

# Select Bus Service or *SBS* on Woodhaven Blvd Is Simply a Bad Idea

Presented to: Community Board 14  
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Please hold all questions until the end. Thank you.

# Goals for Improving Bus Transit

## ● What We Need:

- **Speedier trips** for bus passengers
- **An Increase in safety** for pedestrians and bus passengers
- **A More Efficient system** leading to ridership growth
- **More frequent and reliable bus service**
- **Fewer bus transfers** and **no double fares** for using 3 buses or two buses and a train
- **SBS Accomplishes None of This.**



# Why SBS Does Not Accomplish These Goals

- **Most bus passengers will not save significant time.**
- **Bus passengers running to catch a bus are put in danger** with median bus stops.
- **SBS costs more to operate and patronage on many SBS routes has declined.**
  - Off-board payment requires fare enforcement.
  - M15 ridership lost 3 million annual trips since 2012.
  - B44 ridership lost paid riders since 2014. How many because of increased fare evasion? We do not know.
- **Reduced ridership leads to reduced service.**



# Why Most Bus Passengers Will Not Save Time

- **Only those making long bus trips may have quicker trips.** Most local bus trips are short.
  - The average local bus trip is only 2.3 miles. This may be a little higher in the Woodhaven corridor.
- The loss of local stops will require **more time spent walking to and from SBS stops.**
- For most, the **quicker bus rides will be offset by longer walking times.**
- **Off-board fare collection saves little time.**



# Why Most Bus Passengers Will Not Save Time

- Bus drivers are instructed not to wait for passengers purchasing their tickets. **Your chances of missing a bus are increased.**
- **SBS buses still bunch.** Service is not more reliable.
- On the main roadway when traffic is congested or gridlocked:
  - Express buses will not be able to pass SBS and local buses and
  - SBS buses will not be able to pass local buses.



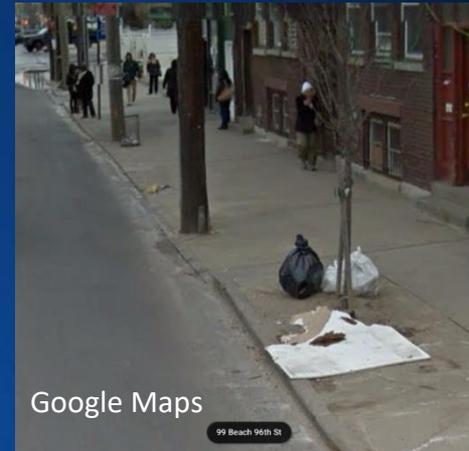
# Why There Will Be a Decrease in Safety

- Longer response times for emergency vehicles.
- Median bus stops will encourage passengers to rush across the street without looking to catch a bus.
- How long will it take for snow to be cleared from median bus stops? Passengers be forced to wait in the bus lane.
- Through traffic will be forced to use the local service road and parallel residential side streets to avoid gridlock traffic during rush hours.
- The B. 102 St. sidewalk will not be able to accommodate the large number of school students.
- The sidewalk at B. 96 St. is too narrow to handle large summertime crowds.



# Inadequate Sidewalk Space to Handle Large Crowds

- Narrow sidewalk at B. 96 St. sidewalk will not be able to accommodate large summer crowds of 50 to 100 people with the elimination of B. 98 St.



# It Will Take Days to Remove Snow and Ice From Bus Stops

- Since snow and ice isn't promptly removed from existing bus stops, why would they be removed from median bus stops?
- Would you have to wait for the bus in the bus lane?



# Do We Want More Than 30 Students Congregating at One Bus Stop?

- B. 105 St. to be eliminated
- Existing B 102 St. bus stop



- A similar situation will exist at B. 96 St. with the elimination of the B. 98 St. bus stop.
  - (The B. 96 St. bus stop is much narrower.)

# Problems with Exclusive Bus Lanes and Existing SBS Routes

- **Bus Lanes Back Up Traffic**



Photo Taken on Q44 SBS route

# Problems with Exclusive Bus Lanes and Existing SBS Routes

- DOT claims travel times would be reduced by as much as 30% but there is no evidence to support this.
- **Fare machines** that remain **inoperable** for weeks.
- **SBS Bus Lanes are Not Maintained.**



**Example of worn out bus lane markings in Staten Island.**

# Problems with Exclusive Bus Lanes and Existing SBS Routes

- **Confusing and unclear signage.**
  - The Resorts Casino bus accident in Rego Park (where exclusive bus lanes were already installed) was caused by a confused driver who did not know he could make a right turn from the bus lane. The sign on the previous block said “Buses Only” which was not meant for following block where there was no signage saying right turns were allowed from the bus lane.
- **Unfair summonses** (over \$100) are given to cars as well as bus passengers. Cameras do not discern the guilty from the innocent.
- **Local service has deteriorated** with 45-minute waits reported on some bus routes forcing passengers to use SBS thereby inflating SBS ridership numbers.

