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Bus Turnaround Coalition: MTA's draft Queens bus network redesign a bold step toward bus service that helps more Queens residents get where they want to go

Transit advocates encouraged by draft proposal to redesign the Queens bus network, which calls for ambitious changes that promise to make service faster and more reliable while enabling riders to reach new destinations.

The current Queens bus network is plagued by slow speeds and unreliable service. Routes that have barely changed since the middle of the last century don't align with where people live and work today.

More than 2.3 million people live in Queens – and a large share reside beyond the reach of the subway. Half of Queens residents are immigrants and most are people of color. They deserve bus service they can count on to get to work, school, medical appointments, friends and family, and everything that New York has to offer, but the network is not serving them well. Ridership has steadily fallen for years as people abandon service that doesn't meet their needs.

Big challenges call for bold solutions. With the release of its draft redesign of the Queens bus network, the MTA has put forward an ambitious yet pragmatic plan to overhaul Queens bus service.

After reviewing the plan, the Bus Turnaround Coalition believes it has the potential to substantially improve bus performance and transit access for Queens residents. The proposed network is still a rough draft without schedules, and should be thoroughly vetted and adjusted before it's finalized. But the basic concepts of the plan are sound and promise to improve speed, reliability, and access.

The coalition endorses the redesigned Queens bus network as the baseline from which to make adjustments, and encourages elected officials to support the core framework of the proposal. These changes will help Queens transit riders, and they should be accompanied by increased investment to boost frequency on the improved network.

The Bus Turnaround Coalition's assessment is based on how the MTA has optimized routes and stop patterns in the draft bus network redesign. In the current network, long, meandering routes that stop at short intervals slow down service and lead to pronounced bunching, causing delays and unpredictable wait times. It's not a bus network that riders can count on. In the proposed network, simpler routes with better stop spacing will lead to faster bus speeds and more reliable service.

The proposed bus routing also makes possible faster, more direct service within Queens and between Queens and other boroughs. An abbreviated, partial list of these new connections includes:

- Multiple new north-south routes linking western Queens to north and downtown Brooklyn
- New east-west routes linking eastern Brooklyn, southeast Queens, and Nassau County
- New north-south routes creating direct connections between eastern Queens neighborhoods
- Direct east-west connection between Astoria and Elmhurst via Broadway
- One-seat ride between LaGuardia and the Bronx on the Q50

Combined with better connections to subways and LIRR stations, these routing and stop spacing changes will enable more people to rely on Queens buses to get to jobs, schools, healthcare, shopping, and other daily destinations.

The Bus Turnaround Coalition recognizes that these changes will entail some tradeoffs and adjustments to riders' routines. Some trips may require an additional transfer or a longer walk, but overall, riders stand to gain more from shorter travel times and improved reliability as a result of these changes.

The MTA's proposal is a rough draft. We expect it will be revised in response to feedback, and we believe it still has room to improve. We strongly recommend that these revisions proceed as deliberate adjustments to the proposed network, not hasty reversions to the status quo, and that the MTA hold firm to the design principles that have guided the network redesign so far.

We also await the release of full schedule information, which was not included in the draft plan. Detailed schedule data will enable more robust analysis of the Queens bus network redesign and more conclusive evidence of its benefits.

Our preliminary review indicates, however, that within a given service budget, more Queens residents will be able to reach more places in less time using the proposed bus network than the current bus network.

By rethinking the Queens bus network from the ground up, instead of adjusting it route-by-route, the MTA is adhering to best practice in bus network redesign, which has improved transit performance and increased ridership in other cities. New Yorkers will get similar benefits if the MTA follows through on the ambitious spirit of this proposal.

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