

# BETTER BUSES FOR FLATBUSH AVENUE:

## PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH REPORT

PRATT  
CENTER  
FOR  
COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT

 **RIDERS  
ALLIANCE**



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was developed as part of the Flatbush Avenue Bus Service Participatory Action Research Project. Riders Alliance engaged Pratt Center for Community Development to design and help conduct the research, analysis and writing. Riders Alliance is grateful for the The New York Community Trust's support of bus rider organizing and engagement, which allowed for the canvassing and outreach activities necessary to complete this report.

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**Pratt Center for Community Development** works for a more just, equitable, and sustainable New York City. As part of Pratt Institute, Pratt Center partners with frontline community organizations to provide research, participatory planning, policy advocacy, and implementation support. The views expressed in this report are derived from analysis conducted by the Pratt Center for Community Development, and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Pratt Institute.

**Riders Alliance** is a grassroots advocacy organization made up of, and dedicated to, New York bus and subway riders fighting for better public transit to make our city more equitable, inclusive, and accessible—especially in Queens, the Bronx, and Brooklyn where transit is most delayed and disjointed. Riders Alliance members have won meaningful, tangible improvements that save bus riders time and money, including projects on Archer Ave, Fresh Pond Rd, Jamaica Ave, Main Street, Merrick Blvd, Story Ave, Woodhaven Boulevard, 14th Street, 181st Street, and other major bus routes.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Flatbush Avenue bus riders, like those across Brooklyn and the city, face slow and unreliable service. Advocates and the current mayoral administration alike have identified Flatbush Avenue as a priority for bus service improvements including street redesigns, but plans for the corridor south of Grand Army Plaza have stalled. To better understand the economic and community impacts of current bus service, potential improvements, and delays to those improvements, Pratt Center for Community Development and Riders Alliance conducted surveys and focus groups of Flatbush Avenue bus riders and small businesses from June-September 2024. Key findings are summarized here and detailed in the full report.

## 1 FLATBUSH AVENUE BUSES PRIMARILY SERVE BLACK, WOMEN, AND LOW-INCOME RIDERS LIVING IN AND AROUND FLATBUSH.

Among surveyed bus riders:

- 59% identify as Black
- 72% identify as women
- 74% report household incomes of less than \$80,000/year
- 65% live in five zip codes in and around Flatbush

## 2 BUS DELAYS HAVE NEGATIVELY AFFECTED 91% OF SURVEYED FLATBUSH AVENUE BUS RIDERS.

Among surveyed bus riders:

- **2 out of 3** bus riders has had long waits in extreme weather
- **Half** have paid for a car service or taxi
- **1 in 3** has been fired, reprimanded, or lost pay at work

## 3 BUSES SERVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY.

- “Shopping, dining, or entertainment” is the number one destination for Flatbush Avenue bus riders
- 85% of riders said they would shop or dine on Flatbush Avenue more often if buses were more reliable

## 4 BUS LANES ARE SUPPORTED BY 87% OF FLATBUSH AVENUE BUS RIDERS SURVEYED.

- 87% of bus riders say they are more likely to vote for candidates who prioritize improving bus service.

## 5 COMMUNITY MEMBERS HAVE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE THAT COULD HELP SHAPE PLANS FOR THE FLATBUSH AVENUE CORRIDOR.

and they want more services and engagement from the City.

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These findings reveal community need and support for better bus service on Flatbush Avenue – and the costs of stalled improvements – which should inform the City’s plans for Flatbush Avenue and the bus system citywide.

# INTRODUCTION

Flatbush Avenue bus riders, like those across Brooklyn and the city, face slow and unreliable service. The City has made a series of policy commitments to improve bus service through better route planning and street designs that prioritize buses, including the 2019 [Better Buses Action Plan](#), 2019 [NYC Streets Plan Law](#), and 2021 [NYC Streets Plan](#) – and the current mayoral administration identified Flatbush Avenue as a priority for improvements in 2022.<sup>1</sup> Despite some progress, these plans have largely stalled. The City has built just 20% of its 150-mile commitment for new bus lanes, and plans for Flatbush Avenue underway focus on the northern-most segment of the corridor, from Grand Army Plaza to Downtown Brooklyn.<sup>2</sup> Bus riders and their neighbors in the segments south of Grand Army Plaza, which have larger populations of people of color and low- and moderate-income people, are still facing long wait times for the bus and the plans to improve them.

In the face of these delays, Pratt Center and Riders Alliance conducted a Participatory Action Research Project to better understand the economic, social, health, and other community impacts of current bus service on Flatbush Avenue, potential improvements including street redesign, and delays to those improvements.

## RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODS

This research project was designed collaboratively by Pratt Center for Community Development and Riders Alliance, in consultation with an Advisory Committee of Flatbush residents, advocates, and researchers with expertise in the neighborhood and transportation issues. While DOT has proposed plans for the entirety of the Flatbush Ave corridor, this project focuses on the sections between Empire Boulevard and Brooklyn College. In order to ensure that research tools were accessible and effective, survey and focus group questions focused on community perspectives on bus service, rather than on other uses and aspects of the Flatbush Avenue corridor such as dollar vans or other modes of transportation. The research team recognizes that dollar vans are an essential part of transportation infrastructure on Flatbush Avenue, and that research and planning for bus service and street design must include the impact on dollar vans. Research methods included a literature review, survey of bus riders, and focus groups with small business owners, summarized below and detailed in Appendix A.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Pratt Center and Riders Alliance reviewed existing literature on New York City's bus system and the Flatbush Avenue corridor, considering scholarly sources, MTA and DOT datasets and reports, other government agency reports, newspaper articles, and independent studies from organizations focused on improving public transportation. Our review of existing literature informed our research questions and the design of the survey and focus groups, with a focus on filling gaps in existing literature. A full list of references can be found in Appendix C.

## BUS RIDER SURVEY

The Flatbush Avenue Bus Riders Survey was implemented via Survey Monkey from June-September 2024. Survey outreach was conducted through a combination of in-person canvassing (at bus stops on Flatbush Avenue, as well as libraries and community events) and online, with the survey made available in English, Spanish, and Haitian Kreyol. This report highlights key findings from our analysis of 1,803 complete survey responses. Detailed methodology can be found in Appendix A, and survey results by question can be found in Appendix B.

## FOCUS GROUPS

Pratt Center designed and facilitated two focus groups of small business owners in September 2024. The six participating small businesses were located on or adjacent to Flatbush Avenue between Empire Boulevard and Avenue J, and included a mix of retail, food service, and other service businesses.

The findings we detail in this report demonstrate that buses serve a vital role in the economy and communities of Flatbush and surrounding neighborhoods, but slow and unreliable service has negative financial and health impacts on riders. Improving bus service, our research shows, would benefit workers and businesses. Bus riders strongly support and have valuable local knowledge that should inform plans to prioritize buses on Flatbush Avenue.



# FINDINGS

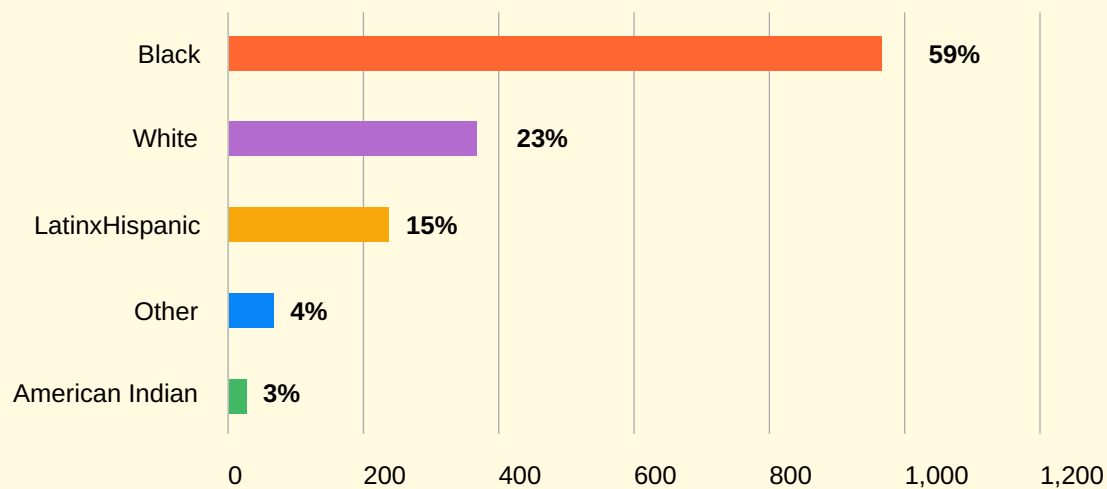
## 1. FLATBUSH AVENUE BUSES PRIMARILY SERVE BLACK, WOMEN, AND LOW-INCOME RIDERS LIVING IN AND AROUND FLATBUSH.

Demographic analysis of survey respondents show that Flatbush Avenue buses are used by people across income, race, and gender, but that riders are most likely to identify as Black, to identify as women, and to report annual household incomes of less than \$80,000. Survey respondents overwhelmingly reported living in five zip codes in and around Flatbush.

