

**The Case for a Second, Thorough Review of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) for  
Woodhaven and Cross Bay Boulevards, in Queens, NY.**

By Allan Rosen and Brendan Read

Members, Queens Public Transit Committee

November 4, 2015

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November 4, 2015

The Hon. Anthony Foxx  
Secretary, United States Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Foxx:

I understand that the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) has requested federal funding under the New Starts program for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on Cross Bay / Woodhaven Boulevards in New York City, estimated to cost at least \$231 million. This project would extend from the Woodside Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) /subway station to both parts of the Rockaway Peninsula.

I request that you place this application on hold until NYCDOT provides the following:

- (1) Detailed impacts for all users of the roadway not only bus riders and pedestrians;
- (2) Full community impacts including the impacts to emergency vehicles;
- (3) A complete and detailed alternatives analysis including the results of a New Starts AA/DEIS
- (4) Complete public input including community and motorist/commercial vehicle operator input.

There are numerous unresolved problems with existing SBS routes. These need to be addressed before the program is widely expanded.

I am a former director of Bus Planning for MTA New York City Transit and spent 25 years working for that agency. I have devoted my life toward improving bus routes and bus service. However, I oppose projects, which take heavily used general traffic lanes out of commission without data. There are better ways to have buses travel faster without the expense and disruption caused by SBS. A simple state law that would require non-emergency vehicles to give the right-of-way to buses pulling out of bus stops would save buses more time than installing SBS. It would also be more far reaching, affecting 200 bus routes rather than a dozen.

This report was prepared with the assistance of Brendan Read, a former Richmond Hill, Queens resident and long-time transportation advocate and industry journalist. He wrote the section on the Rockaway Beach Line and offered other suggestions; he was involved with efforts to restore the rail line in the 1990s.

Please rethink approving this project at this time. Thank you very much for your time. Please feel free to contact us if you require additional information or if we could be of assistance. I can be reached at [alrosen2@msn.com](mailto:alrosen2@msn.com) and Brendan can be reached at [readbrendanb@gmail.com](mailto:readbrendanb@gmail.com)

Sincerely,

Allan Rosen

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) has requested Federal funding under the New Starts program for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on Cross Bay / Woodhaven Boulevards in New York City, estimated to cost at least \$231 million. BRT enables the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to provide Select Bus Service (SBS) in transit-exclusive full-time lanes on these roadways. This project would extend from the Woodside Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) / subway station to both parts of the Rockaway Peninsula.

It includes:

- ❑ The elimination of numerous left turn lanes;
- ❑ Destruction and relocation of the recently completed exclusive bus lane between Dry Harbor Road Metropolitan Avenue resulting from NYCDOT's Congested Corridors Study;
- ❑ New traffic islands;
- ❑ The addition of a bus lane between Queens Boulevard and the LIRR Main Line underpass;
- ❑ An exclusive bus lane between Union Turnpike and Park Lane South and on the main roadway of Woodhaven Boulevard between Park Lane South and Rockaway Boulevard;
- ❑ Bus passing lanes only at selected locations;
- ❑ Elimination of six pairs of bus stops in Broad Channel and in the Rockaways.
- ❑ Narrowing of Woodhaven Boulevard lanes with a probable further speed reduction to 25 mph, not yet announced by NYCDOT. The speed limit was already lowered on Woodhaven from 35 to 30 mph and on Cross Bay from 40 mph to 30 mph as part of the recently completed Congested Corridors Study.
- ❑ On Cross Bay Boulevard two alternatives were discussed: (1) Elimination of the dedicated left turn lanes and installation of exclusive bus lanes and (2) Narrowing of the traffic lanes to permit the installation of an exclusive bus lane.

**The application is deficient because:**

- ❑ **It Does Not Include Detailed Impacts For All Road Users.**

Cross Bay/Woodhaven Blvd. is a vital and one of the few north-south arterial roads in Queens. It is a secondary link between the Long Island Expressway (I-495) and John F. Kennedy International Airport, and the only alternative to the Van Wyck Expressway

(I-678). According to the New York City Economic Development Commission, over 60% of Queens residents, including in the study area, own at least one car. Of those who do not own cars, many rely on for hire vehicles (FHV) e.g. car services, taxis, Uber, etc. for trips where transit is not convenient, for example, to doctors' offices and shopping. Yet despite the criticality of Woodhaven Boulevard as a transportation corridor there is, for example, no information on the impacts at the 23 locations where the banning of left turns are proposed. This information should be available from traffic counts, the NYCDOT Traffic Forecasting model, and the MTA Transit forecasting model, all of which these agencies claim to have utilized in the development of this proposal. All community requests for release of this information have been refused.

❑ **It Does Not Include Alternatives That Should Have Been Assessed.**

No rigorous open AA/DEIS has ever been performed on this corridor, one that looks at all options including rail. This includes restoring a parallel existing grade separated commuter rail line: the Rockaway Beach Line (RBL), either standalone, or in combination with nearby in-service freight or commuter rail lines (e.g. Montauk Branch) for commuter rail or subway use. Congressmen Gregory Meeks and Hakim Jeffries and other local officials, notably New York State Assemblyman Philip Goldfeder want the RBL alternative examined. A subway under Woodhaven Boulevard because of its tremendous cost is not even worth considering given the availability of the RBL in the same corridor.

❑ **There is an Absence of data validating SBS/BRT value.**

SBS is unproven as being successful in New York City. No hard data has been presented proving the ability of SBS to deliver the critical benefits of diverting users out of their private or FHV. This is a major failing in light of the removal of the two lanes and turn bans, resulting in added traffic congestion and drivers' use of unsuitable neighborhood streets as alternates, if SBS cannot be proven to lower traffic demand to avoid those severe consequences. Instead the supposed benefits of SBS/BRT are all based on conjecture without any hard data being made public in spite of numerous community requests.

❑ **There was Inadequate and Misleading NYCDOT and the MTA Public Outreach.** Here are several examples:

- ❖ The NYCDOT outreach process was insufficient and only targeted bus riders on the affected routes ignoring the other 60 to 70 percent of roadway users. The vast majority of residents still have no idea of plans to modify the roadway.
- ❖ Notices were only placed on the buses about a week before each meeting and for no longer than five days on their website. Bus riders who do not use Woodhaven routes daily are still unaware of the plan as are most other roadway users.

- ❖ NYCDOT has not presented any evidence of credible outreach to motorists, business owners who rely on commercial deliveries, car services, delivery and trucking companies, emergency vehicle operators e.g. FDNY and private hospital EMS, and to businesses reliant and associated with JFK Airport.
- ❖ At each meeting, only the portion of the plan affecting that specific community was revealed. One had to attend all six outreach meetings to fully understand the entire plan, which still has not been posted on the NYCDOT website or in printed literature.
- ❖ There are about 100,000 daily roadway users and total meeting attendance was under 200 and some attended more than one meeting.
- ❖ Only the positive aspects of SBS have been discussed by NYCDOT.

