



New Leaders, Faster Buses

**How Governor Hochul and
Mayor Adams can seal the deal
and deliver much better bus
service for New Yorkers**

Introduction

Great bus service would make New York a fairer, healthier, more productive city. Millions of people – especially Black, brown, immigrant, and working-class New Yorkers – rely on buses to get to work, school, doctor's offices, and other daily activities. But sluggish, unreliable service – the slowest average bus speed in the nation! – reduces access to jobs, costs riders time, and limits where people can go in their own city.

With a fast, reliable bus system, New Yorkers would gain affordable access to much more of what the city has to offer. People could reach more places, save more on transportation costs, and spend more time with their families.

Our organizations launched the Bus Turnaround Campaign in 2016 to reverse the trend of deteriorating bus service in New York City. We noted that bus speeds and bus ridership had been declining for more than a decade, and we recommended a package of policy reforms to make buses faster and more reliable for riders.

Fast forward to today, and New York City's bus system is at an inflection point. The MTA and NYC DOT have announced several initiatives that align with the ideas our coalition proposed six years ago. For the most part, these improvements are in various stages of development and have yet to be completed or fully scaled up across the city. There are pilot bus routes for all-door boarding on the way, plans in the works for redesigned bus networks, and an energetic but under-resourced program to give buses more priority on city streets.

Changes are in motion but implementation has not progressed to the point where citywide metrics of bus service show signs of improvement. If these initiatives are left incomplete or executed poorly, intensifying traffic congestion threatens to further degrade bus service in the wake of the COVID pandemic.

The cooperative relationship between New York Governor Kathy Hochul and New York City Mayor Eric Adams gives bus riders cause for optimism. Improving bus service is a joint effort of the MTA and NYC DOT, and a functional partnership between the governor and the mayor is conducive to productive cooperation between these two agencies.

To deliver for bus riders, Governor Hochul, Mayor Adams, and leaders at the MTA and NYC DOT must now convert the promise of fledgling plans into real-world, citywide changes that speed up the nation's slowest bus service.



The Bus Turnaround Story So Far

The Bus Turnaround Campaign launched on July 20, 2016, at Brooklyn Borough Hall. Advocates were joined by Eric Adams (then Brooklyn Borough President), Ydanis Rodriguez (then the City Council representative for Washington Heights and Inwood), and other elected officials making the case for a systemwide overhaul of New York City's faltering bus network.

The campaign focused on six core policy recommendations:

- **Redesign New York City's outdated bus routes to provide riders with simpler, faster, more direct routes that meet the travel needs of today, not 1950.**
- **Implement all-door boarding to improve speed and reliability on every bus route, not just Select Bus Service routes.**
- **Scale up the redesign of streets to enhance bus service by creating a citywide network of bus lanes and traffic signals that prioritize buses.**
- **Adopt better methods to keep buses on schedule and prevent bunching and gapping.**
- **Make the bus rider experience easier and intuitive with more comfortable bus stops and more real-time information displays on- and off-board the bus.**
- **Increase transparency about bus performance so the public can assess progress.**



Since then, the MTA and NYC DOT have stated their intent to adopt many of the Bus Turnaround Campaign's recommendations. But as this timeline shows, most implementation has yet to be completed:

☑ **July 2016 - Bus Turnaround Campaign launches**

☑ **October 2016** - Campaign issues "report cards" for every bus route, and City Council holds hearing on bus service

☑ **May 2017** - 67 legislators send letter to governor to speed up bus service

☑ **September 2017** - Riders Alliance collects bus rider stories, "Woes on the Bus"

☑ **March 2018** - MTA creates new bus performance dashboard with rider-oriented metrics

☑ **Spring 2018** - **New York City Transit's Fast Forward plan calls for bus network redesigns, citywide all-door boarding, and better bus dispatching**

☑ **November 2018** - MTA begins public workshops for Bronx bus network redesign

☑ **January 2019** - **City Hall releases the Better Buses Action Plan, promising to accelerate implementation of bus lanes and transit signal priority**

☑ **May 2019** - MTA begins public workshops for Queens bus network redesign

☑ **October 2019** - DOT launches 14th Street busway

☑ **March 2020** - Onset of pandemic interrupts planning for MTA bus network redesigns and DOT bus priority projects

☑ **June 2020** - City Hall announces "Better Buses Restart"

☑ **2020** - DOT installs more bus lane mileage and signal priority than any previous year

☑ **August 2021** - **MTA and DOT jointly announce initiatives to speed up buses, including all-door boarding on 10 pilot routes, implementation of Bronx bus network redesign plus the restart of network redesigns in other boroughs, and 20 miles of new or upgraded bus lanes**

☑ **October 2021** - NYC DOT launches busways on Jamaica Avenue and Archer Avenue in Downtown Jamaica

To date, NYC DOT's bus priority program has achieved the most concrete progress on the Bus Turnaround policy agenda. Bus lane and signal priority implementation have accelerated significantly, generating tangible time savings for hundreds of thousands of riders on several routes. Motorist compliance with bus lanes remains inconsistent, however. Without greater support from City Hall, existing bus lanes will not perform as intended, and the DOT bus program will not be in position to meet the annual installation targets laid out in the city's Streets Master Plan.

