

Riders Alliance - Straphangers Campaign
TransitCenter - Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Let's Get Stuff Done for Bus Riders

Recent bus priority projects have produced major time savings for bus riders. By scaling up implementation of bus lanes and busways, Mayor Adams and DOT Commissioner Rodriguez can extend these benefits to millions of New York City bus riders who are still stuck in traffic.

The Bus Turnaround Coalition applauds Mayor Adams' campaign goal to add 150 miles of bus lanes in four years. As the mayor lays out a more detailed agenda, translating that promise into action is essential for millions of New Yorkers who ride the bus, and for the city as a whole. A new analysis from our coalition shows that bus lanes make a difference for riders – and highlights the urgency of expanding the bus lane network.

Mayor Adams entered office vowing to get stuff done for working-class New Yorkers. That has to include getting stuff done for bus riders. New Yorkers who work in food distribution, building maintenance, home healthcare, and other essential jobs are much more likely to commute by bus than white-collar workers. Black and brown residents, immigrants, and New Yorkers with lower incomes especially rely on bus service.

When buses work well for the millions of people who count on them, the whole city can get more done. Bus lanes double as priority lanes for emergency vehicles, shortening response times for ambulances, fire trucks, and other urgent essential services. Businesses can make more deliveries and perform more service calls when working drivers aren't mired in gridlock caused by private cars.

There's a lot of work to do. In September, citywide average bus speeds dipped to 7.9 mph, marking a return to the notoriously sluggish pace of NYC bus service before the arrival of COVID. But this number does not tell the whole story of what bus riders are experiencing.

For riders on several bus routes, service is moving dramatically faster than before, thanks to the addition of bus lanes and busways where general traffic is restricted. Most riders, however, use routes that have yet to benefit from bus priority projects. They are enduring worse service, as rising traffic and parking dysfunction slow buses – and riders – to a crawl.

What the data tell us: New Yorkers need better bus lanes, more bus lanes, and a comprehensive congestion reduction strategy from the Adams administration.

The Bus Turnaround Coalition review of recent NYC DOT bus priority projects shows what's working on NYC streets and indicates how Mayor Adams can get buses back up to speed. The projects in this table have improved trips for hundreds of thousands of bus riders each weekday:

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

First, **the quality of bus priority treatments matters**. Busway projects, which prevent through traffic other than buses and trucks on the entire width of the street, do the most to reduce congestion along bus routes. As a result, they achieve the greatest improvements in bus speed. Service on DOT's busways sped up riders' trips between 14 and 65 percent in our sample. The Adams administration should expand the implementation of busways and deliver stronger bus lane designs to prevent obstruction by other motor vehicles, including center-running bus lanes and physical barriers to keep cars out of curbside bus lanes.

Second, **mileage also matters**. The Merrick Boulevard bus lanes produced a 10% speed increase, less than the increases on busways. But the Merrick Boulevard bus lanes also cover a substantial share of the total Q85 bus route length and generate a proportionately bigger speed increase along the full route than some of the busways. The city's standard bus lane designs remain a critical tool for increasing speeds on long stretches of the bus network. The Adams administration should ensure that DOT has the staffing, financial resources, and political support to deliver the ambitious target of 150 miles of bus lanes in four years.

Third, **the city needs to reduce congestion and parking dysfunction that slow down the entire bus network**. Despite the improvements produced by these bus priority projects, citywide average bus speeds remain stagnant. Rising traffic and illegal parking are slowing down buses and overwhelming the gains riders are seeing thanks to new bus lanes. The B26 is a microcosm of what's happening: The new busway significantly sped up service on a sluggish portion of the route, but that improvement was negated by slower speeds on the rest of the route. The Adams administration should pursue a wide range of congestion reduction strategies to clear the way for buses on streets with and without bus lanes. Of particular importance for bus riders are greatly expanding commercial loading zones to prevent double parking, strictly forbidding city employees from blocking bus lanes, and consistently towing bus lane violators out of the way of buses.

"Our bus network is key to creating an efficient, reliable and equitable transit system, and we must prioritize our bus infrastructure as we build the Manhattan of the future," said **Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine**. "There are important steps that the City must take to continue to improve public transit, and I'm committed to working with the Bus Turnaround Coalition, the Mayor and Commissioner Rodriguez to reduce the reliance on public cars on our streets, improve public transit, reduce congestion, lower emissions, and make our streets safer."

"New York is in the middle of a profound mobility crisis. This is especially in our outer boroughs," said **Council Member Amanda Farías**. "Our neighbors deserve affordable and efficient transportation options, and we must allocate the necessary resources to continue improving our public transportation options. Creating additional and upgraded bus lanes, as well as, a comprehensive congestion reduction strategy ensures supporting working families. This is not only a citywide priority, but something that is critical to improving the quality of life in my council district. Revamping bus lanes and increasing bus speeds would exponentially enhance commuting from my district throughout the borough. That is why I am proud to support Bus Turnaround Coalition's platform to help everyone in NYC get where we want when we want."

"As a disabled New Yorker, MTA buses are one of the few accessible and reliable forms of transportation available to me in our city," said **Council Member Shahana Hanif**. "Unlike our subway system, nearly all buses are accessible making them a lifeline to millions of disabled New Yorkers. But for buses to be effective, we need effective bus lanes. A recent analysis of DOT bus projects proves that bus lanes work, but the quality and length of those lanes are critical to their success. Today, I'm calling on Mayor Adams and Commissioner Rodriguez to continue DOT's work to expand current bus lanes and identify new places we can add bus lanes around the city. If we're to provide a more accessible form of transit to millions of New Yorkers and alleviate congestion, we need a holistic approach to moving away from cars and towards mass transit. Bus lanes are an indispensable part of that solution and a critical form of transportation for the millions of disabled New Yorkers like myself."

"We applaud the Adams administration's commitment to building 150 additional miles of bus lanes - which should produce faster, more reliable trips for riders," said **TransitCenter Advocacy and Organizing Program Manager Ashley Pryce**. "With many bus routes returning to the sluggish speeds we saw before the pandemic, the mayor and his team must act with urgency. We know that bus lanes work to improve the lives of riders, and that both quality and quantity matter. We look forward to working with the City to ensure that New Yorkers get the better bus lanes they deserve."

"After decades sitting in gridlock, millions of bus riders are pumped for much faster commutes and more reliable service," said **Riders Alliance Senior Organizer Jolyse Race**. "Busways and bus lanes are already getting results from 14th Street to Main Street to Merrick Boulevard. Now it's time to scale up and speed up our buses citywide. We look forward to partnering with Mayor Adams and Commissioner Rodriguez to deliver on the promise of a city that works because our buses work."

"The data is in and the results are clear: bus priority projects are a huge benefit for the millions of New Yorkers who rely on buses. Given the climate crisis and growing traffic congestion, the NYC Department of Transportation must give greater priority to buses on city streets," said **Liam Blank, Policy & Communications Manager for Tri-State Transportation Campaign**. "We commend Mayor Adams for his commitment to add 150 miles of new bus lanes and busways throughout the city, however, DOT must ensure that these projects are equitable—prioritizing the slowest routes in bus-dependent communities—and implemented on an accelerated timeline."

"It's encouraging to see bus speeds improving in the last two years with more bus lanes and busways, but NYC can't slow down now. Quicker commutes should be a reality for all riders across the city. The Mayor's promise of 150 miles of new bus lanes and busways would bring riders, including the student riders we work with, closer to that reality," said **Cecilia Ellis, campaign coordinator for the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign**.

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 millions of 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.