### MORE THAN HALF (59%) OF BUS RIDERS SURVEYED IDENTIFY AS BLACK AND 15% IDENTIFY AS HISPANIC.

These demographics are reflective of the Flatbush area, where 59% of residents identify as Black and 12% identify as Hispanic.<sup>3</sup>

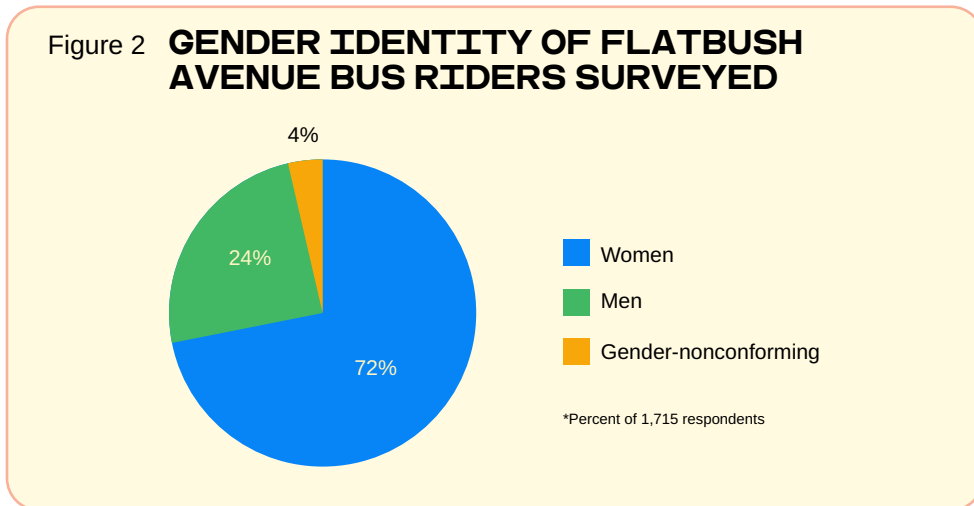
Figure 1 **RACE AND ETHNICITY OF FLATBUSH AVENUE BUS RIDERS SURVEYED**



Based on 1,624 respondents who answered

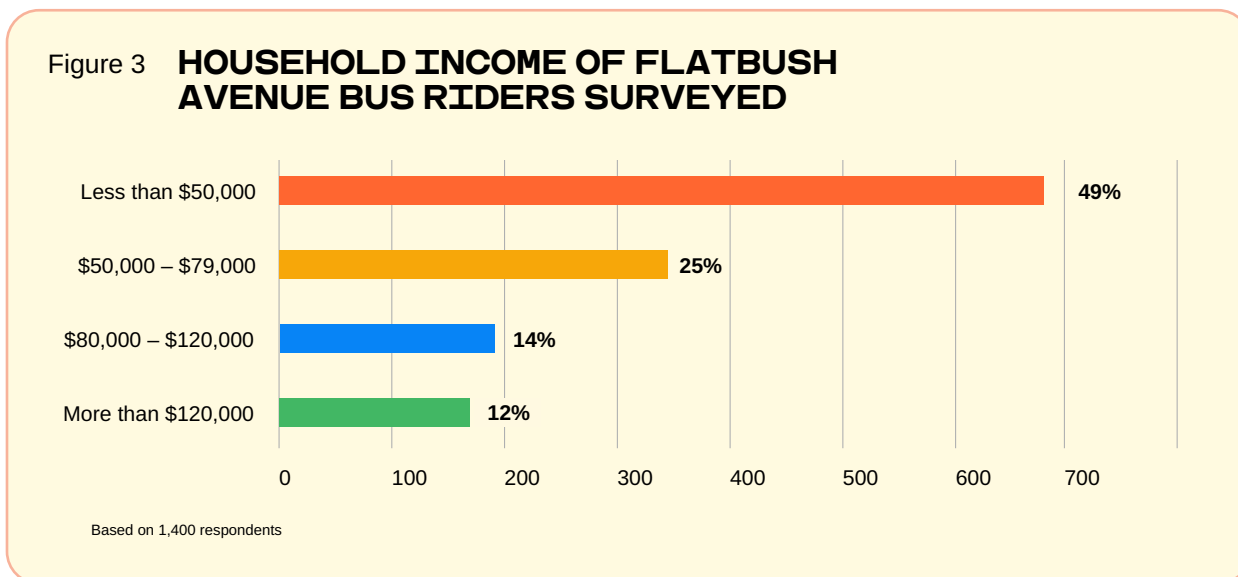
## WOMEN MAKE UP THE MAJORITY (72%) OF FLATBUSH AVENUE BUS RIDERS SURVEYED.