❑ **The Emphasis Was on Selling SBS/BRT, Not Listening to the Public.**

It became clear to participants at the meetings that the purpose of the public information process was to sell the SBS concept rather than to gather public input and to listen and to address public, user, and community and neighborhood concerns. SBS was presented only as one alternative when funding for it had already been allocated since its recommendation resulting from the recently completed Congested Corridors Study.

SBS was “sold” at workshops, which posed leading questions to garnish positive feedback for SBS. There was no attempt to solicit ideas from the public regarding other methods to improve transportation in the corridor. Questions regarding the RBL were summarily dismissed. Moreover, there were an inordinate amount of time given to representatives from pro-BRT outside groups, including the Riders Alliance and Transportation Alternatives. This gave the strong impression to those in the community and to community-based groups that the NYCDOT was attempting to stack the meetings.

At the Community Advisory Committee meetings, invited organizations were told only one representative could attend, but they allowed pro-outside BRT groups as many as three members each.

❑ **NYCDOT Has Refused To Respond To Questions From The Public.**

The Queens Public Transit Committee presented a list of sixty questions at the Howard Beach workshop, none of which have been answered. NYCDOT stated they will not respond to individual questions but to all questions at the same time. The only responses to questions they have given are that they are working with the communities to address concerns and that nothing is cast in concrete, the plans can be altered, and they are now fine tuning the proposal.

NYCDOT must show with current data how SBS has been a net benefit by helping more roadway users than it hurts during all the years it has been in operation. Providing limited

data for bus riders during the first year of operation and limited traffic data for several weeks is insufficient. The first route was placed in operation eight years ago.

❑ **NYCDOT and the MTA Have Been Inconsistent Whether BRT is an Inexpensive Alternative to the RBL or a Substitute for It.**

If not a substitute why has the MTA not applied for available state funding to study the feasibility of its reactivation? If it is a substitute, why have they not said so?

BRT is painted as a panacea to solve bus reliability problems but they have not presented clear, verifiable, and above all accurate information to validate their case. Reports and presentations have been misleading by only presenting the positives using unclear and misleading diagrams. At the initial Woodhaven meetings it was stated that SBS is only one option when in fact, based on and judging from MTA and NYCDOT statements, it was a pre-determined conclusion.

❑ **There Are Critical Questions About NYCDOT's Ability To Execute SBS Program And Overall Transportation Management Performance.**

Existing SBS routes exhibit numerous unresolved problems. They include on-time performance, failing fare machines, poor signage, deteriorated lane markings, no grace periods allowed regarding enforcement of bus lanes, motorists receiving summonses for driving in the bus lane when they are just entering or leaving a legal parking space. Issues such as these issues need to be addressed before the program is widely expanded.

NYCDOT recently completed the installation of a bus lane unrelated to this project on the northern portion of Woodhaven Boulevard wasting millions since it will be demolished in three years. Signage is misleading and unreadable from a car moving at a reasonable speed. This has already led to one serious accident.

NYCDOT has done a poor job in maintaining city streets that are laden with potholes year-round. They admit that one-third of the streets are in unsatisfactory condition and brag about the numbers of potholes filled, but do not resurface some streets for as long as forty years. Their website makes no distinction between the filling of a single pothole and the resurfacing of an entire block giving a misleading impression as to the condition of the streets.

NYC DOT promised street and parking signage that would be more readable and instead produced signs with smaller and narrower print that is less visible. Missing and faded signage are not replaced for as long as five years after being reported to NYCDOT.

NYCDOT took up to ten years to study the redesign of an intersection (Guider Avenue and Coney Island Avenue). Yet they expect us to believe they can complete this 14-mile project in only two years. Implementation has already been postponed from 2015 to 2018.

## SECTION 1

### INTRODUCTION

Cross Bay/Woodhaven Blvd. is a vital transit corridor and one of the few north-south arterial roads in Queens. It is a secondary link between the Long Island Expressway (I-495) and John F. Kennedy International Airport, and the only alternative to the Van Wyck Expressway (I-678).

According to the New York City Economic Development Commission, over 60% of Queens residents, including in the study area, own at least one car. Of those who do not own cars rely on for hire vehicles (FHV) e.g. car services, taxis, Uber, etc. for trips where transit is not convenient, for example, to doctor's offices and shopping.

Woodhaven is also an alternative to the chronically congested Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (I-278) for trips between southern Brooklyn, and northern and Central Queens and points north. Local residents do not only use Woodhaven Boulevard. Some of its users have neither an origin nor destination within the corridor and no efforts were made to include these users at meetings where Select Bus Service (SBS) / Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) was discussed.

The NYCDOT has maintained that the corridor is dangerous for vehicles and pedestrians, is too wide, and needs to be redesigned. They have proposed BRT as a solution to make the road safer without presenting any evidence that BRT would have prevented even one single accident. They have undertaken a second study of the corridor jointly with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of New York (MTA). The first study they performed solely as part of the Congested Corridors Study that was performed from 2007 to 2015.

Any proposal for this corridor must take into account all users of the roadway so as to not negatively significantly impact some of them. The proposal must be proven to be a net benefit for all users of the roadway using existing traffic data and available computer model simulations.

## SECTION 2

### DETAILED IMPACTS OF BRT ON WOODHAVEN AS PROPOSED

The proposed redesign of Woodhaven and Cross Bay Boulevards includes:

- ❑ The elimination of 23 left turning movements some of which are very heavily utilized, in addition to numerous turns already banned;
- ❑ Destruction and relocation of the recently completed exclusive bus lane between Dry Harbor Road Metropolitan Avenue;
- ❑ New traffic islands resulting from NYCDOT's Congested Corridors Study
- ❑ The addition of a bus lane between Queens Boulevard and the LIRR Main Line underpass;
- ❑ An exclusive bus lane between Union Turnpike and Park Lane South and on the main roadway of Woodhaven Boulevard between Park Lane South and Rockaway Boulevard;
- ❑ Bus passing lanes only at selected locations;
- ❑ Elimination of the following bus stops in Broad Channel on East and West 5<sup>th</sup> and West 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> Roads; and in the Rockaways at: Beach 96<sup>th</sup>, 98<sup>th</sup>/99<sup>th</sup> and 102<sup>nd</sup> and 105<sup>th</sup> Streets. Some of the bus stops proposed for elimination in the Rockaways are heavily utilized in the summer such as Beach 96<sup>th</sup> and 98<sup>th</sup> Streets.
- ❑ Narrowing of Woodhaven Boulevard lanes with a probable further speed reduction to 25 mph, not yet announced by NYCDOT. The speed limit was already lowered on Woodhaven from 35 to 30 mph and on Cross Bay from 40 mph to 30 mph as part of the Congested Corridors Study.
- ❑ On Cross Bay Boulevard two alternatives were discussed: (1) Elimination of the dedicated left turn lanes and installation of exclusive bus lanes and (2) Narrowing of the traffic lanes to permit the installation of an exclusive bus lane. Narrower lanes will make it difficult and dangerous to pass large vehicles such as tractor trailers, leaving only about one foot between two large vehicles after the lane width reduction.



