

# Fixing NYC's Buses



2018  
Progress  
Report

**Two years after the launch of the Bus Turnaround Campaign to bring New Yorkers fast and reliable bus service, we offer the following review of progress made by MTA New York City Transit (NYCT), the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT), and the New York City Police Department (NYPD) on the Bus Turnaround agenda.**

The spontaneous collapse of part of the ceiling at the Borough Hall subway station this June epitomizes the dismal state of New York City's transit system. Massive delays and trip-wrecking subway meltdowns have become part of daily life in the city. Meanwhile, for bus riders, who have been dealing with slow and unpredictable service for years, things continue to worsen. The downward spiral of NYC's buses continues in 2018. In the first half of 2018, bus speeds were 4.5% lower than in the same period of 2017. Likewise, ridership fell 5.36% January-June 2018 versus the first six months of 2017. Despite the poor quality of bus service, more than two million rides are still taken daily on the city's buses.

However, New Yorkers have reason to hope that change is coming. This spring, New York City Transit's new president, Andy Byford, released an ambitious and comprehensive plan to improve buses and subways. The Fast Forward plan includes clear benchmarks and timelines for bus improvements, including short term measures to be completed in 2018. In this report, we grade NYCT's progress based primarily on major policy changes included in that plan, and track the status of 2018 benchmarks. NYCT's ability to enact the full plan depends on Governor Cuomo securing a sustainable source of funding for transit.

Mayor de Blasio's Department of Transportation has a critical role to play in getting buses moving too, but has yet to commit to a serious plan to do so. When questioned about plans to improve buses, the City's typical response is that they will be rolling out 2-3 Select Bus Service routes per year. As of last month, the future of the Select Bus Service program was called into question - New York City Transit is putting the program on hold as it embarks on a bus network redesign. The SBS program demonstrated that better bus service in the city is possible, but it was wholly insufficient to address the magnitude of the crisis facing bus riders on the city's 246 local routes. Of those routes, 183 (74%) received Ds and Fs in the Bus Turnaround Campaign's annual report cards. Only two routes received As. With NYCT set to bring SBS-like improvements to bus riders citywide, including elements like all door boarding and streamlined routes, it's time for an equally ambitious commitment to bus improvements by Mayor de Blasio's DOT.



# INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

## NYCT: Incomplete

## NYCDOT: Incomplete

Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio have important roles to play in encouraging cooperation to improve buses among the agencies they control. Strong coordination between New York City Transit, which plans and operates the bus network, and the NYC Department of Transportation, which controls the streets buses run on, is essential to turning the bus system around. Yet the relationship between the two agencies appears to be under strain.

When news broke this summer that NYCT was putting the Select Bus program on hold, DOT reported having no advance notice, despite being a partner in the program. This apparent lack of communication between the agencies is troubling.

However, recent developments have shown that greater cooperation is possible. Last month, DOT partnered with NYCT to implement the Staten Island express bus network redesign. The DOT also joined NYCT to brief Bronx elected officials about plans for the next phase of the bus network redesign, which will take place in the Bronx in the coming year.

DOT has yet to form an adequate plan for systemwide bus improvements outside of the Select Bus paradigm. New York City Transit's Fast Forward plan includes goals DOT must implement, but the plan was not issued jointly, and DOT has not indicated any change in approach. DOT should establish ambitious benchmarks for bus lane and signal priority expansion that demonstrate a commitment to transforming the citywide bus system and fully partnering with NYCT on the Fast Forward plan.

# DESIGNING STREETS TO PRIORITIZE BUSES

## NYCDOT: D+

If the Mayor is to achieve his goal of making New York City the fairest big city in the country, turning around the city's bus service is a necessity. Sadly, the de Blasio administration hasn't developed a broad plan for prioritizing buses on the city streets which it controls.

There are currently 106 miles of bus lanes in NYC, and bus lanes are being added slowly.

Since our last report in August of 2017, the DOT has added or improved about 15 miles of bus lanes in the City, though a substantial number of the miles were from long-delayed projects:

- 1.3 miles of bus lanes added along the Bx6 in September 2017
- 6 miles of bus lanes added along Woodhaven and Cross Bay Boulevards as part of the Q53 SBS route in November 2017
- 1.7 miles of bus lanes added along Fulton Street in Brooklyn in Summer 2018
- 1.3 miles of lanes improved through the creation of a double bus lane along 5th Avenue between 34th and 60th Streets in Midtown Manhattan
- 5 miles of new bus lanes added along the B82, to be operational in October 2018

While these upgrades were necessary and laudable, overall progress on expanding the bus lane network has simply been too slow. We're calling on the City to add 100 miles of bus lanes in the next 5 years, including 60 new miles during the remaining three and a half years of the de Blasio administration.