While women may appear to be overrepresented among survey respondents, studies show that women are more likely to use public transportation and buses.<sup>4</sup>



## THREE-QUARTERS (74%) OF FLATBUSH AVENUE BUS RIDERS REPORT HOUSEHOLD INCOMES OF LESS THAN \$80,000 PER YEAR, AND HALF (49%) LESS THAN \$50,000 PER YEAR.

These bus riders are considered low-income per 2024 federal housing guidelines.

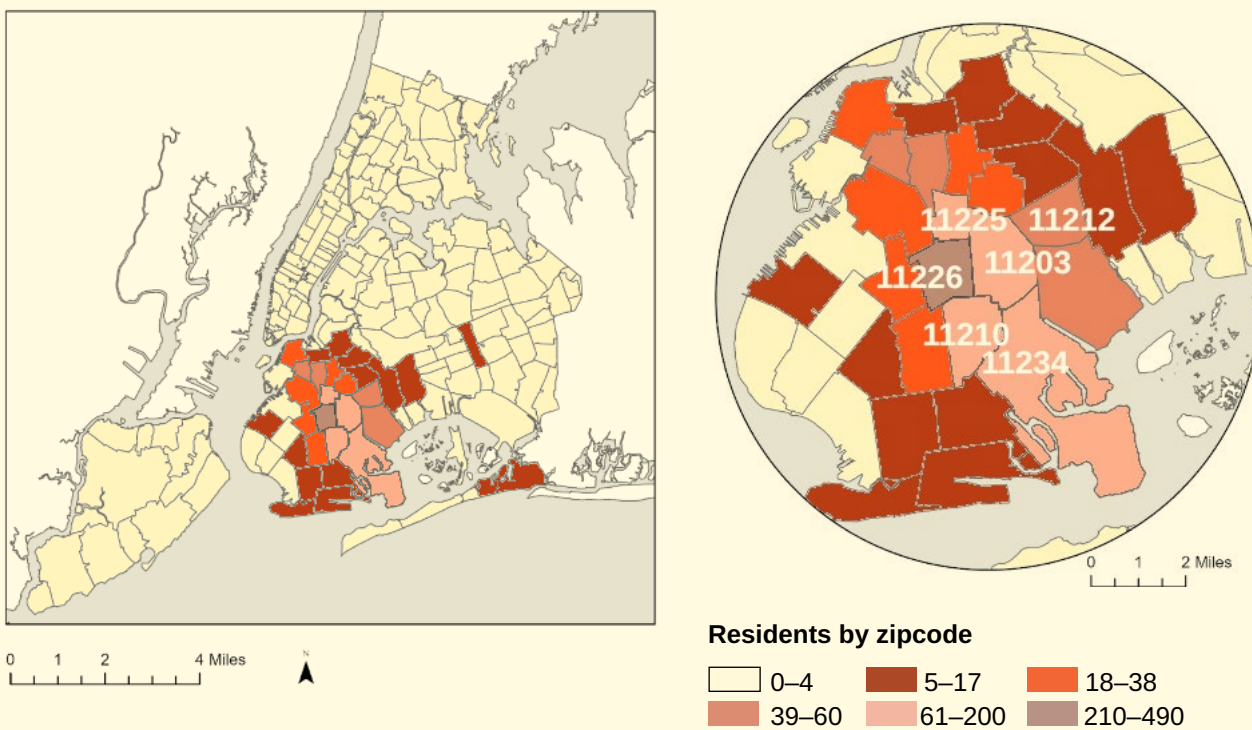








## BUSES ENABLE FLATBUSH RESIDENTS TO TRAVEL WITHIN THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND TO CONNECT TO THE REST OF THE BOROUGH AND CITY.

Most surveyed bus riders reported living in Flatbush or adjacent neighborhoods.<sup>6</sup> Top destinations include Downtown Brooklyn, Kings Plaza, and other parts of Flatbush. Some riders reported taking the bus as part of their travels to Bedford-Stuyvesant, Bushwick, Clinton Hill/Fort Greene, Crown Heights, and Park Slope, as well as destinations outside of the borough to Manhattan and the Bronx. Many Flatbush Avenue bus riders are transferring to other buses and subways; MTA analysis of Brooklyn's bus system found that "long, straight routes such as the B41 ... serve as spines in the grid system of the Brooklyn Bus Network, and therefore the percentage of customers who transfer to another bus is higher than on other routes."<sup>7</sup>

