Better Buses Restart: Jamaica Bus Improvements

Community Advisory Board Kickoff | July 13, 2020
Agenda

1. Better Buses Action Plan and Better Buses Restart
2. Downtown Jamaica Transit Issues and Potential Solutions
   – Jamaica Ave
   – Archer Ave
   – Merrick Blvd
3. Summary and Next Steps
Better Buses Action Plan and Better Buses Restart
Better Buses Restart

Better Buses Program

- **Mayor’s 2019 State of the City:**
  \textit{Improve bus speeds 25%}

- **Better Buses Action Plan**
  \textit{Released April 2019}

- **Bus Priority Projects**
  - 22 projects implemented in 2019
  - 24 projects were planned for 2020, heavy focus on coordination with NYCT Bronx Bus Network Redesign
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Impact of COVID-19

2020 Work Program was disrupted by the pandemic

- Limited ability to conduct data collection and outreach starting in March
- Bronx Redesign implementation postponed
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Bus Service During the Pandemic

• Speeds initially increased by over 20%

• Ridership initially decreased about 70%

• Highlighted areas of particular need
  • Essential workers using transit
  • Underrepresented communities hardest hit by virus

• Good bus service needed for restart
  • Support essential workers
  • Attract people back to transit

NYC Reopening

Phase 1
• June 8
• Approx. 300k workers returned
• Construction, manufacturing, some retail

Phase 2
• June 22
• More retail
• Outdoor dining
• Some office

Phase 3
• July 6
• Personal care services, some outdoor recreation, no indoor dining

Phase 4
• Timing TBD
• Schools, entertainment
• Indoor dining
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Why New York Buses Are on the Rise in a Subway City

During the coronavirus pandemic, daily ridership on buses has surpassed the subway for the first time in over half a century.

Buses more popular than the subway in NYC during coronavirus crisis

By David Meyer

Carmageddon if returning workers avoid mass transit

"Traffic could come to a standstill."

By Gio Benitez and Mina Kaji

June 15, 2020, 12:12 PM • 5 min read

Coronavirus Updates: Bus And Subway Riders Jump By More Than 213,000 On First Day Of Reopening

By Elizabeth MN

June 9, 2020 1:90 P.M. • 35 COMMENTS
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Recovery Plan

In June, Mayor de Blasio announced a plan for fast, reliable transit service during reopening

- Buses played a vital role during the shutdown and continue to during recovery
- Bus ridership is already at 56% of pre-COVID levels, while subway ridership is only at 21%
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Recovery Plan

9 busway & bus lane projects announced, focused on:

• Vulnerable populations, essential workers
• Number of bus passengers served
• Ability to implement quickly
• Geographic equity
Downtown Jamaica Transit Issues and Potential Solutions
Transit in Downtown Jamaica

- Downtown Jamaica is the busiest bus hub in NYC, with over 45 NYCT, MTA Bus and NICE bus routes with connections to the E, J, and Z subway lines and LIRR
- Buses using Archer Ave
  - Serve 225,000 daily riders
  - Existing speeds of 5.7 to 6.1 MPH (PM)
- Buses using Jamaica Ave
  - Serve 147,000 daily riders
  - Existing speeds of 4.7 to 4.9 MPH (PM)
- Several bus routes operate on both Archer Ave and Jamaica Ave
- Congestion is a major issue for buses, passenger vehicles, and pedestrians
- Pedestrian realm lacks adequate space, amenities, and connectivity
Transit in Downtown Jamaica

- Many of these bus routes travel through neighborhoods that rank high on the CDC’s Social Vulnerability Index (SVI)
- SVI is based on factors such as:
  - Socioeconomic status
  - Car-free households
  - Non-white population
  - Population aged over 65
- Communities with high vulnerability often have limited transportation options, making fast and reliable transit critical

*Routes running between Sutphin Blvd & 168 St only*
Recent Planning Efforts in Jamaica

- Jamaica Bus Improvement Study (DOT, 2010-2012)
  - Led to implementation of curbside bus lanes on Jamaica Avenue
- Jamaica Now Action Plan (Multi-agency, 2015)
  - Led to streetscape study of Jamaica Avenue
- Downtown Jamaica: Gateway to the New York Region (GJDC, RPA, 2016)
- Queens Bus Network Redesign (MTA, 2019-present)
  - Draft Plan explores routing and stop changes borough-wide
- Downtown Jamaica Transportation Study (DOT, 2019)
  - Evaluated busway treatment on Archer Avenue
Jamaica Ave: Current Conditions

- Carries Q6, Q8, Q9, Q41, Q54, Q56, Q110, Q24, Q30, Q31, Q34, Q25, Q65, and Q112 buses
- Serves 147,000 daily riders
- Existing bus speeds of 4.7 to 4.9 MPH (PM)
- Major regional commercial corridor with significant curb demand
- Narrow sidewalks and high pedestrian activity creates sidewalk congestion
- Intermodal transit connections between buses, AirTrain JFK, LIRR, and the subway
- Existing curbside bus lanes in both directions
Jamaica Ave: Current Conditions