A tractor trailer on Cross Bay Blvd currently occupies virtually the entire lane.

- ❑ Elimination of a convenient bus transfer at Atlantic Avenue necessitated by buses operating on the main roadway. Transferring passengers will now have to walk an additional three blocks just to make a bus transfer.

The SBS/BRT roadway design will greatly inconvenience all users, including, ironically, transit users. Longer trips, also result in added fuel consumption and pollution. Here are several examples:

- ❑ **Proposed Banning of Left Turns**

The proposed left turn ban plan for Woodhaven Blvd would greatly inconvenience motorists by adding much distance and time to their trips. Left turns will only be allowed about once every mile. Jug handle turns are proposed as alternatives to some left turns utilizing streets such as 73rd Avenue, which are already heavily congested during shopping hours on weekends. Adding dozens of vehicles every few minutes to those streets would result in adding an additional 15 minutes just to make a simple turn.

No traffic counts have been provided to justify the elimination of these 23 left turns. This information should be available from traffic counts, the NYCDOT Traffic Forecasting model, and the MTA Transit forecasting model, all of which these agencies claim to have utilized in the development of this proposal. All community requests for release of this information have been refused.

- ❑ **Safety Issues**

The replacement to the southbound left turn from Woodhaven to Metropolitan is for a current one-way residential street, Trotting Course Lane, with 21 one or two family homes, to be converted into a two-way street to be utilized by cars, trucks, and tractor trailers. How will that improve safety? It will just move the accidents over from Woodhaven and Metropolitan to Trotting Course Lane so they will no longer appear in the Woodhaven statistics. Would you want all those cars and trucks polluting your street all day and night if you lived there? There are presently very few pedestrians crossing Woodhaven Boulevard at Metropolitan. There is no evidence that pedestrian islands are necessary.

The proposed passenger loading from the main roads will be more dangerous for bus customers. They will have to first cross the service road before boarding. Harried commuters running to catch a bus do not always first bother to check for oncoming traffic. An increased number of pedestrian accidents are likely to occur with thousands of new daily street crossings necessitated by SBS. Ironically, SBS is being marketed as making the roadway safer for pedestrians when it will actually make it more dangerous for them.

### ❑ **Traffic Congestion**

Exclusive bus lanes and the left turn lanes prohibitions on Woodhaven and Cross Bay risks tying existing traffic into knots, despite NYCDOT's unproven claims to the contrary. The left turn lanes proposed at the few intersections where they will still be allowed will not be nearly long enough backing up traffic into one of the two through lanes leaving in effect only one moving through lane when prior to the bus lane installation, there had been four through lanes in each direction. That is a 75% reduction in roadway capacity for vehicles other than buses.

The addition of a bus lane between the underpass of the LIRR Main Line and Queens Boulevard alone, will result in missing an additional one or two traffic cycles adding about five minutes to non-bus trips.

Moreover, at intersections such as Metropolitan Avenue where there were previously ten traffic lanes (eight through and two turning lanes), there will now have only six general traffic lanes (four through and two combined local and right turn lanes). That is a reduction of four lanes. How could these measures possibly not negatively impact traffic?

### ❑ **Emergency Response**

These times will increase when the road is congested under the chosen road design. This will make it difficult for emergency vehicles to change from the bus lane they will be using to the opposing traffic lane when they become stuck behind buses loading and discharging. They will have to get around two lanes of solidly packed traffic. Unlike a highway where the lanes are wide enough for traffic to move to the side creating a new lane, the narrow lanes proposed for Woodhaven would not allow this. Emergency vehicles will have no choice but to wait for the buses to complete their loading process or wait until the traffic signal turns green.

### ❑ **Bus Operations**

The chosen road design will interfere with bus operations. It does not permit express and SBS buses to pass stopped local buses at many of the bus stops since no bus-passing lane is provided. They also will have to wait for local buses to complete their loading process if they are not able to merge into a crowded general traffic lane. Express bus trips will be slowed and SBS trips will not be as fast as projected and might not even be quicker than current limited service.

Most of the time during the off-peak hours, buses are not delayed in traffic and exclusive lanes will not cause them to operate any faster, while the average speed for other vehicles will drop to a miserable 10 or 12 mph. Yet NYCDOT insists traffic will still move at a reasonable rate of speed and even faster than it moves today.

Elimination of a convenient bus transfer at Atlantic Avenue necessitated by buses operating on the main roadway. Transferring passengers will now have to walk an

additional three blocks just to make a transfer. The elimination of two sets of bus stops in Broad Channel and four sets of bus stops in the Rockaways, some of them heavily utilized, will greatly inconvenience residents and beachgoers by adding probably as much walking time as SBS/BRT will save them.

□ **SBS is Not A Net Benefit For All Users Of The Roadway**

No documentation has been presented showing that the eight Select Bus Service (SBS) routes currently in operation, New York City's scaled down version of full-featured BRT, provides a net benefit.

NYCDOT claims that SBS has thus far saved millions of hours of bus travel times in the eight years SBS has been in operation. But bus travel times are being confused with passenger travel times, which are two separate measures. Savings in bus travel times omits walking and waiting times. The former will increase with the removal of eight bus stops in Broad Channel and the Rockaways.

The major reason people choose to drive is because transit takes too long and/or requires too many transfers. BRT along Woodhaven only minimally speeds up trips for bus riders and it does nothing to reduce the number of bus transfers required. A bus trip from southern Brooklyn to Rego Park, for example still would require either three or four transfers. Waiting times will increase with less frequent service resulting from the replacement of 40 foot buses with 60 foot buses. Saving ten minutes on a trip taking between 90 minutes and two hours is not enough of an incentive for roadway users to switch modes.

In fact, SBS has caused a deterioration of local service in many corridors. It has resulted in passengers walking longer to bus stops, possibly trading six minutes saved on their bus trips for six minutes extra walking, while long distance bus passengers may have saved time, but we have no statistics.

NYCDOT insists they have taken the needs of all roadway users into account and asserts traffic will be speeded for all users when all logic dictates otherwise. How can lower speed limits and narrower and fewer lanes reduce traffic congestion for all users unless there is a massive switch from the automobile to the bus? No claims have been made that will happen. The modal split will remain largely unchanged although some drivers will switch to other congested alternative routes and parallel residential streets. Those roadways will not be included in the traffic counts for the corridor skewing any future statistics that are collected. SBS alone is not reason enough to switch modes.