# Problems with Woodhaven SBS

- **Significant negative impact on travel time for...**
  - Family and friends who drive
  - Commercial vehicles
    - Large Trucks will have difficulty turning into service roads.
  - Emergency vehicles
    - Will not be able to pass stopped buses when in traffic or gridlock.
    - Will not be easily able to cross center median to use opposing traffic lanes.
- **Adverse or Unknown environmental effects**
  - Increased air pollution due to increased traffic congestion on Woodhaven Blvd and on neighborhood streets.
  - No Environmental Impact Study has been done.



# Problems with Woodhaven SBS

- **Through traffic will be forced to use the local service road** and residential side streets to avoid gridlocked traffic during rush hours.
  - DOT claims traffic will be better organized but has not shown that 1/3 of the traffic is local for several blocks only.
- **Communities support keeping the bus on the service roads** to keep the three general traffic lanes together. DOT refused.
- **This plan is designed to punish drivers** so they give up driving.
- Mass transit usage should be increased by improving it, not by worsening the alternatives.



# Problems with Woodhaven SBS

- **Dangerous median bus stops**
- Over 1,700 bus riders **will lose bus stops** in Rockaway and Broad Channel.
- **Longer walks** for commuters and summer beachgoers and tourists carrying beach gear.
- **Extremely long lines for the Q53** in the summer at B116 Street will stretch around the block. Longer lines at other bus stops also.
- **Businesses will suffer** where bus stops are eliminated.
- **No SBS stop at Atlantic Avenue** increasing transfer time to Q24.
- **Unnecessary 24/7 bus lanes.**
- **Service will not be more frequent or more reliable.**
- **Narrow service roads near intersections** will inhibit snow clearing.
- **Too many unanswered questions** such as costs and specifically what is included in the short term (2017) verses the long term (2025).



# SBS is Less Efficient Than Traditional Bus Routes

- Signage and road markings require maintenance.
- Drivers of longer buses get paid more under the new contract.
- Longer buses use more fuel and will be used during low use hours.
- Fare machines require maintenance.
- Fare machines will become obsolete when the MetroCard is replaced in a few years. (An inefficient use of funds.)
- Off-board fare collection saves little time.
- The cost for fare enforcement is very high.
  - MTA stated it is the most expensive component of SBS but won't reveal costs or tell if the MTA benefits from the fines collected or if it just goes into the city's general fund.
- Each SBS route costs between \$2 million to \$3 million more to operate each year and ridership on many SBS routes is declining.



# DOT Has Not Been Completely Candid

- **They have only disclosed the positives of SBS, omitting all negatives.**
  - They never mentioned anywhere that at least two general traffic lanes will be removed in each direction.
  - They just say exclusive bus lanes will be created.
  - They do not state that the remaining three lanes are separated by a mall allowing changes between all lanes only every quarter-mile increasing traffic congestion.
  - They downplay the effect of the elimination of bus stops on increased walking times.
  - They haven't disclosed the number of parking spaces that will be lost due to longer bus stops which will be significant.
  - They didn't mention that all parking will be removed between Union Turnpike and Myrtle Avenue.



# DOT Has Not Been Completely Candid

- **DOT claims SBS has increased bus ridership.**
  - **On most SBS routes** outside the Bronx, there are **significantly fewer riders** than before SBS began.
  - The M15 along Second Avenue, the route most often singled out as a success, has lost about 3 million annual riders between 2012 and 2015. (The first full year of M15 SBS was 2011.)
- **DOT cherry picks their data proving whatever they want.**
  - They cite ridership increases during the first year of operation when it went up. (e.g. M15, ignoring other years.)
  - They cite second year ridership when first year ridership is down. (e.g. B44)
- DOT omits that **33,000 daily bus riders** account for **only 20% of the corridor's users** in motor vehicles.



# DOT Has Not Been Completely Candid

- **SBS with exclusive bus lanes was a given** before the start of the study.
- DOT first stated Vision Zero and SBS were two separate programs when asked why speed limits were lowered.
- DOT now states both projects are part of the Complete Streets Program and a goal of SBS is to make the streets safer.
- That means the speed limit on Woodhaven Blvd. could be lowered further to 25 mph as was done on Queens Blvd., further slowing buses.
- That means you could receive a \$50 fine if your speed touches 36 mph for even a few minutes.
  - The speed limit originally was 35 mph for many years.
- We know nothing about their modeling assumptions.
  - Traffic data could be taken over a five year period.