Figure 4 **ZIP CODES HOME TO SURVEYED FLATBUSH AVENUE BUS RIDERS**



## FLATBUSH AVENUE BUS RIDERS HAVE DIVERSE NEEDS AND IDENTITIES

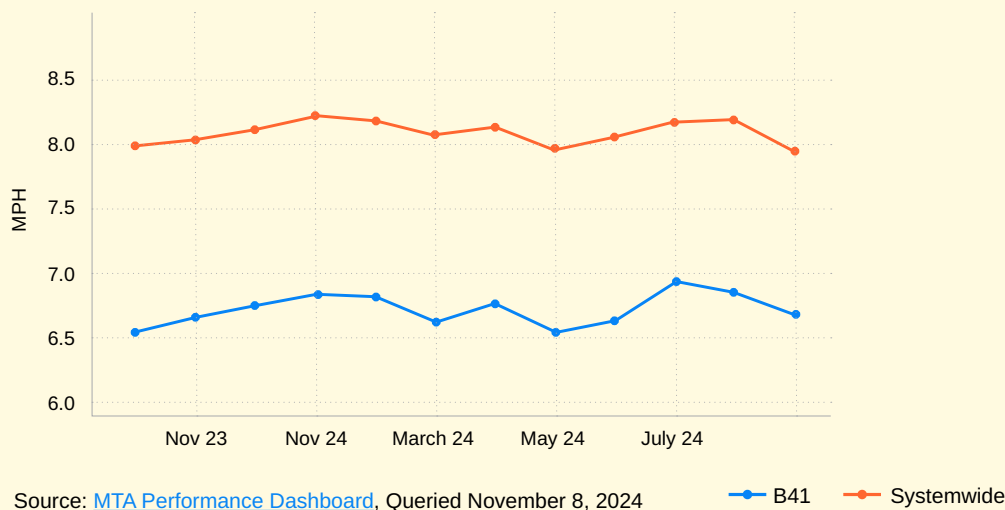
-  **STUDENTS: 17% OF SURVEYED RIDERS**
-  **SENIORS (PEOPLE AGE 65 OR OLDER): 16%**
-  **PARENTS OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 16: 14%**
-  **PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: 13%**

While Flatbush Avenue bus riders are diverse, bus service – both poor service and any improvements – primarily affect low-income, Black, and women riders, including seniors and people with disabilities.

## 2. BUS RIDERS FACE SLOW, UNRELIABLE, CROWDED BUSES – AND EXPERIENCE FINANCIAL AND HEALTH CONSEQUENCES AS A RESULT.

As acknowledged by the NYC Department of Transportation, “New York City buses are... the slowest in the United States,”<sup>8</sup> and the buses on Flatbush Avenue are even slower than systemwide. (See Figure 5) Buses are also unreliable and frequently delayed. As the MTA put it, “Bus riders in Brooklyn face a harsh reality: buses arrive late all the time. ... [I]t is especially difficult to rely on buses to go to work, school, or appointments if the bus does not arrive when it is scheduled to, and runs into unexpected congestion or other delays en-route.”<sup>9</sup> These widely-documented service issues are reflected in Flatbush Avenue riders’ reported experiences and attitudes.

Figure 5 **SYSTEMWIDE AND B41 BUS SPEEDS, OCTOBER 2023 – SEPTEMBER 2024**



**ONLY 37% OF BUS RIDERS TRUST THE BUSES ON FLATBUSH AVENUE TO GET THEM TO THEIR DESTINATION ON TIME. THE MAJORITY (71%) OF SURVEYED FLATBUSH AVE BUS RIDERS TAKES THE BUS AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK, YET MOST DO NOT FEEL IT IS RELIABLE.** This perceived and actual lack of reliable service often results in riders building in additional wait time that lengthens their regular commutes (in addition to delays and slow speeds). As the MTA assessment of existing conditions in Brooklyn's bus network explained, a "bus rider must account for... delays in the time they allocate to get to their destination. In an ideal situation, maybe their trip takes 45 minutes. Factoring in all the things that could go wrong, they may instead allocate an hour and 15 minutes to make that same trip to assure they arrive on time."<sup>10</sup> Further, for B41 riders, many of whom are connecting to other bus routes and the subway,<sup>11</sup> these delays can have a ripple-effect on their trip. As shown in the following finding, delays can have significant negative consequences on riders' physical, mental, and financial health.

