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66 Elected Officials Release Letter Asking Governor Cuomo to Improve Bus Service

After release of district-level report cards revealing poor bus service citywide, elected officials and advocates release letter to the governor calling for low-cost solutions to fix bus service

New York, NY— Today the Bus Turnaround Coalition, in conjunction with State Assembly Corporations, Commissions and Authorities Committee Chair Jeffrey Dinowitz, State Senator Daniel Squadron, and State Senator Marisol Alcantara released a letter to Governor Cuomo asking him to direct the MTA to commit to two low cost solutions to improve bus service. Days after the MTA released their comprehensive plan to tackle subway delays, the letter from elected officials in the Assembly and Senate called for similar action to fix ailing bus service.

"Residents of my district are dependent on bus service to get around, and the quality of service is unacceptable. There are basic changes that can be made to improve bus service, right now, which would drastically improve average travel speed and reduce bus bunching," said Chair of Corporations, Commissions and Authorities Committee, Assembly Member Dinowitz. "Cashless fares at all doors would greatly reduce the amount of time passengers spend boarding, and GPS technology would allow dispatchers and drivers to react to unexpected delays and evenly distribute buses. The MTA needs to implement these improvements today, so that New Yorkers can get where they need to go."

"Millions of New Yorkers rely on buses to get where they need to go every day," said State Senator Daniel Squadron. "Improving bus service is part of improving the entire transit network, and that's essential for our city. Thanks to the Bus Turnaround Campaign, Riders Alliance, transit advocates, and my colleagues in government for continuing the push.

"Expanded bus service is a simple, cost-effective, and green way to meet our city's growing infrastructure needs. By quickly implementing transit signal priority and all-door boarding, the millions of people who use New York City buses every day will be able to cut down on wasted time and energy, and the MTA will be able to be more efficient with its existing bus fleet," said Senator Marisol Alcantara. "Investing in bus infrastructure helps people to be able to access jobs throughout the city and connects transit-poor areas of the city with the transit grid, and should therefore be a priority for the MTA and the state government."

In order to help speed up buses and reduce bus bunching, the Bus Turnaround Coalition is calling on the MTA to deploy a robust transit signal priority network by 2018 and ensure that all-

door boarding is a prominent part of the agency's plans for implementation of the MetroCard replacement payment system.

"NYC buses are becoming slower and less reliable each year. All-door boarding and bus signal priority are proven applications for improving bus service that are urgently needed on bus routes across the city," said Tabitha Decker, NYC program director for TransitCenter.

Transit signal priority reduces bus dwell time at traffic signals by holding green lights at intersections for a few extra seconds as buses approach to allow them to cross the intersection and maintain a constant speed. The NYC Department of Transportation's (DOT) 2007 Victory Boulevard study found that transit signal priority reduced vehicle and bus delays by reducing bus travel time without increasing traffic delays. With the launch of TSP on SBS M15, former NYC Transit President Tom F. Prendergast acknowledged transit signal priority make buses more dependable, making buses a more attractive transit option for riders.

Now, advocates and elected officials are calling on the MTA to expand transit signal priority, currently operating on small handful of select bus routes, citywide. "Reliable bus service is important because it makes it easier for my family to commute to school and work," said Suman Ganguli, Riders Alliance member. "Reliable service doesn't only make getting around easier for riders, but encourages people to use the buses and leave their cars, making our streets calmer and safer."

Simultaneously, the elected officials' letter asks for all-door boarding to be implemented as part of the plan to replace the MetroCard, allowing riders to board buses at any door and reducing dwell time at bus stops. The MTA's Select Bus Service has demonstrated how much more quickly buses can move when riders pay before boarding. With the introduction of off-board payment collection, dwell time reduced 40% on the M15, Bx12, and B44.

Today's letter comes on the heels of the interactive online district-level bus report card tool released by the Bus Turnaround Coalition in April. That tool allows bus riders and elected officials to see, at a glance, the quality of bus service in their districts. Users can access the report cards at busturnaround.nyc/district; they show users detailed and easy-to-understand information about bus speeds, reliability and ridership in their neighborhoods.

While bus speeds and reliability vary from district to district, citywide, buses average 7.4 miles per hour. The impacts of service declines are apparent in ridership data: from 2002 to 2015, bus ridership fell 16%, despite citywide population growth and record subway ridership.