# DOT Has Not Been Completely Candid

- **They confuse bus travel times with passenger travel times.**
  - DOT saying SBS reduces travel time from 10 to 30% refers to buses traveling the entire route which could be 14 miles long.
  - The percent of time you save will be much less if you ride only 3 or 5 miles, transfer to other buses or trains, do not ride the entire route, walk extra to and from the bus, miss a bus buying your ticket, or if buses are not on schedule.
  - Most likely you will only save 5% (or only about 5 minutes) when including all factors if you save time at all.
- **We do not know all the details.** They do not answer all questions.
  - Will there be bus lane between Queens Blvd and Eliot Ave eliminating a left turn lane to Queens Blvd?
  - Why install small bus shelters at major stops?
- **SBS is not low cost and cannot be completed quickly.**



# We Still Do Not Know What SBS Will Cost

- **DOT switched plans**, from a \$20 million plan to one costing as much as \$400 million.
- DOT never clearly explained the difference between the two plans, or **what Phase 1 includes and what Phase 2 includes**.
- **DOT never provided evidence** that the more expensive plan will provide ten or twenty times the benefit as a responsible government agency should do.
- The plan is to spend as much federal dollars as possible.
- If federal monies are not obtained, **the second phase will never be done**. Or it could be split into additional phases.
- **We could be left with an incomplete plan** having unprotected local bus stops in the median or buses on the main roadway with local buses on the service roads further worsening traffic.

# Conclusions

- **SBS is an expensive**, complicated plan causing more problems than it solves and hurts more people than it helps.
- **It is poorly designed** not allowing for express buses to pass SBS and local buses, or SBS buses to pass local buses on the main roadway when traffic is congested.
- **Simple, less expensive solutions** such as intelligent traffic control devices **were not evaluated**.
- **A state law requiring non-emergency vehicles to give the right-of-way to buses** pulling out of bus stops would save buses more time than SBS and would cost next to nothing.
- **No thought was given to reducing the number of bus transfers.**
  - For example, one of the routes could also operate along 63<sup>rd</sup> Drive to serve Sears and allow a transfer to the Q72 to LaGuardia.
- Woodhaven could be under construction for 8 or more years.

# Who Benefits vs. Who is Inconvenienced

- 33,000 daily bus riders sounds like a big number.
- However, two thirds of bus riders will not save a significant amount of time.
- There are about 150,000 riding in other vehicles daily, all of whom would be somewhat inconvenienced.\*
- Therefore, of the total commuters, less than 6% will benefit significantly.
- About 11 % of the total commuters will benefit marginally or not at all.
- Travel times will increase for 83% of commuters.

\*There are about 50,000 vehicles crossing most major intersections.

150,000 assumes a turnover of three-fold between Rockaway and Queens Blvd and slightly more than one person per vehicle.

So if an average car loses only 5 minutes, every single bus rider would have to save 23 minutes for a net zero change.

Clearly, more will be hurt than helped.

## DAILY BUS RIDERS VS. DAILY MOTOR VEHICLE USERS



# Why This Plan Must Be Rejected

## Needed Changes are Required

- **Exclusive Bus Lanes are not required 24/7.**
  - Bus Riders will not save time during off-peak hours.
  - Other vehicular traffic will move much slower.
  - They should be in effect 7-10 AM and 3 to 7 PM and allow HOV vehicles.
- **Bus lanes need to be on service roads and would be less harmful.**
- **Lost bus stops need to be restored** at B. 105, B. 101, B.98, B. 86, B. 81, B.69 Sts. and W. 5 Rd.
- **Passengers will be forced to wait in the bus lanes when snow is not cleared from median bus stops.**
- **N-bound left turn at Rockaway Blvd** must be restored. (Also S-bound at Union Tpke)
- **Rush hour Cross Bay Blvd lanes should only be for the peak direction** because of the many parking spaces they eliminate.
- **Wider malls with plantings in Woodhaven are unnecessary** and could be used instead to increase the number of parking spaces.
- **Q52 service should be extended** to Mott Ave and 21<sup>st</sup> St. in Far Rockaway.



# **We can Do Better A Lot Better than a Poor SBS Plan!**

- **Needed Changes Must Be Made to the Plan**
- **Or the Plan Should Be Scrapped.**
- **DOT Should Wait for the Results of the state study to reactivate the Rockaway Beach Line.**
  - **QueensRail would only cost a little more than twice the full SBS Plan and take half as long to complete without construction disruption on Woodhaven or hurting traffic.**
- **Thank you for your Attention!**
- **Questions and answers**
- **Discussion**