## SECTION 3

### ALTERNATIVES

One of the unique factors of the Woodhaven Corridor SBS/BRT project is the availability of direct alternatives, chiefly the unused parallel ex-Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Rockaway Beach Line (RBL). The only other similar example is on Staten Island where the Hylan Blvd SBS partially parallels the in-service Staten Island Railway (SIR). But the SBS/lanes serve the Brooklyn and midtown Manhattan markets whereas the SIR acts mostly as a feeder to the Staten Island Ferry, serving Lower Manhattan.

There have been cursory piecemeal studies performed on the RBL. But no thorough, objective AA/DEIS study with public engagement for either SBS/BRT or the RBL has ever been performed, unlike for the Second Avenue Subway or for the proposed Staten Island North Shore BRT. It was stated at the public meetings that restoring the RBL was never under consideration.

A thorough analysis of feasible alternatives would include costs and benefits of providing:

- ❑ Traffic Systems Management (TSM) improvements along Woodhaven /Cross Bay;
- ❑ SBS along Woodhaven /Cross Bay;
- ❑ BRT along Woodhaven /Cross Bay;
- ❑ BRT along the RBL;
- ❑ People Mover along the RBL;
- ❑ Light Rail along the RBL;
- ❑ Rail along the RBL connecting with the LIRR;
- ❑ Subway (above ground) along the RBL connecting with the Queens Blvd line;
- ❑ Combined rail and greenway along the RBL, like the rapid transit network in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (It is worth noting that the current MTA chair, Thomas Prendergast, served as CEO of TransLink, the Metro Vancouver transportation authority, before returning to New York).

How many of these alternatives were considered? A subway under Woodhaven Boulevard because of its tremendous cost is not even worth considering given the availability of the RBL in the same corridor. There is even a provision in the Queens Blvd subway for a subway track connection from the RBL, by the 63rd Drive station.

Here are several factors and points to consider that merit requiring an objective AA/DEIS of the rail alternative:

□ **Significant Diversion Into Transit, And Resulting Ridership, Revenue Gains From Higher Speeds**

Based on pre-abandonment (1948) LIRR schedules, journey times to midtown Manhattan (7<sup>th</sup> Av/34<sup>th</sup> St) can be as low as a little over a half hour from Rockaway Beach. In contrast the SBS/BRT plus subway transfer combination will take 60 to 75 minutes: the same as the A train through Downtown Brooklyn, an improvement over the **Q53** on Woodhaven at 74 minutes, but still far longer than the RBL. The RBL is more reliable than the SBS/BRT bus options as it is wholly-grade separated, resulting in no impacts to other corridor users.

□ **Availability And Connection Provisions**

While the RBL is much deteriorated—service ended in June, 1962-- the right of way is intact and in public ownership. The connecting ramps to the LIRR main line are still there. There also is a provision in the Queens Blvd subway for a subway track connection from the RBL, by the 63rd Drive station. The City of New York had planned to take over the RBL when it was building the IND network in the 1930s, including the Queens Blvd. subway line.

□ **Route Options**

The MTA did study, but rejected reportedly out of cost and also as a result of community objections, reusing the LIRR Montauk Branch from Long Island City to Jamaica for a subway line in the 1980s. The Regional Plan Association suggested it should connect into the RBL—the Montauk Branch was the original RBL route until the line from Rego Park was built—for JFK Airport access. This would avoid having to rebuild the LIRR into Rego Park and instead convert it into a greenway. It is still feasible to build this option, from the LIRR East Side Access lower level, but reusing the existing tracks to the RBL. There is now community and local elected official support for LIRR service on the Montauk Branch.

□ **Regulatory Flexibility And Cost Savings**

One of the RBL re-use proposals has been to restore the LIRR adjoining the existing **A** train, with the **A** terminating at Rockaway Park and the LIRR at Far Rockaway. But this would cost, based on an MTA analysis in 2001, close to \$1 billion for a separate new trestle across Jamaica Bay, based on FRA regulations prohibiting mixed use of subway and railroad trains.

But your policy since then of regulatory flexibility may bring those costs down by allowing shared use of the existing trestle and right-of-way. We note that in 2012 you approved the previous transit-only Stadler GTW diesel light rail car design for the DCTA Train for mixed-use operation with freight trains between Denton and Carrollton, Texas. Given the similarity of LIRR and MTA NYCT loading gauges, equipment (much more akin to each other than with freight trains), would not regulatory flexibility be warranted

in the RBL case? When the Pennsylvania Railroad, which owned the LIRR, grade-separated the RBL, from Ozone Park to the Rockaways in the 1930s, and installed new stations, it designed them for subway conversion. With the Stadler GTW decision as precedent, it would be reasonable to allow joint LIRR-MTA NYCT operation over Jamaica Bay.

□ **Midtown Development Patterns And Transit Improvements**

The New York Penn Station area has never taken off as a CBD hub unlike other parts of Manhattan, which some reports have cited as a mitigating factor against the RBL. But there are changes in Manhattan development and transit that are conducive to and which support RBL restoration. First is the Hudson Yards development west of Penn Station, which, with Moynihan Station will lead to more redevelopment in that area. Second, is East Midtown development near Grand Central Terminal (GCT) The LIRR East Side Access will support both developments indirectly, through the extension of the connecting No.7 subway line to the Javits Center, and directly; RBL trains will also be able to reach GCT as well as Penn Station.

□ **Transit-oriented Development Potential**

The Rockaway Peninsula and South Queens has long languished compared to other parts of New York City in large part due to poor transit access. The significant time and convenience factors, and the permanency and appeal of rail, will help drive transit oriented development and raise property values, resulting in more tax revenues and higher employment.

□ **Improved JFK Airport Access**

The RBL would provide a new, faster, and direct airport access route into midtown Manhattan, with also connections to Amtrak, Metro-North Railroad, and NJ Transit. It would avoid the hassle of transferring at Jamaica Station: luggage-toting air travelers do not mix well with commuters changing trains at one of the country's busiest train stations outside of the CBD. This is the route that Governor Nelson Rockefeller envisaged in the 1960s and had his vision been followed New York City would have had the world's finest airport rail system.