Meanwhile, major MTA initiatives like citywide all-door boarding and bus network redesigns are still in progress. When the Bronx network redesign takes effect later this year, it will mark the first delivery of a major component in the bus plan the MTA announced in spring 2018.

As a result, while many bus riders have probably noticed faster service on some trips, the overall experience of riding the bus remains frustrating and unpredictable. A Bus Turnaround analysis of routes where bus lanes or busways were recently added reflects the general situation: relief on the worst bottlenecks but little sign of systemwide improvement.

	October 2019	October 2021	Change
Citywide average bus speed	7.9 mph	7.9 mph	none
	PM rush hour speed, before bus lanes*	PM rush hour speed, after bus lanes (10/21)	
B26 on the Jay Street busway (0.3 mi)	3.9 mph	5.1 mph	+29%
B26 full route (6 mi)	5.4 mph	5.4 mph	none
M14A SBS on 14th Street busway (1.1 mi)	3.5 mph	5.7 mph	+65%
M14A <u>SBS</u> full route (3.4 mi)	3.8 mph	5.0 mph	+32%
Q44 on Main St Flushing busway (0.5 mi)	4.7 mph	5.3 mph	+14%
Q44 full route (13.4 mi)	8.3 mph	8.5 mph	+2%
Q85 on Merrick Blvd bus lanes (1.9 mi)	8.5 mph	9.4 mph	+10%
Q85 full route (6.9 mi)	8 mph	8.6 mph	+7%

* These speeds are the average from October 2019, except for the M14, where we use October 2018 data because busway was implemented in September 2019

New Yorkers are counting on Governor Hochul and Mayor Adams to scale up piecemeal improvements into citywide progress. The moment to act is now. With traffic congestion on the rise, complacency will cause bus service to degrade further, hampering the city's recovery from the pandemic. But swiftly advancing long-promised upgrades to bus service will generate a positive reinforcement cycle of faster trips for riders, growing confidence in the transit system, and a sturdier, fairer recovery.




Rider Tell Their Stories

"I am a home attendant that lives in Southwest Queens. The bus is consistently late and unreliable and I often have to wait 20 minutes and there is a lot of bus bunching. When the 8:37 a.m. bus does not show up, I have to wait for the next bus at 8:46 a.m. but it is often too crowded to board. Recently I was waiting for the Q12 and the bus driver skipped my stop so I had to wait for 60 minutes for the next bus. Being late for work is upsetting and impacts my professional life."

- Vinnie S, Queens

"I take the bus daily in Co-op City. The Bx12, Bx28 and Bx38 suffer from horrible traffic on Fordham Road and Gun Hill Road, and sometimes it can take a very long time to reach Co-op City from the other side of the Bronx. In the case of the Bx28/38, it causes delays of a half hour for each branch of Gun Hill Road service. I usually avoid the Bx28/38 for that reason. I've had to cough up money for Ubers which is extremely unsustainable."

- Raymond M., the Bronx



"I ride the bus in Chelsea. The subway stations around me are not accessible, but I also avoid the bus because they are so slow and get stuck in traffic. I took the bus last summer when they were free for medical appointments. I have a bad back which is an invisible disability. I have trouble standing and waiting and bus shelters are far and few between. A lot of them don't have awnings, which is terrible in bad weather. The 23rd St and Second Ave bus stop only has one small bench and no awning."

-Miriam F., Manhattan

"I ride the bus every day from my home in Ozone Park to the hospital in Jamaica Hills, where I work. The travel time is about an hour when there aren't any issues. My biggest challenge is how unreliable the Q24 is. The bus needs to be much more frequent, better than every 16 minutes. The bus gets very crowded due to the amount of people waiting to get on. The other day I waited for 40 minutes for the bus, and because of that, it was crammed. Sometimes, the unreliability results in a taxi ride, which is too big of a cost to do it often."

- Fermina H., Queens

Recommendations

The Bus Turnaround Coalition calls on **Governor Hochul** and the **MTA** to implement the following changes to improve service for bus riders:

Restart bus network redesigns and invest in expanded bus service to deliver faster, more frequent trips for riders.

After a rushed attempt that generated much confusion two years ago, the restart of the Queens bus network redesign in 2022 is an opportunity to pursue bold changes while clearly communicating the benefits to riders. Redesigning outdated bus networks can help riders reach more places in less time. With ambitious route changes and an increased investment in service frequency, the MTA can address deeply rooted inequities like the racial access-to-opportunity gap in New York. The next round of network redesigns should set clear goals and measure success based on whether new bus service patterns deliver such benefits.

