses move between 9-10mph (Transport for London & National Transit Database). In Los Angeles, buses cruise at 10.5mph on average (National Transit Database).

-Such a speed goal is feasible only if ambitious measures are taken to prioritize buses- in a city as dense as New York, it's a priority that bus riders deserve.

Bus reliability goal:

- **5% (maximum) average systemwide bunching rate on high-frequency routes.**
- **No more than 1 in 20 buses should arrive within a quarter of the scheduled headway of the previous bus. The current average bunching rate among local, frequent bus service in NYC is 13.4% (TransitCenter).**

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1. There are currently approximately 120 miles of bus lanes in NYC. Make NYC a world leader in terms of prioritizing the movement of people on our streets by adding 100 new miles of bus lanes in the next 5 years, with 60 miles to be completed by the end of Mayor de Blasio's second term.

Short term: Expand bus lanes to at least 10 additional priority routes in 2018 and maintain or increase that pace for the following five years.

Criteria: Bus lanes should be rolled out first on highest ridership and most routinely delayed routes.

Bus lanes are one of the most powerful tools the City has to prioritize the movement of people on city streets. The City has installed bus lanes along SBS routes, but this feature should be expanded citywide to increase the number of bus riders who benefit from such priority. Beyond benefitting bus riders, setting aside priority lanes that are also available for use by the NYPD and FDNY/EMS would dramatically improve city agencies' ability to respond quickly to emergencies in congested areas.





2. Enforce bus lanes by ticketing unauthorized vehicles that obstruct them and reforming the practice of bulk discounted ticketing for large truck fleets.

The mayor should take swift action on a plan to protect NYC's bus lane network. The City should compel NYPD to step up enforcement and stop blocking bus lanes.

Likewise, the City should reform the practice of bulk discounted ticketing for large truck fleets through the Stipulated Fine and Commercial Abatement Programs, which encourage illegal parking. At the same time, the City must update its curbside management protocols to accommodate the rise in delivery vehicles and congestion.

Finally, the City should make significant expansion of bus lane enforcement cameras a top priority of its state legislative agenda for 2019. Automated bus lane camera enforcement is unbiased and can never escalate beyond the scope of the bus lane violation itself. While a fair city is rightly wary of increased friction between New Yorkers and NYPD officers, camera enforcement of bus lanes will never result in a pretextual arrest nor lead to negative immigration consequences for a bus lane violator. The single goal of bus lane camera enforcement is to put itself out of business by fairly and reliably conditioning drivers not to commit bus lane violations and permitting their fellow New Yorkers to reach their destinations quickly and reliably.

3. Expand transit signal priority (TSP) to all intersections appropriate for the treatment by the end of 2020.

Short term: Increase the pace of implementation to at least 20 routes per year (or about 1000 intersections per year) from 2018-2020.

Criteria: TSP should be rolled out first on highest ridership and most routinely delayed routes, with clear peak directions.

Buses spend 21 percent of their operating time at red lights. Transit signal priority has been proven to improve travel times by 15% on average. The MTA has obtained the software necessary for systemwide implementation of signal priority on its buses, and has committed to installing that software by 2020.

NYC DOT plans to implement the technology on just 550 intersections, or around 10 additional routes by the end of 2020. NYC DOT should quadruple its planned pace to get signal priority in places wherever it would quicken trips by 2020.





4. Improve the experience of bus riders with bus shelters and real-time information at all bus stops.

It's important that bus stops are built to accommodate comfortable waiting in all weather and that accurate real-time information about bus arrivals is available for riders who may not have smartphones.

Of the 15,000 bus stops across the five boroughs, only 3,556 have shelters, or about 24 percent in total. Furthermore, those shelters are not equitably distributed. Although Manhattan has the second lowest weekday bus ridership by borough, it has 21 percent of all shelters. The Bronx and Staten Island only have 17% and 6% of shelters, respectively. (Office of the NYC Comptroller).

A strong partnership between the DOT and MTA to implement the Fast Forward plan would allow Mayor de Blasio to reach his goal of making New York City "the fairest big city in America" by providing our most vulnerable New Yorkers access to reliable bus service. Our city's bus service has declined as congestion has risen and now increasingly strands our more than two million daily riders, many of whom come from vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. Traffic congestion and lack of city prioritization of local bus service has led us to a point where New York City bus riders must endure the slowest average bus speeds in the country. Meanwhile, more than one in ten buses arrives bunched, making service unreliable for riders who need to arrive at their destinations on time.

The opportunities for improvement are clear. The failures of our bus system are costing millions of New Yorkers money and negatively impacting their lives, while burdening the city with increased congestion and harmful emissions. Working alongside NYCT, the City can take advantage of proven strategies to provide the fast, more efficient trips that New Yorkers need. Further, better bus service is a matter of basic fairness to more than two million daily riders. Improving their bus rides -- and lives -- will make New York a much more inclusive and just city.

Sources:

- Office of the NYC Comptroller Scott M. Stringer. 2017. The Other Transit Challenge: How to Improve the NYC Bus System.
- Pratt Center for Community Development. 2013. Mobility and Equity for New York's
- Transit-Starved Neighborhoods: The Case for Full-Featured Bus Rapid Transit.
- TransitCenter analysis conducted using NYC Bus Performance API: <http://api.busturnaround.nyc/>. Speed and bunching averages were calculated using data from May and October 2017.
- US Census Bureau. 2000. Census ad ACS 2011-2015 5-year estimates.
- Transport for London. Bus speeds report, 2018.
- National Transit Database, 2018.



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