**“ BUSES ARE OFTEN LATE, AND EVEN SLOWER THAN WALKING TO DESTINATIONS. ”**



## 91% OF SURVEYED BUS RIDERS HAS EXPERIENCED AT LEAST ONE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCE OF DELAYS ON FLATBUSH AVENUE BUSES. AMONG THEM:



**67% HAD LONG WAITS IN EXTREME WEATHER**



**48% PAID FOR A CAR SERVICE OR TAXI**



**43% EXPERIENCED EMOTIONAL STRESS**



**32% LOST PAY, GOT REPRIMANDED, AND/OR GOT FIRED FOR BEING LATE TO WORK**

Infrequent service and delays can also affect crowding. As one respondent wrote, “buses are often overcrowded due to having to wait so long.” More than a dozen bus riders raised the issue of crowding or “overcrowding” unprompted in their open-ended responses on the survey, and some addressed related accessibility and safety issues. As one rider wrote, “I use a cane and many times can’t get a seat ... in a crowded bus;” another expressed concern for the risk of COVID spread.

### SPOTLIGHT ON BUS RIDERS WITH DISABILITIES

People with disabilities, who account for 13% of bus riders surveyed (and about 11% of the city’s population as a whole),<sup>12</sup> suffer when buses are delayed. Among Flatbush Avenue bus riders with disabilities, the majority (79%) experienced long waits in extreme weather due to bus delays—an even higher rate than bus riders as a whole (67%). They were also more likely to have missed medical appointments (45%) than all survey respondents (27%).

**79% HAD LONG WAITS IN EXTREME WEATHER**

**45% MISSED MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS**

Long waits in extreme cold, heat, or precipitation can be uncomfortable or even hazardous for anyone, but particularly for people with disabilities. People with certain medical conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis may be more sensitive to temperature, for instance<sup>13</sup>, or people with mobility issues or other physical conditions may experience pain when standing for long periods where bus stops lack adequate seating. Missing medical appointments can have negative health and financial ramifications. For people with disabilities and those managing chronic conditions, receiving scheduled medical care may be of particular importance.

### **3. BUSES SERVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY, BOTH FOR GETTING WORKERS TO THEIR JOBS AND GETTING CONSUMERS TO BUSINESSES.**

**FLATBUSH AVENUE BUSES CONNECT LOCAL WORKERS TO JOBS, BUT POOR SERVICE COSTS THEM WAGES.** The majority of Flatbush Avenue bus riders (54%) take the bus to get to work or school. Commuters rely on buses, but suffer when they are delayed: 1 in 3 survey respondents has lost pay, been fired, or been reprimanded for being late to work due to bus delays. For essential workers, the issue is even more acute (see Spotlight on Essential Workers).

## **SPOTLIGHT ON ESSENTIAL WORKERS**

**A QUARTER (26%) OF BUS RIDERS SURVEYED ARE ESSENTIAL WORKERS.**

**ESSENTIAL WORKERS ARE AMONG THE MOST FREQUENT BUS RIDERS ON FLATBUSH AVENUE.** The vast majority of essential workers (85%) reported taking the bus at least once a week, compared to 71% of all surveyed riders. Further, 61% of essential workers ride the bus at least four days a week, compared to 41% of all surveyed bus riders.

**HALF OF ESSENTIAL WORKERS (51%) REPORTED LOSING PAY, BEING FIRED, OR BEING REPRIMANDED AT WORK DUE TO BUS DELAYS** that made them late to work. By comparison, about a third (32%) of all survey respondents experienced these consequences.

Infrequent and unreliable service can be a particular challenge for essential workers commuting during off-peak hours. One surveyed essential worker, who is a Black woman living in Flatbush who rides the bus at least 4 days per week, wrote: "Health care workers can never get home at night; there is no service." Another essential worker, who is a Black woman over the age of 65, wrote, "I work weekends and the bus is always late"

When bus delays make essential workers like health care workers late, the impact can be felt not just by the workers themselves but the communities they serve.



**HEALTH CARE WORKERS  
CAN NEVER GET HOME  
AT NIGHT; THERE IS NO  
SERVICE. ”**

**BUSES CONNECT CONSUMERS TO BUSINESSES ON FLATBUSH AVENUE.  
THE NUMBER ONE REASON FLATBUSH AVE BUS RIDERS REPORTED**

**RIDING THE BUS IS TO SPEND MONEY LOCALLY:** 68% of riders take the bus for shopping, dining, or entertainment. Further, **85% said they would shop or dine on Flatbush Avenue more often if buses were more reliable.** While bus riders across incomes are traveling to do local spending, high-earners are even more likely to ride the bus for this purpose. Among the 173 surveyed bus riders with incomes above \$120,000, three-quarters (76%) report using the bus for shopping, dining, and entertainment, compared to 68% of all survey respondents.