# Reactivation of the LIRR Rockaway Beach Branch for Integration into the New York City Subway (Conceptual Schematic)

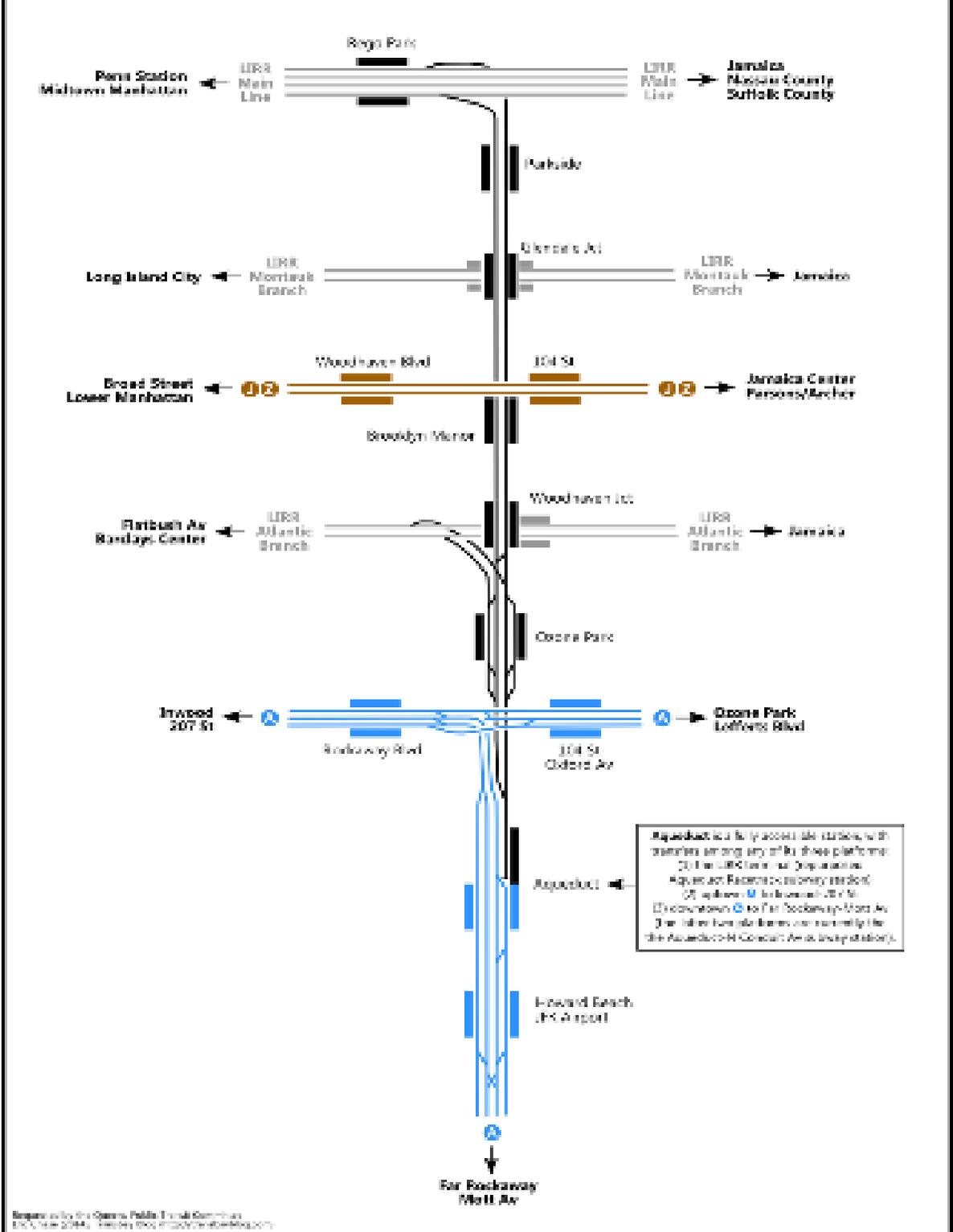
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(Map Courtesy of the Queens Public Transit Committee.)

# LIRR to Aqueduct Station via Rockaway Beach Branch

## Track Map



(Map Courtesy of the Queens Public Transit Committee.)

## SECTION 4

### **SBS IS UNPROVEN AS BEING SUCCESSFUL IN NEW YORK CITY**

The basic premise is "trust us;" since SBS works in other places, it has to also work on Woodhaven. There is no hard data for the supposed benefits of SBS/BRT. All we have are general statements such as BRT (which costs 20 times as much as SBS) is "bigger and bolder," that travel times will be reduced by as much as 35% without any further details provided.

We also note:

- ❑ Paid ridership has declined in recent years on most SBS routes, possibly due to increased fare evasion while subway ridership is booming. For example, paid ridership on the B44 SBS in Brooklyn declined in 2014 by nearly three times the borough average. , However, the MTA insists that SBS decreases fare evasion without presenting any proof that is the case.
- ❑ NYCDOT and the MTA are also using five year-old outdated data, which showed initial booms in SBS ridership as justification that it has been successful, ignoring recent data which shows most SBS routes are now exhibiting declining ridership.
- ❑ There also is no data to suggest riders switched from autos and FHV's to buses with SBS. This is a critical factor in the case of the SBS/BRT on roadways, like Woodhaven Blvd as these projects reduce capacity and cause inconvenience other users. Only by reducing vehicular traffic through drawing sufficient numbers of drivers and occupants into transit will there be a net gain of faster movement of all vehicles: single-occupancy, FHV, commercial, and emergency, as well as transit.

So if there is no evidence showing traffic and resulting emissions reductions, or ridership and revenues increases from SBS then it makes no sense to spend scarce tax dollars on it to ensure fares are being paid and for maintenance of new off-board equipment these routes require. When the switch is made to smartcards in a few years, this equipment will be made obsolete and will have to be scrapped.

## SECTION 5

### UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ABOUT NYCDOT AND MTA COMMENTS, ACTIONS, AND STATEMENTS

#### □ **Is SBS/BRT Is A Substitute For Rail?**

If not, why has the MTA not applied for available state funding to study the feasibility of reactivating the inactive Rockaway Beach Line in the Woodhaven Corridor, only a half mile to the east of where SBS is proposed? By not applying for these funds, they are tacitly supporting its conversion to a bike path and trail dubbed Queensway.

If so, will BRT on Woodhaven spell the death of reusing a valuable resource, one without any of the negative impacts of SBS?

#### □ **Is BRT Cost Efficient To Build And Operate?**

Neither is true. BRT is neither cheap to construct (at a cost of at least \$231 million) nor cheap to operate costing many millions more annually to operate than traditional bus service.

#### □ **Is SBS/BRT A Panacea To Solve Bus Reliability Problems?**

The MTA would like us to believe it is. Whenever the MTA is questioned about buses being unreliable, the MTA responds that SBS/BRT will fix that because of the exclusive lanes most SBS routes have since buses will not have to mix with other traffic.

In actuality, SBS bus routes have shown the same reliability problems as other bus routes, often bunching two or three buses at a time, since bus lane enforcement has been lacking. The M15 with SBS has been rated as the most unreliable route in Manhattan.