In July of 2016, the Bus Turnaround coalition released its report, "Turnaround: Fixing New York City's Buses." The report highlights cities like London and Seoul that have managed to transform their bus networks, leading to increased ridership system-wide, and identifies key steps to fix our city's bus network:

- More frequent service on routes with high ridership or high ridership potential
- Redesign of routes with obsolete or indirect routing
- Use the post-Metrocard fare payment system to allow all-door bus boarding
- Overhaul bus dispatching and on-street control
- Create more bus lanes and widespread traffic signal priority for buses

- Report bus performance in ways riders can easily understand and institute a comprehensive open data policy

The New York City Department of Transportation has signaled its support for many of the recommendations of the Bus Turnaround campaign, most notably at last year's City Council Transportation hearing on bus service. More recently, at March's MTA Board meeting, the MTA acknowledged bus ridership and performance decline and noted that Bus Turnaround strategies including bus only lanes, transit signal priority, route and network redesign, and speeding up the boarding process can improve local buses.

Assistant Speaker Felix Ortiz said, "Faster and improved bus service will have a tremendous impact in Brooklyn. By implementing Transit Signal Priority and all-door boarding, riders will be able to get to their destination quickly. This is especially important at a time when so many subway lines are being renovated."

Assembly Member Rob Castorina Jr. said, "I am happy to sign onto this letter with over fifty of my colleagues in both the Assembly and the Senate. With MTA busses operating at an average speed of 4.4 miles per hours and spending upwards of 20% of their time at bus stops, these two low cost improvements - Transit Signal Priority and all door boarding - will help alleviate these two problems. I hope the MTA continues to seek out solutions like these to increase the efficiency of the services they provide. As my constituents face some of the worst commutes in the country, these improvements prove as a necessary step in changing the lives of so many. We live in the greatest city in the world. Under no circumstances should our public transportation system continue to be unreliable, inefficient, and as costly as it stands now. Over two million New Yorkers rely on our public transportation to support their families. Unfortunately, the time in which they spend simply getting to and from work takes away from precious moments with their families. The call for improvements is stronger now than ever. I support these changes to the system and implore the MTA to mend this broken system affecting so many New Yorkers."

Assembly Member Michael DenDekker said, "Public transportation, especially bus service, provides millions of New Yorkers alternate ways to get around the city. It is essential that the MTA continue to improve their service. Transit signal priority and all-door boarding technology are great technological improvements that have the potential to enhance riders travel time, making travel more fluid."

Assembly Member Pamela Harris said, "New York City residents deserve reliable and efficient bus service. Our buses should be getting commuters to work on time, students to school before the first bell rings and seniors to the doctor's appointments they depend on. The MTA needs to be held accountable for improving public transportation infrastructure throughout the city."

Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh said, "I am proud to join the Bus Turnaround Campaign to call for these low-cost, big-impact reforms to improve bus service in our city. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the legislature and friends in this coalition to do everything we can to ensure that New York has reliable and efficient transportation, essential to strong, prosperous, and livable communities."

Assembly Member Lentol said, "Improving bus service in NYC is essential to a fully integrated transit system. We must ensure that people without nearby subway access have reliable buses

to count on. By introducing transit signal priority and all-door boarding with electronic proof of payment we can easily make buses faster. I encourage the MTA and the Governor to explore these common sense options.”

Assembly Member Yuh-Line Niou said, "New York City buses provide an essential service to New Yorker's across the city, and it is critical that we bring service improvements to our bus fleet. Parts of my district depend heavily on bus service, particularly east of Essex Street on the Lower East Side – which is why we need a reliable bus system citywide. In Albany and in my district, I have fought for transit improvements, and it is critical that we include our buses in the conversation on how we can improve public transportation in New York. I thank advocates and my colleagues for supporting improvements to our bus service."

Assembly Member Stacy Pheffer-Amato said, “In a transportation desert like my district, every little improvement helps - and these are big little improvements. I'm proud to join the Riders Alliance in pushing for these commonsense adjustments to make bus transportation faster and better. The Bus Turnaround Campaign isn't just smart; it's crucial. I would urge Governor Cuomo and all other parties to respond to these engaged citizens and take these cheap and effective steps to help everyone get from A to B faster and easier.”

Assembly Member Dan Quart said, "New Yorkers deserve an affordable bus system they can rely on .It is clear that our current system is falling short of the standards we expect, and improvements must be made. All-door boarding and transit signal priority are two common-sense, low-cost fixes we can implement to help New Yorkers easily travel throughout the city. Let's work together to strengthen our communities and better our transit network."