**“SHOPPING, DINING, OR ENTERTAINMENT”  
IS THE #1 DESTINATION FOR FLATBUSH  
AVENUE BUS RIDERS. 68% OF RIDERS SAY  
THEY TAKE THE BUS TO SHOP, DINE, OR GO  
TO ENTERTAINMENT.**



## **4. BUS RIDERS WANT FLATBUSH AVENUE BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS INCLUDING STREET REDESIGNS, AND THEY WILL VOTE FOR CANDIDATES THAT PRIORITIZE THIS.**

Flatbush Avenue bus riders expressed strong support for street redesigns that would improve bus service, and for policymakers who advocate for such solutions.

**93% OF FLATBUSH AVENUE BUS RIDERS SAY THEY WOULD TAKE THE BUS MORE OFTEN IF IT WAS FASTER AND MORE RELIABLE.** Improving bus speeds and reliability to address declining ridership was a central goal of the 2019 Better Buses Action Plan,<sup>14</sup> and since 2020 bus ridership has still not exceeded 75% of pre-COVID levels.<sup>15</sup> Improving bus service on Flatbush Avenue would address local riders' priorities and advance the City's existing policy goals.

**THE VAST MAJORITY OF BUS RIDERS SURVEYED (87%) SAY BUSES SHOULD HAVE THEIR OWN LANES.** Surveyed bus riders overwhelmingly support street designs that prioritize bus service, and some spoke to the related need to address double-parking and traffic that impedes buses. One bus rider, who identifies as a Caribbean man over the age of 65 with a disability and reports a household income less than \$50,000 per year, said, "B41 need[s] its own bus lanes [and] traffic and double parking law enforcement."

**BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS ARE POLITICALLY POPULAR AMONG BUS RIDERS.** 87% of bus riders say they are more likely to vote for candidates who prioritize improving bus service. One surveyed bus rider wrote, "Buses are the easiest mode of public transportation for the city to invest in because they don't require [major] capital investment. NYC must invest in buses!"



**87% OF BUS RIDERS SAY THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO VOTE FOR CANDIDATES WHO PRIORITIZE IMPROVING BUS SERVICE.**

## **5. COMMUNITY MEMBERS HAVE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND INTEREST IN FLATBUSH AVENUE'S STREET DESIGN THAT COULD HELP SHAPE PLANS FOR THE CORRIDOR.**

Flatbush bus riders and small business owners engaged through surveys and focus groups raised a number of concerns and ideas related to bus service, street design, and public engagement that they would like to see addressed by the City.

### **COMMUNITY MEMBERS VALUE THE DENSITY OF FLATBUSH AVENUE AND THE ABILITY TO STOP AT MANY DESTINATIONS ALONG THE STREET, RATHER THAN SOLELY USING IT AS A THOROUGHFARE.**

Flatbush Avenue is a major street that serves complex, sometimes potentially-conflicting needs for the neighborhoods it passes through: it is a spine that runs from the southern end of the borough to downtown Brooklyn and the bridges to Manhattan, intersecting with multiple transit hubs along the way, but is also a commercial corridor full of small businesses and community institutions in every neighborhood it touches. Comments from the bus riders we surveyed and small business owners we engaged in focus groups reflected concerns about balancing these needs.

### **SEVERAL SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN FOCUS GROUPS EMPHASIZED THAT THEY AND THEIR CUSTOMERS LIKE TO MAKE FREQUENT, OFTEN SPONTANEOUS STOPS INTO SHOPS AS THEY TRAVEL DOWN FLATBUSH AVENUE,**

whether by car, bus, or on foot. As one retail business owner in the Prospect Lefferts Gardens area put it, Flatbush Avenue feels “like a little village.” While several of the participating small business owners recognized congestion as an issue, they also want to ensure that street designs maintain and support Flatbush Avenue’s character as a diverse commercial corridor.

### **BUS RIDERS EMPHASIZED THE NEED FOR MORE LOCAL BUS SERVICE.**

Using the open-ended comment section, many respondents shared the perception and frustration that local buses run less frequently and are more crowded than limited buses. As one surveyed bus rider, who identifies as a woman over the age of 65 with a disability, wrote, “I have been complaining for years about the 3-to-1 ratio of unlimited [to] local buses. [O]ften times the limited buses go by almost empty while the local is packed with shoppers[,] seniors[,] mothers with babies[,] and] disabled [people.] [W]hen will the ratio be readjusted?” As another put it, “there are 1000 limited buses but no locals.” These comments also suggest bus riders’ perception that decisions about bus service do not align with local needs and conditions, and were made without consulting local bus riders.

### **BUS RIDERS AND SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS RAISED A NUMBER OF OTHER PRIORITIES FOR FLATBUSH AVENUE AND ITS DIVERSE USES THAT THEY WISH TO SEE ADDRESSED IN PLANNING, INCLUDING THE ROLE OF DOLLAR VANS**

on the street and in the neighborhood. This underscores that the City’s planning for Flatbush Avenue and its buses must engage and take into account the impact on dollar vans.