In its July 2017 Green Means Go report, DOT committed to having traffic signal priority (TSP) on a total of 489 intersections by the end of 2017. The agency also committed to adding TSP to 550 more intersections by the end of 2020. As of September 2018, DOT has equipped 546 intersections with signal priority. DOT appears to be on track to meet its targets, but, as we have said before, those targets are far too weak.

Giving buses priority at traffic signals should be an easy win for the city. Instead, their pace conveys a lack of urgency around improving the commutes of the more than two million New Yorkers who rely on buses daily. We're calling on the de Blasio Administration to increase their pace to at least 20 routes per year (around 1000 intersections per year) and get TSP in place wherever it would quicken trips by 2020.

# ENFORCING BUS LANES

## NYPD: D

New York City bus lanes are severely weakened by a lack of enforcement. Only 1% of moving violations issued by the NYPD between January and July 2018 were for driving in bus lanes. That's an increase from 0.2% during the same period last year, but is still unacceptably low given the frequency with which bus lanes are used illegally. In a study conducted by Hunter College students in fall 2017, cars illegally entered bus lanes in 84% of the 30-minute time blocks observed. The city needs to make it a priority to keep bus lanes and bus stops clear for buses.

**#buslanesareforbuses!**



# MAKING USING THE BUS EASY AND INTUITIVE

NYCT: B

NYCDOT: B+

NYCT's Fast Forward plan and the bus plan overview that preceded it included many commitments to improving the bus rider experience. For example, NYCT indicated that it will work with DOT to install more real-time bus arrival information signs and ensure the accessibility of bus stops. Fast Forward calls for 150 new audio-capable "next bus" signs. Since our last progress report, the DOT has installed 80 of these signs. Fast Forward likewise commits to full accessibility at bus stops. DOT has added 9 stops with full accessibility in the Bronx and Brooklyn, with plans to complete additional stops in Queens and Staten Island.

We call on DOT to ensure that all bus stops have shelters and real time information, once NYCT's bus network redesign is complete. Currently, only about 24% of bus stops across the city have shelters. DOT will need to update its agreement with JD Decaux, the company that holds the city bus shelter franchise, in order to expand bus shelters significantly.

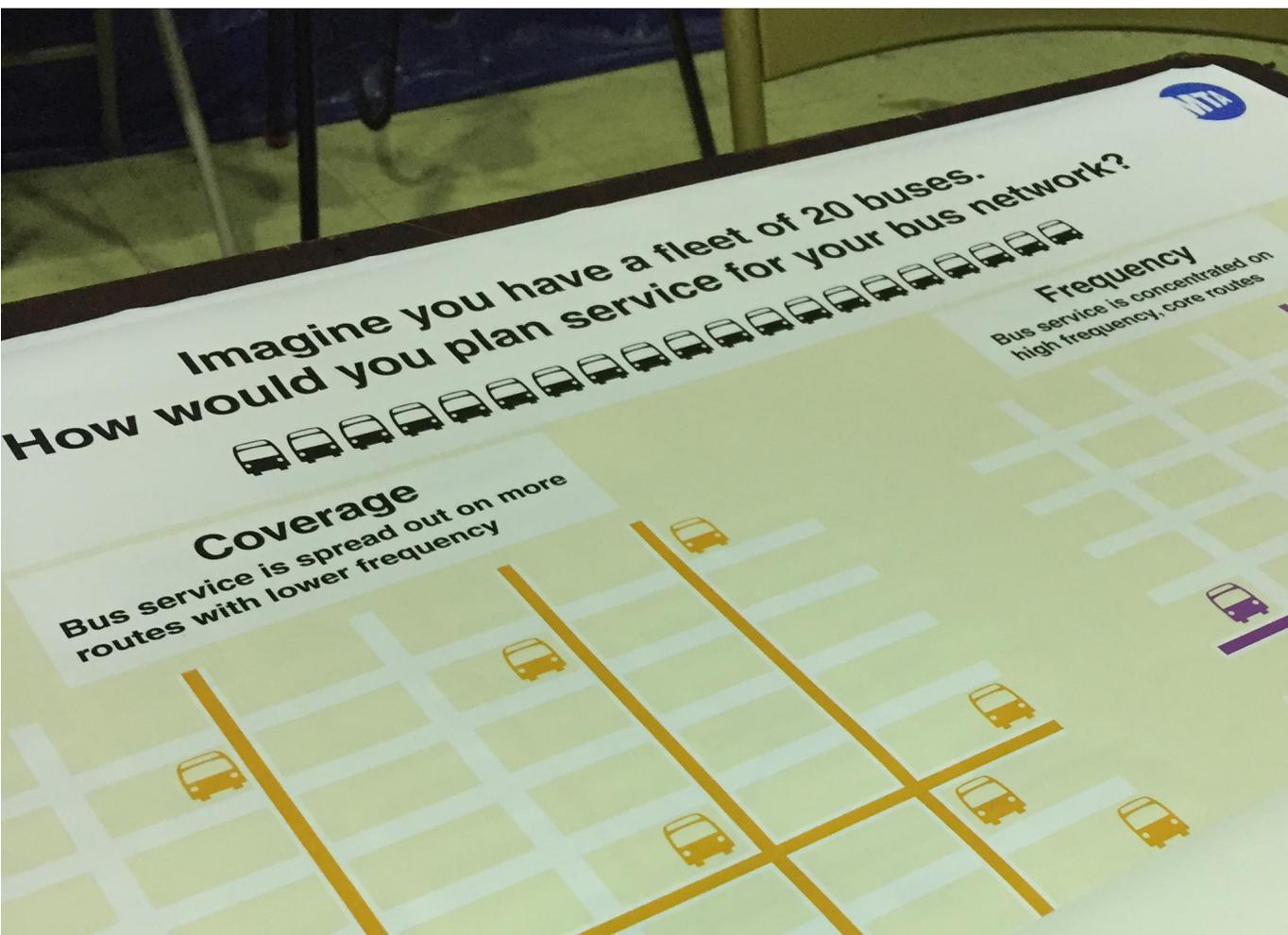
In terms of what NYCT can accomplish on its own, the bus plan it released in April 2018 included exciting commitments to develop more user-friendly bus maps and to provide real-time seat availability information. These are welcome changes, but it's unclear when riders can expect to see them.

