

Bus Rapid Transit in New York City

An Affordable Solution for Transit-Starved Communities

What is Bus Rapid Transit?

Bus Rapid Transit makes buses move people almost as quickly and efficiently as a subway system, but at a much lower cost. BRT uses dedicated lanes on existing streets, and doesn't require the construction of rails or tunnels. A new BRT line can therefore be put in place much more quickly and cheaply than a new subway line, and with much less disruption of the communities it will serve.



BRT station at Avenida Jimenez, Bogotá, Colombia

What will BRT do for New York?

Right now over 750,000 New Yorkers commute more than an hour to work; many of them stand to have faster, easier rides to work (and school, and play), and all New Yorkers will benefit from the reductions in private vehicle traffic BRT will generate - but only if New York does Bus Rapid Transit right.

Under an agreement with U.S. Department of Transportation, New York City will receive \$354 million – if the state legislature allows the city to implement congestion pricing or a similar traffic reduction plan. Nearly one-third of the funds would be dedicated to creating bus rapid transit routes.

How can we do BRT right?

In 2006, the MTA and the New York City Department of Transportation announced a Bus Rapid Transit pilot project, to begin service in 2010, in which each borough would have its own BRT route. Yet current plans suggest a system that falls far short of Bus Rapid Transit's potential.

New York can learn a lot from major cities like Vancouver, Canada; Jakarta, Indonesia; and Bogotá, Colombia:

Dedicated lanes used exclusively by buses that exclude other vehicles using physical barriers and enforcement cameras (mounted on the buses).

Electronic systems that increase efficiency by giving drivers the ability to make traffic lights turn green as they approach intersections, allowing drivers and dispatchers to communicate to avoid bunching, and providing people waiting at the station stops with real-time information on when the next bus will arrive.

Station-like bus stops where riders pay their fare before the bus arrives, allowing people to board the bus quickly from a platform that is level with the bus floor, using extra wide doors at both the front and rear of the bus.

How Would BRT Work in New York?

East Elmhurst, Corona, South Jamaica, East Flatbush, Canarsie, East New York, Morrisania, Soundview, and Williamsbridge are just a few of the many neighborhoods far away from existing subway lines. There are also many neighborhoods where the existing subways are running at capacity or are already overcrowded.

Financial and physical barriers make it very unlikely that subway lines will ever be built or extended to these neighborhoods, but BRT lines could be put in place very quickly. New BRT routes would use the same Metro Cards, have the same payment options and accept the same transfers that currently exist for MTA subway and bus lines now (multiple-trip discounts, unlimited rides, etc.).

With new leadership at both the MTA (which runs the buses) and the DOT (which manages our streets), the possibility of federal funding, and new revenue that congestion pricing would generate, BRT looks ready to roll. And it's now, as decisions are being made about where and how the next generation of bus service will go forward, that New Yorkers need to make clear what we need from BRT.



Inside the station, lighted signs provide bus arrival times. Passengers have already paid their fares, and when the bus arrives, wide multiple doors open for quick boarding.

The Pratt Center makes the following recommendations:

- **The new BRT needs to connect underserved neighborhoods all the way to and through Manhattan,** just like the subways do. The current BRT plan only carries passengers within their borough, stopping short of the East River and Harlem River bridges. If riders from outside Manhattan want to continue to Downtown or Midtown, they must transfer to the subways, which are already overburdened.
- **BRT must be designed to succeed.** The MTA and DOT must introduce all the elements that make bus rapid transit truly rapid - including protected bus lanes, station-stops with pre-boarding fare collection at busy locations, electronic information and control systems. If we don't invest in making BRT work, it will not deliver the speedy trips New Yorkers expect and deserve.
- **Launch as many BRT routes as possible, as quickly as possible.** Five routes are not enough, and neighborhoods with high concentrations of people with long commutes should be the priority for BRT.
- **Make BRT a funding priority.** The federal funds to launch BRT are essential, but they won't be enough to build and operate a fully functional system. The MTA and City will need to make additional investments, whether from congestion pricing revenues or another source. Right now, however, the MTA has \$30 billion committed to big-ticket rail projects such as the extension of the No. 7 line to the Far West Side that do more to help real estate developers increase profits than to help most New Yorkers get around.
- **Bottom line.** To get BRT, we'll need new funding, ideally from congestion pricing. The 3 percent of drivers who commute to Manhattan will pay for an affordable and efficient new transit resource for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers - if state legislators guarantee now that congestion pricing will be used to build and sustain BRT.

**For more information contact Elena Conte: econte@pratt.edu, or 718399-4416
www.prattcenter.net/transportationequity.php**