#### □ **Does SBS/BRT Really Increase Ridership?**

Initially it did and the MTA is still relying on those five-year old statistics. However, first year assessment reports are only issued when ridership goes up. Ridership on the B44 and the M60, both of which now have SBS, has declined and no assessment reports were issued due to the fear of jeopardizing future SBS routes. After all, how could a 4.4 percent reduction in B44 ridership be explained which is nearly three times the borough average decline?

#### □ **Has NYCDOT Deliberately Misperceive The Public?**

NYCDOT reports mislabeled a typical section of Woodhaven Boulevard as 160 foot wide when the actual width was 125 feet to give the misleading impression the street is wider than it is to suggest that general traffic lanes can be removed without consequences. They neglected to mention that the road also narrows to 75 feet wide in several locations.

Cars, taxis, trucks, and vans, won't magically disappear, although DOT did exactly that by painting out cars and trucks in their "after" picture of the intersection of Woodhaven and Metropolitan, and replacing them with a dozen new pedestrians crossing the street in their report, as if new pedestrian islands will bring more pedestrians to the intersection.

NYCDOT also dishonestly removed some traffic signals from the “after” picture to present a cleaner looking intersection.

❑ **Was SBS A Pre-determined Conclusion Before There Was Any Public Outreach?**

All initial meetings were held stating SBS is only one option that is being considered when the truth was that the required \$20 million in funding had already appropriated because the Congested Corridors Study, which was concluding when the NYCTDOT/MTA first approached the communities regarding SBS, recommended SBS.

By the way, the Congested Corridors Study, which was aimed at reducing congestion along Woodhaven, actually increased it by removing traffic lanes, and restricting additional turns. For example, there is a bottleneck at the LIRR Montauk Line overpass where the roadway is reduced to three lanes. Using the parallel 88<sup>th</sup> Street was a convenient alternative for those who knew about it. NYCDOT eliminated that timesaving alternative by forcing a right turn onto Union Turnpike from the southbound service road. When this was brought to their attention, they responded that they were unaware 88<sup>th</sup> Street was used as an alternative and promised to take a second look. No merge was eliminated at Union Turnpike as was alleged by NYCDOT.

First the NYCDOT presented to the communities SBS as a potentially inexpensive solution costing \$15 to \$20 million (without fully describing the proposal). The NYCDOT gave the impression of stacking the meetings with outsiders from advocacy groups such as Transportation Alternatives and Riders Alliance who then applauded the plans. With this support, the NYCDOT late in the process, then switched the scope of the project to full featured BRT costing nearly ¼ million dollars without any explanation of the differences between the two or giving any justification how the benefits of BRT was worth twenty times the cost of SBS. This amounts to a bait and switch. The NYCDOT continues to muddy the waters by using the two terms interchangeably.

After the switch from SBS to BRT, three alternatives were developed and the one most detrimental to non-bus traffic was chosen.

❑ **Did The NYCDOT/MTA Fairly Present The SBS/BRT Plans?**

No. These meetings only revealed the positive aspects of SBS. All negatives were all omitted such as:

- ❖ Reduced parking due to longer bus stops;
- ❖ Initially not revealing the number and locations of Limited bus stops that will be removed;
- ❖ That eliminating the dedicated left turn lane on Cross Bay Boulevard will in effect reduce the street to only two moving lanes. No traffic data was provided to show the road could handle this without significantly increasing road congestion;
- ❖ Reduced bus service resulting from the introduction of longer 60-foot buses since service levels are partially based upon percentages of utilized bus

capacity. In the past the MTA has substituted five 40-foot buses with four 60-foot buses and;

- ❖ The destruction of hundreds of trees;
- ❖ No hints were given as to there being any problems with existing SBS routes in order to sell the concept.

❑ **Was The Public Adequately Informed About These Meetings**

The NYCDOT has been accused of holding its meetings at inconvenient times, either during the workday or just after it at dinnertime, limiting attendance. There are about 100,000 daily roadway users and total meeting attendance was under 200 and some attended more than one meeting.

The NYCDOT outreach process was insufficient and only targeted bus riders on the affected routes ignoring the other 60 to 70 percent of roadway users. The vast majority of residents still have no idea of plans to modify the roadway.

Notices were only placed on the buses about a week before each meeting and no longer than for five days on their website. Bus riders who do not use Woodhaven routes daily are still unaware of the plan as are most other roadway users.

NYCDOT has not presented any evidence of credible outreach to motorists, business owners who rely on commercial deliveries, car services, delivery and trucking companies, emergency vehicle operators e.g. FDNY and private hospital EMS, and to businesses reliant and associated with JFK Airport.

❑ **Is Backwards Planning Being Used to Justify BRT?**

The only reason there is such a push for SBS/BRT is because of the available federal funding and that funding could be used to replace buses nearing the end of their life cycle, which the MTA would otherwise have to pay for out of its own budget.

The entire justification for BRT is that it works in other cities so it has to work on Woodhaven Boulevard because it is a wide street. BRT has not been attempted before in New York City because none of the streets where SBS exists is as wide as Woodhaven Boulevard. There is no proof SBS works in New York City or that BRT would work on Woodhaven and numerous reasons to believe it would be detrimental especially to other users of the roadway who have not received fair consideration.

The NYCDOT has hinted that the exclusive bus lanes on SBS routes have not been all that effective because of the general inability to enforce them. They believe that by installing exclusive bus lanes on the main roadway, they will be more enforceable. Even if that is the case, it is inadequate justification for using the center road lanes for buses and constructing new islands to enable that. There needs to be a cost benefit analysis regarding the added benefits of BRT over SBS. “BRT gives us the opportunity to go bigger and bolder” is inadequate justification for the additional spending of over \$200 million.

## SECTION 6

### QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ABILITY OF NYCDOT TO EXECUTE AND MANAGE THE SBS PROGRAM

- ❑ **Why Is Signage On Existing SBS Routes Is Inadequate And Many Signs Are Difficult to Read?**

Below are photos of the lanes and signage on the B44 in Sheepshead Bay:

**Miss the bus lane sign and the roadway markings and you could face a fine of at least \$115**



Bus lane as it looked on 12/5/14, only one year after implementation. Roadway markings are already worn out.



Bus lane as it looked when new.

This is how the bus lane sign appears to drivers making a right turn from Avenue Z into Nostrand Avenue. Signs are only placed on the corners so you will not see another one until the following intersection.