# REDESIGNING THE BUS NETWORK

## NYCT: A-

In April, NYCT committed to completing a full redesign of the bus network by 2021, which is very good news for riders. The launch of the redesigned Staten Island express bus network on August 19th, which included serious revisions to route design, illustrated that the agency is serious about using such redesigns to bring riders faster and more reliable trips. Strong public engagement will be essential to successfully redesigning NYC's bus network to match riders' needs. The Bronx will be the next borough to get updated routes, and it's a good sign that the agency began a series of public workshops there this month.

In the Fast Forward plan, NYCT committed to expand off-peak service in strategic locations in 2018. Off-peak service was added on the Q6 and Q65 in early September, with the B17 and B65 set to receive off-peak service at the end of September.



# TRANSFORMING HOW WE GET ON THE BUS

## NYCT: A-

In April 2018, NYCT announced that it would implement systemwide all door boarding on local buses in conjunction with the MTA's new fare payment system. This is excellent news for bus riders, who can expect faster trips, more reliable service, and an easier boarding process as a result of this policy change. It is unclear when riders can expect this change to occur, and we call on the agency to provide a definitive timeline.

In the meantime, NYCT should continue to roll out all door boarding on its highest ridership lines and at high ridership stops, like Jamaica terminal, the ferry terminal in St. George, and the Rockaway bus terminal, using the current SBS-style method for payment and enforcement.

# ADOPTING BETTER METHODS OF KEEPING BUSES ON SCHEDULE

## NYCT: B+

NYCT's Fast Forward plan commits to major reform of bus reliability, including adding a new bus command center in 2020, implementing computer-aided dispatching, and more than doubling the number of supervisors tasked with monitoring service on the road. These are praiseworthy commitments, but the agency should also take steps to improve the experience of riders in the short-term. Improving the rate of on-time departures from bus depots, for example, could provide riders with more dependable bus arrivals, even before the new tech is in place.

One potential area of improvement is in bus bunching on local routes. A May to May comparison shows that bus bunching this year is down to 9.5% from 13.1% in 2017. It should be noted that this decrease only represents a snapshot in time - more data will need to be made available to determine if a decreased bus bunching trend truly exists. We will continue to monitor NYCT performance numbers for a more accurate picture of where bus bunching stands.



# INCREASING TRANSPARENCY ABOUT BUS PERFORMANCE

## NYCT: B+

This March, NYCT released a new bus performance dashboard, featuring new metrics like “additional bus stop time” and “additional travel time”, that better reflect the rider experience. This was a big step forward for transparency given that previously, the public needed to search through MTA Board books to find data on buses. Furthermore, what you could find there wasn't especially helpful if you wanted to know the travel speeds of buses or how reliable service was.

There is room for improvement. When the dashboard was launched, NYCT said it would add route level data, but half a year later, that information is still not available.

NYCT has made strides in improving rider engagement and transparency via social media. The agency's customer service team has been prompt in fielding and responding to the complaints and concerns of riders via Twitter, in addition to publicly acknowledging the need for service improvements.

As our subway system languishes in disrepair, the need for fast, reliable bus service is even more paramount. The release of the Fast Forward plan gives the DOT and NYCT the opportunity to work together to provide the high quality of service that bus riders deserve. The target areas we've graded here provide a roadmap for turning around the city's buses. Elected officials and agency leadership should commit to work together to achieve these targets and realize the fast and reliable service bus riders deserve.

# #busturnaround

