

March 2nd, 2018

Andy Byford
President, MTA New York City Transit
2 Broadway
New York, NY 10004

Dear President Byford:

We write as advocates of mass transit, who support your vision to reinvigorate bus service. We agree that the right response to declining bus ridership is not to scale back bus service, continuing a vicious downward cycle, but rather to improve speeds to deliver better service and attract more riders.

We are also advocates for pedestrians. Most of our streetscapes have not been altered in more than 50 years, even as our City has grown tremendously and travel patterns have changed significantly.

Improving the pedestrian experience on 32nd Street between 6th Avenue and 7th Avenue, starting at the busiest entrance and exit to Penn Station, is an opportunity to both improve mass transit and make our streets safer.

This block sees huge pedestrian flows – some 6,000 per hour, many of whom walk in the street. To address this situation, as a pilot in 2015 commercial loading was cut in half to allow a temporary widening of the northern sidewalk. The pilot was extremely successful in improving the pedestrian experience but unfortunately it did not work well for loading and unloading, due in large part to an MTA bus layover for the M4 and Q32 routes on the south side of the block requiring space for up to 8 buses. It was determined that the only way to bring back the sidewalk widening was to relocate the bus layovers.

Interestingly enough, these are also two of the worst performing bus routes in the city, in terms of speed and as a result, ridership. In fact, both lines recently received F ratings by the Bus Turnaround Coalition. A big part of the delay is that they are some of the longest routes in the system and they require a short but time-consuming crosstown movement to move the buses between 5th Avenue and Penn Station despite limited ridership on that two-block segment.

That is why we are pleased the MTA has advanced a plan, supported by a broad coalition of residents and community leaders, to reconfigure the routes for both the M4 and Q32 bus lines in a way that improves speed while enabling the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) to significantly increase pedestrian space on the block. By moving the layovers to eliminate the cross-town movement, the MTA expects significantly better speeds and better reliability. This also allows NYCDOT to move forward with the necessary pedestrian improvements.

This is a win-win for pedestrians, our transit system and New York City. We hope you will proceed as quickly as possible with implementing the plan.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Goldstein
The Municipal Art Society of New York

Nick Sifuentes
Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Tom Wright
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cc:

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