- ❑ **Why Are Bus Lane Pavement Markings Totally Worn Out In Places?**
- ❑ **Why Do SBS Fare Machines Run Out Of Paper Or Are Non-Functioning?**  
WPIX TV documented one bus stop on the M60 with fare machines out of service for over one month after the reporter notified the MTA.
- ❑ **Why Has NYCDOT Issued Numerous Undated Reports And Different Reports Using The Exact Same Cover.**

- ❑ **Why Are Woodhaven Diagrams Unclear Showing Bus Lanes On Portions Of The Street Where None Are Proposed?**
- ❑ **How Much More Money Will NYCDOT Waste?**

NYCDOT recently spent millions of dollars on the installation of bus lanes on the northern part of Woodhaven Boulevard. They intend to demolish and relocate those bus lanes in only three years when SBS is completed. The intelligent decision would be to first collect data to determine how these lanes are functioning before deciding they need to be relocated. NYCDOT instead determined these bus lanes would be in place for only three years before they were installed! It is not prudent to spend millions of dollars on a temporary project unless it is for emergency repairs.

❖ **DOT has created safety problems with the newly installed bus lane confusing drivers.**

- There already was one serious accident between an SUV and a Resorts Casino bus with numerous injuries and a portion of a building demolished. All accounts indicate the bus was cut off by an SUV making a right turn from the lane just to the left of the newly installed bus lane because he probably was confused regarding the proper turning lane.
- The bus lane sign installed by NYCDOT prior to where the turn was made neglects to indicate that right turns must be made from the bus lane. If the signage had been clear, there would have been no accident.
- According to the signage posted on the block before, the SUV driver made the turn from the proper lane but did not exercise due care according to reports.
- According to the law, the turn should have been made from the travel lane nearest the right side of the road, meaning the bus lane. Therefore, a summons was issued for turning from the wrong lane. A second sign was needed on the block where the turn was made indicating that right turns must be made from the bus lane.
- It is no wonder drivers are confused. At least three of the bus lane signs fail to state that right turns are permitted from the bus lane because they appear on blocks where the street direction of the upcoming street goes in the direction where a right turn is not possible.
- How are drivers supposed to know that if they want to make a right turn they must enter the bus lane when there is no additional signage to that effect?
- Drivers are expected to read the minds of DOT engineers and planners. It is the responsibility of traffic engineers to minimize driver errors, not to create situations where errors are increased.

- The unreasonable assumption is made that every driver knows the direction of every upcoming street. Drivers habitually use the right lane when they intend to make a right turn soon and do not wait until the final block to switch to that lane when traffic is heavy.
- Motorists should be allowed to use the bus lane as long as they make the next available right turn onto a public street. As a result of DOT's confusing signage, drivers will unfairly receive summonses just for driving responsibly and some will attempt to turn from the improper lane as that SUV driver did.
- There are at least two other signs that fail to include the words "right turns". Where they are included, the print is so small that the words "right turns" cannot be read until you are within about 20 feet from the sign and only if you are traveling slowly. The signs should state clearly "Buses and Right Turns Only" in one size font. The words "right turns" should not be an afterthought.



- If NYCDOT is not capable of producing a few signs that are adequate or repaint bus lane markings and crosswalks before they are totally worn out, how can they be trusted to safely install SBS on Woodhaven? That major change includes installing new pedestrian islands, relocating the newly installed bus lane, and narrowing lanes that will cause a further reduction in the speed limit to 25 mph. Previously, it had been 35 or 40 mph.
- An unsafe right turn also was created at Yellowstone Boulevard going north which gives drivers about 30 feet to cross a broken line to enter the bus lane. That is an insufficient distance in moderate or slow traffic. How many more crashes will it take before NYCDOT sees the error of its ways?
- ❖ Complaints of major increases in traffic congestion and travel time for those driving have resulted from the recently installed bus lane. Residents also have noticed that buses are speeding in nearly empty bus lanes.

- NYCDOT painted a “Fire Lane Only ↑” marking on Woodhaven Boulevard near Queens Boulevard forgetting to leave adequate space between the words “Lane” and “Only ↑”. Technically any vehicle using that lane other than fire vehicles are in violation. Just one of the many errors DOT sign painters make.



- The NYCDOT outreach process only targeted bus riders on the affected routes who use the affected routes nearly every day and ignored the other 70 percent of roadway users. The vast majority of residents still have no idea of NYCDOT plans to modify the roadway. Notices were only placed on the buses only about a week before each meeting and no longer than for five days on their website.
- At each meeting, only the portion of the plan affecting that specific community was revealed. One had to attend all six outreach meetings to fully understand the entire plan, which still has not been posted on the DOT website or in printed literature.
- DOT promised street and parking signage that would be more readable and instead produced signs with smaller and narrower print that is less visible.



- Missing and faded signage are not replaced for as long as five years after being reported to NYCDOT.



- NYCDOT has done a poor job in maintaining city streets that are laden with potholes year-round. They admit that one-third of the streets are in unsatisfactory condition. They brag about the numbers of potholes they fill, which is only a temporary measure, but do not resurface some streets for as long as forty years. Their website makes no distinction between the filling of a single pothole and the resurfacing of an entire block giving a misleading impression as to the condition of the streets.
- **Why Hasn't the NYCDOT And MTA Answered Questions Posed To Them at the Public Meetings?**

The Queens Public Transit Committee presented a list of sixty questions the workshop held in Howard Beach, none of which have been answered. State Senator Joseph Addabbo witnessed the presentation of these questions to NYCDOT. At the time they were received, NYCDOT stated they will not respond to individual questions but to all questions at the same time. One newsletter was issued dated Spring 2015 which only reiterated previous points and did not address any questions asked or requests for data that NYCDOT stated they could provide, such as traffic counts.

The only responses to questions they have given are that they are working with the communities to address concerns and that nothing is cast in concrete, the plans can be altered, and they are now fine tuning the proposal.

- **Why Is NYCDOT So Anxious To Rapidly Expand The SBS Program?**

The de Blasio Administration has indicated it wants to add twelve more SBS routes within the next two years before the end of the administration. Why is there such a hurry when there are numerous unresolved problems with existing SBS routes?.

These problems include:

- ❖ Improper enforcement of SBS Bus Lanes where unauthorized vehicles are using bus lanes;
- ❖ Questions regarding unfair enforcement of bus lanes:
  - Where no grace periods allowed regarding enforcement of bus lanes causing some motorists to cry foul for summonses received one minute before or after the bus lanes go into affect.
  - Motorists have complained of receiving summonses for driving in the bus lane when they are just entering or leaving a legal parking space.
  - Where summonses have been received during hours bus lanes were not in affect. This happened in Staten Island.

- When bus lane violators did not receive their summonses for three months making it difficult for them to plead their case.
- ❖ Problems with the Transit Adjudication Bureau that need first to be resolved so that multiple visits or extraordinary long waits are not required causing the innocent just to pay up so as not to lose time from work.
- ❖ Failing fare machines that are not promptly repaired;
- ❖ Poor and Misleading signage and severely deteriorated out lane markings as previously documented;
- ❖ Questions regarding improved-on time performance on existing SBS routes. The M15 route, which has SBS, was rated as the most unreliable route in Manhattan and bus bunching of three SBS buses is a common cite along the B44 Nostrand Avenue route.
- ❖ Passengers needing to pay additional fares if they use a local bus to access an SBS bus since only one bus transfer or transfer is allowed under current fare policy.