A substantial increase in the bus operating budget will enable buses to run every six minutes or less on more routes – making redesigned bus networks irresistible for riders.





Start all-door boarding to deliver simultaneous citywide speed improvements.

All-door boarding has proven its worth on Select Bus Service for nearly 15 years. With OMNY fully installed on city buses, there's no technical obstacle to opening up back and center doors to riders on every route. Access through all doors means shorter lines, less time at stops, and faster overall trips. And it's the only speed improvement that can be rolled out simultaneously to millions of riders citywide. Riders should not have to wait until the MetroCard is retired in 2023 (or later) before all-door boarding is available systemwide. The MTA can use this time to develop a better fare inspection system that contains strong safeguards against racial discrimination and does not bring buses to a halt during fare checks.

Work closely with DOT to adjust schedules as quickly as possible in coordination with new bus priority projects. Bus lanes and busways are rolling out across all five boroughs, clearing the way to faster trips and much better commutes for riders. But a bus trip is only as fast as the schedule permits. Rather than waiting months after a bus lane is implemented to adjust schedules, schedules should be updated immediately to take advantage of time saved and deliver faster trips for riders.

The Bus Turnaround Coalition calls on **Mayor Adams** and **NYC DOT** to implement the following changes to improve service for bus riders:

Empower the DOT commissioner to make ambitious changes.

Central to any bus improvement initiative is the relationship between the mayor and the transportation commissioner. Reallocating street space to transit is inherently contentious. And the most effective bus priority treatments, like physically separated lanes, center-running lanes, or car-free busways, tend to consume the most space. To make bold changes for bus riders, the DOT chief needs to know the mayor has confidence in the plan and won't back down when the inevitable resistance hits. If Mayor Adams sees these projects through to completion, New Yorkers will appreciate the benefits.





Prioritize bus riders in the city budget.

While bus improvements provide excellent bang for the buck, building out a high-quality network of bus-priority streets can't be done on a shoestring. The city budget should devote substantial resources to more intensive street redesigns like the Edward L Grant Highway center-running bus lanes. And to enable greater output without sacrificing public communication and outreach, City Hall needs to adequately staff DOT's transit and bus priority program.

Combined with a strong mandate from the mayor for street changes that improve bus speeds, a budget that prioritizes bus riders will deliver high-quality bus lanes less prone to obstruction, saving riders significant time and creating a fairer transportation system.

Improve traffic and parking management in bus lanes and on other streets where congestion slows down bus service.

Traffic congestion and illegal parking are the bane of bus riders on streets with or without bus lanes. The expansion of bus-mounted cameras to nab drivers who obstruct bus lanes is promising, but provides delayed feedback. The city should take a more active role and consistently tow bus lane blockers out of the way. Upgrading part-time bus lanes to 24/7 operation will also reduce motorist confusion and improve compliance.

Busy streets that lack bus lanes, meanwhile, would function much better for bus riders if the city gets double-parking under control. Expanding loading zones and metered parking will be critical to this effort, as will tackling the corrupt use of placards to evade consequences for illegal parking. Given NYPD's institutional apathy toward bus performance and indulgence in placard abuse, this type of enforcement is ripe for what Adams has called "civilianizing" — taking it out of the hands of police. Transferring it to DOT would prevent encounters from escalating, and confer responsibility for traffic and parking management on an agency motivated to improve bus service.





Upgrade bus stop amenities and pedestrian connections.

The bus stop and the sidewalk are part of almost every trip bus riders make in New York. But only about one in five New York City bus stops has a shelter, and pedestrian connections to bus stops are often dangerous or uncomfortable. This is a major flaw in the bus network that is within the city's purview. The Adams administration should make a concerted effort to improve pedestrian safety on streets leading to bus stops, repair sidewalks by public housing and other city properties near bus stops, and install more bus shelters and benches.

A deliberate program of bus stop improvement could go hand-in-hand with the MTA's efforts to speed up service through bus stop consolidation as part of its network redesigns. In the Bronx, the first borough slated for a complete network redesign, bus ridership is high but amenities at stops are scarce. In general, New York City bus stops are spaced too close together, slowing down service. Other cities have won support for stop consolidation by pairing it with upgrades like shelters, seating, and pedestrian safety improvements. One obstacle in New York: JCDecaux, the outdoor advertising company contracted with the city to maintain bus shelters through 2026, is under no obligation to add more. By finding a path forward despite bureaucratic obstacles, Mayor Adams can deliver a big win for bus riders in every borough.



About the Bus Turnaround Coalition

The Bus Turnaround Coalition is a diverse group of New Yorkers determined to turn around the poor service that plagues the city's bus system and the more than 2 million rides taken on it every weekday.

We are winning increased attention from our leaders and greater resources for high quality, fast and reliable bus service for all neighborhoods in New York City.

TRI-STATE TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN



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