Sutphin Blvd to 150 St:
- High commercial activity, high curb demand
- Some placard parking
- Inconsistent grid

150 St to Parsons Blvd:
- Queens Family Court
- Highest placard parking activity

Parsons Blvd to 168 St:
- Heaviest commercial activity with bigger stores than western part of corridor
- Placard parking on Jamaica and on spurs
- Large surface parking lots
- More continuous grid to handle traffic circulation
Jamaica Ave: Transit Issues

Street Is Not Working for Any of Its Users

- Existing bus lanes are ineffective, and are often parked up with placard vehicles or blocked by trucks making deliveries
- Existing curbside lanes are only in effect 7 hours a day due to competing curb demands even though bus ridership is heavy throughout day
- Compared to Archer Ave:
  - Buses are slower
  - Bus stop and lane blockages are more mostly due to personal and delivery vehicles
Jamaica Ave: Potential Solution

Busway from Sutphin Boulevard to 168th Street

- “Offset” bus lanes are not feasible on most of the corridor due to narrow width
- Buses, trucks and local access only
  - Frequent cross-streets allow for local access vehicles to enter and exit busway
- Current curbside bus lane would be repurposed, potentially restoring parking and loading
- Turn restrictions will be studied
- Expanded pedestrian space is under consideration
Jamaica Ave: Benefits of a Busway

Sutphin Blvd to 150 St:
- Improves commercial delivery access and connections to truck routes
- Maintains access to spur streets
- Speeds buses by reducing conflicts between buses, placard parking, and deliveries

150 St to Parsons Blvd:
- Allows buses to bypass placard vehicles
- Maintains access to spur streets

Parsons Blvd to 168 St:
- Improves commercial delivery access and direct connections to local and through truck routes
- Maintains access to large parking structures and spur streets
- Speeds buses by reducing conflicts between buses, deliveries, and “standing” vehicles
Archer Ave: Current Conditions

- Carries Q30, Q31, Q20A, Q20B, Q44 SBS, Q25, Q34, Q65, Q24, Q83, Q111, Q112, Q4, Q5, Q84, Q85, Q42, Q113, Q114, and N4/N4X buses
- Serves 225,000 daily riders
- Existing bus speeds of **5.7 to 6.1** MPH (PM)
- Intermodal transit connections between buses, AirTrain JFK, LIRR, and the subway
- Less retail density than nearby Jamaica Ave
- Existing curbside bus lanes
- Limited access to roadways south of the LIRR tracks
- Heavy pedestrian activity
Archer Ave: Transit Issues

- Bus delays are due to pulling in/out of crowded stops and commuter vans blocking bus stops and bus lanes
- Commuter vans that operate as buses are difficult to enforce
- Placard parking on "teardrop" prevent pedestrian access
- Narrow sidewalks near York College/bus stops
- Faster bus speeds than Jamaica Ave
Archer Ave: Potential Solutions

“Teardrop” Parcel

• Add and relocate bus stops to reduce passenger and bus congestion under the canopies
• Improve bus operations and the rider experience while providing additional space for social distancing
Archer Ave: Potential Solutions

Sidewalks Near York College

- New bus stop amenities for riders such as leaning bars or additional shelters
- Work with MTA to determine feasibility to upgrade/replace pedestrian ramps
- Work with MTA to investigate sidewalk widening to expand space for riders / pedestrian flow and provide additional space for social distancing
Improving Bus Lane Operation

- Work with MTA to prioritize corridor for on-bus camera enforcement
- Build on ongoing DOT protected bus lane pilot using jersey barriers and/or concrete curbs to help keep the bus lanes clear, reduce commuter van conflicts, and prevent illegal U-turns
- Turn restrictions to discourage non-MTA buses from using Archer Ave near the canopy
Merrick Blvd/168 St Transit Improvements

As part of the Better Buses Restart, DOT is proposing offset bus lanes along Merrick Blvd and 168 St from Downtown Jamaica to Springfield Gardens.

A Community Advisory Board is currently being formed and will meet regularly.

Corridor Background:
• 7 bus routes along Merrick Blvd Corridor including NICE bus
• 55,000 daily riders with existing bus speeds of 5.5 to 8.2 MPH (PM)
• Dozens of bus routes on both streets in the core of downtown Jamaica
• Wide commercial street with generally 2 lanes and parking in each direction
Summary and Next Steps
Summary

• Downtown Jamaica is the busiest bus hub in the city and delays in the area can have negative impacts throughout the Queens bus network.
• Buses on Jamaica Ave are often delayed by trucks making deliveries and placard parking.
• Bus riders on Archer Ave are often blocked by commuter vans and face sidewalk congestion near bus stops.
• Jamaica Ave, Archer Ave, and Merrick Blvd all have their own unique issues that impact bus service, which require different, but holistic solutions along each corridor.
Next Steps

• Project scoping and design underway
  – Analysis of traffic data, traffic circulation
• Additional meetings with stakeholders
• Implementation this summer
• Ongoing outreach and monitoring
  – Expedited implementation must be paired with continuous engagement and feedback
  – Community Advisory Board will be convened to relay project outcomes and community concerns on a rolling basis
Thank You!

Questions?