Issues such as these issues need to be addressed before the program is widely expanded.

## SECTION 7

### **OTHER REASONS BRT ON WOODHAVEN/CROSS BAY IS A BAD IDEA**

BRT projects should not take heavily used general traffic lanes out of commission without data to prove there would be no significant impacts to roadway users who are not using buses.

Displaced traffic has to go somewhere and data needs to be collected not only for Woodhaven and Cross Bay Boulevards, but also for alternate routes such as the already congested Van Wyck Expressway and nearby residential streets that will be used as unsafe shortcuts.

There is no logic in removing two lanes or more for general traffic for drivers, livery cabs, vans, and truckers for bus transit when there is an unused rail line nearby. The removal of general traffic lanes may be appropriate in areas where car ownership is low. However, in Queens, 60 percent of the households own at least one car because it is the only way to get to most places in the borough or places other than Manhattan within reasonable amounts of time.

Buses saving millions of hours, as the MTA claims, since the introduction of SBS eight years ago, does not necessarily translate into reduced travel times for bus riders. Increased walking distances to and from bus stops that are up to one mile apart and complaints regarding degradation of companion local bus service cannot just be ignored. Bus service will only be minimally improved for some and made more inconvenient for others with the removal of some bus stops.

Most of the time during the off-peak hours, buses are not delayed in traffic and exclusive lanes will not cause them to operate any faster, while the average speed for other vehicles will drop to a miserable 10 or 12 mph. Yet NYCDOT insists traffic will still move at a reasonable rate of speed and even faster than it moves today. When asked what they consider to be a reasonable rate of speed, they would not answer.

The elimination of heavily used bus stops in the Rockaways are proposed. This will cause beachgoers to carry their gear for up to a half mile to reach a bus stop. These stops are now so heavily utilized in the summertime that buses regularly skip them because there is insufficient room on the buses. Residents will have to walk extra in all types of inclement weather. Yet SBS is being promoted as making bus service more attractive.

SBS proponents are manufacturing reasons to justify it by stating Woodhaven Boulevard is a dangerous roadway and SBS/BRT if it were in place, could have prevented past accidents. There is no proof whatsoever that this is true. This is one of the reasons why critics of Select Bus have dubbed it "Select BS". The truth is that the street redesign that has so far occurred has made the street more dangerous and was a contributing factor to at least one accident and some proposed changes would make it even more dangerous.

## SECTION 8

### CONCLUSION

The MTA and the city only want to give the impression they want to improve bus service. If they were serious, beachgoers would not be required to wait over 90 minutes for an overcrowded bus as was documented by local newspapers several times this summer on the Q35 to Riis Park in Rockaway. (There is even one documented instance of one two hour and 16 minute wait.) The real purpose of removing general traffic lanes is to discourage driving by making it more difficult. Why else would exclusive bus lanes be proposed 24/7 when buses are nearly empty and headways are sparse and virtually all traffic is comprised of automobile traffic?

The MTA's 2013 Looking Ahead report specifically stated that they would consider reactivating deactivated or underutilized railroad rights of way as a cost-effective measure to improving transportation. When the state recently made funds available for exactly that purpose, the MTA's response was they are uncertain if they will apply for that funding. Why should they even question whether or not they should apply? Are they afraid that the results of a study of the RBL might conclude it is affordable and less disruptive than SBS?

Reactivating the RBL would not require trucks to use residential streets. It would not require expensive continuing fare enforcement and slower trips for cars and more expensive trips for cabs. Cars would not be forced onto residential parallel roadways to avoid being stuck in traffic. The RBL has the additional advantage of encouraging development and raising property values. Is the MTA afraid of disturbing current plans for SBS and Queensway? The RBL could be reactivated for a little more than twice the amount it would cost for BRT and Queensway.

The following groups and individuals have already expressed their opposition to SBS on Woodhaven / Cross Bay and the list is growing:

- ❑ Community Boards # 9, 10 and 14,
- ❑ Woodhaven Residents Block Association,
- ❑ Howard Beach-Linwood Association,
- ❑ Jamaica Business Improvement District,
- ❑ Executive Director of the 106<sup>th</sup> Precinct,
- ❑ Assembly members Mike Miller and Phillip Goldfeder,
- ❑ State Senator Joseph Addabbo,
- ❑ Borough President Melinda Katz,
- ❑ Newspapers such as the Queens Chronicle, Rockaway Times and The Wave (of Rockaway).

The opposition is increasing as residents learn more details of the plan. Here is a link to a recent article about community reaction:

[http://m.qchron.com/mobile/editions/south/residents-blast-sbs-plan-at-civic-meeting/article\\_611d2d4c-7425-5ee7-9ea3-912ef10dd930.html](http://m.qchron.com/mobile/editions/south/residents-blast-sbs-plan-at-civic-meeting/article_611d2d4c-7425-5ee7-9ea3-912ef10dd930.html)

As reported by the Queens Gazette in 2013, Congressmen Meeks and Jeffries joined Assemblyman Goldfeder in the effort to restore the abandoned Rockaway Beach Rail Line. The article states: “the current transit infrastructure of Queens is incapable of servicing the present population and does not offer any reliable or alternative travel options.”

Rep. Jeffries stated: “According to the Census, residents of Southern Brooklyn and Queens currently face the longest commute averages in the City because of the lack of reliable transportation. Restoring the Rockaway Beach Rail Line would not only ease the commute for hundreds of thousands New York City residents, it would also spur job growth and revive local businesses that have been struggling since the Great Recession hit in 2008.”

Here is a link to that article: [http://www.qgazette.com/news/2013-03-27/Front\\_Page/Meeks\\_Jeffries\\_And\\_Goldfeder\\_Request\\_Federal\\_Fundi.html](http://www.qgazette.com/news/2013-03-27/Front_Page/Meeks_Jeffries_And_Goldfeder_Request_Federal_Fundi.html)

BRT can never accomplish what the rail reactivation could do. This project needs to be placed on hold until the detailed impacts to all users of the roadway and the alternatives to SBS/BRT are fully explored. NYCDOT also needs to fully explain the differences between SBS and BRT with a cost benefit analysis showing how a project that costs twenty times as much provides twenty times the benefit and to stop confusing SBS and BRT.

They must provide a complete traffic analysis comparing SBS with and without exclusive bus lanes and with exclusive bus lanes that allow HOV vehicles showing the effects on traffic if the lanes are installed 24/7 or only during certain hours. The traffic model they are using should be able to quickly provide these metrics and the public has a right to this data in order to make an intelligent decision as to what is best for the Woodhaven Corridor.