Assembly Member Rodriguez said, “We are traveling at a snail’s pace on our city’s buses. The 18 routes serving East Harlem average a speed of 5 MPH, that’s slower than the average speed people travel on bikes. Transit Signal Priority and all door boarding systems are inexpensive and will save commuter’s valuable time.”

Assembly Member Sepúlveda said, “With so many of my constituents relying on bus service, I salute the work of the Bus Turnaround Campaign in its efforts to improve rider service, and I emphasize the word SERVICE. I stand ready to work with the coalition, and I call on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to fully examine the coalition's suggestions, and to work with the coalition for the mutual benefit of its riders.”

Assembly Member Jo Ann Simon said, “I join my fellow elected officials and transit advocates to call for two common-sense, cost-effective fixes to New York City’s buses that the MTA can implement: all-door boarding and transit signal priority. It’s time to modernize this critical source of transportation for all New Yorkers and in particular bus riders who tend to be older, have lower incomes, and are people with disabilities. In congested areas like downtown Brooklyn, buses average a mere four miles per hour and riders must contend with delays and long commutes. Brooklyn lost a critical east-west transportation link when the MTA eliminated the B71 bus route that connected riders from Carroll Gardens to Crown Heights, adding even more pressure and inefficiencies to the buses throughout downtown Brooklyn. I thank the Bus Turnaround Coalition and the Riders Alliance for their leadership on this issue and call on Governor Cuomo to continue to modernize our transportation system to match the needs of our vibrant, bustling city.”

Senator Leroy Comrie said, "I want to thank the Bus Turnaround Coalition for being forceful advocates for NYC Bus riders. I stand with them and pledge to work alongside Governor Cuomo, my colleagues in government, and the NYC Department of Transportation to look at ways to implement low-cost improvements to New York City's bus infrastructure, particularly here in Queens where we endure some of the longest commute times in the city."

Senator Martin Malavé Dilan said, "The two greatest obstacles all public works projects face are time and money; all-door boarding and transit signal priority are neither. Relatively inexpensive and quick to implement, both these technological upgrades will make a system-wide impact on city bus service. As we look to invest heavily in our subway service, both in time and money, improving the alternatives is a must."

Senator Michael Gianaris said, "With New York City neighborhoods growing faster by the day, our infrastructure must keep pace. Implementing all-door boarding and transit signal priority will improve New Yorkers daily commutes and enhance mass transit service."

Senator Liz Krueger said, "Buses are a vital lifeline that countless New Yorkers rely on every day. But just like the rest of our transit system, our buses are struggling to keep up with riders' needs. All-door boarding and transit signal priority are inexpensive, proven technologies that will ensure faster, more reliable service across the city. I urge Governor Cuomo and the MTA to implement them as soon as possible, and give New York straphangers some desperately needed relief."

Senator Roxanne Persaud said, "I am in full support of all-door boarding and transit signal priority technology; our constituents deserve quality transportation service. In fact, using technological advancement of the 21 century to create the most efficient and reliable means to commute should be in the best interest of everyone, since there is a direct relationship between ridership and customer satisfaction."

Senator Gustavo said, "Our public transportation is facing significant challenges and the two measures proposed by the Bus Coalition Campaign would significantly improve the efficiency and reliability of our City's bus system. I continue to be committed to working with the Bus Turnaround Campaign and my colleagues in Albany as we seek common sense solutions to provide New Yorkers the public transportation system they need and deserve."

About the Bus Turnaround Coalition:

The Bus Turnaround Coalition is a group of diverse New Yorkers working to turning around the poor bus service that's plaguing NYC's bus system and the 2.5 million rides that are taken on it daily. We're promoting practical strategies that can be implemented quickly to make bus trips faster and more reliable. See our recommended solutions here: http://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Turnaround_Fixing-NYCs-Buses-20July2016.pdf

Bus Turnaround Coalition Members:

TransitCenter (www.transitcenter.org) is a foundation committed to improving urban mobility through research, advocacy, and grantmaking that empowers communities, policymakers, and riders.

The Riders Alliance (www.ridersny.org) is a grassroots organization of subway and bus riders, pushing for better service at affordable fares and a stronger public investment in mass transit.

The Straphangers Campaign (www.straphangers.org) a project of the New York Public Interest Research Group, has advocated for New York's public transit system since 1979.

Tri-State Transportation Campaign (www.tstc.org) is a nonprofit advocacy organization working toward a more balanced, transit-friendly and equitable transportation network in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

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