## **DOUBLE-PARKING AND ENFORCEMENT ISSUES ARE A CONCERN FOR MANY BUS RIDERS AND SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS.**

Several surveyed bus riders added comments about the challenges of double-parking to bus service and their support for increased traffic enforcement. One survey respondent, a Black woman over the age of 65 in a household earning less than \$50,000 per year, wrote, “I think if there were bus lanes and traffic agents to control double parked cars the buses would be able to move smoothly.” Several small business owners also voiced support for increased traffic and parking enforcement to address congestion, agreeing that “no one ever gets a ticket” for parking violations. Some business owners reported that, when driving on nearby streets with bus lanes, consecutive double-parkers often forced them to drive in the bus lane which resulted in tickets via automated enforcement. Frustration with this uneven enforcement contributed to their concerns about street redesigns on Flatbush Avenue.

## **MANY COMMUNITY MEMBERS PERCEIVE A LACK OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND POOR SERVICES FROM CITY AGENCIES.**

Bus riders shared many comments with recommendations for bus service improvements, from the need for more furniture and canopies at bus stops to the above-mentioned lack of local bus service. Some expressly asked for more community engagement, like the bus rider who wrote, “Talk to elders more.” Others expressed a sense of inequity and abandonment from the City: one rider wrote, “They treat us like dirt. Some places get tons of buses but not here;” another said, “The customer service is terrible in black and brown communities. They need to invest more in... quality and service.”

Small business owners repeatedly discussed their shared perception that city agencies have not shared clear information about plans for Flatbush Avenue or how to engage with them. Further, bus riders and small business owners expressed other neighborhood concerns – from sanitation to commercial rent increases – where they felt the city response was inadequate. Dissatisfaction with city services or public engagement processes may have eroded trust in government agencies, and as a result informed some community members’ skepticism of street redesigns.

Residents’ local knowledge and desire to see it reflected in local transportation plans, as demonstrated in our surveys and focus groups, should inform the City’s approach to community-engagement in plans for Flatbush Avenue buses.

# CONCLUSION



**I WOULD USE BUSES ON FLATBUSH AVENUE, WERE THEY MORE RELIABLE. COUNTLESS TIMES I'VE HAD TO WAIT IN EXTREME WEATHER OR WITHOUT A BENCH FOR A BUS THAT MAY TAKE CLOSE TO AN HOUR TO ARRIVE. ”**

This Flatbush Avenue bus rider's comments reflect the current failures of Flatbush Avenue bus service, and the potential impact of improvements. Buses are essential to the local economy, helping residents get to work – often providing healthcare and other essential services – and to go shopping and spend locally. Yet, bus riders face long waits and delays, causing them to be late to work and school or miss doctor's appointments. Many riders have to spend additional money on a cab to avoid being late. For low-income workers, which are the majority of Flatbush Avenue bus riders, lost pay at work or additional travel expenses are potentially devastating. For seniors and people with disabilities, long waits in extreme weather can be hazardous, crowding can make buses inaccessible, and missed doctor's appointments can negatively affect their health. Businesses also suffer from poor bus service, with most riders reporting that they would do more shopping, dining, and entertainment on Flatbush Avenue if buses were better. Flatbush Avenue bus riders and small business owners are frustrated with poor public services, and have good ideas for what their communities need – ideas that they feel are being ignored in the City's plans and services.

Implementing plans to improve bus service on Flatbush Avenue – and citywide – would likely increase ridership and support the local economy, and would be met with active engagement from the community.



# APPENDICES

- A. METHODOLOGY**
- B. SURVEY RESULTS, BY QUESTION**
- C. ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES**

# APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The scope and design of this Participatory Action Research project was developed collaboratively by Pratt Center for Community Development and Riders Alliance, in consultation with an Advisory Committee of Flatbush residents, advocates, and researchers with expertise in the neighborhood and transportation issues. In Participatory Action Research, members of a community who are directly affected by an issue actively engage in the design and implementation of research, in partnership with researchers in policy, academia, or other professionalized research practices. In this project, our research methods included a literature review, survey of bus riders, and focus groups with small business owners.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Pratt Center and Riders Alliance reviewed existing literature on New York City's bus system and the Flatbush Avenue corridor, considering scholarly sources, MTA and DOT datasets and reports, other government agency reports, newspaper articles, and independent studies from organizations focused on improving public transportation. Our review of existing literature informed our research questions and the design of the survey and focus group, with a focus on filling gaps in existing literature. A full list of references can be found in Appendix C.

## BUS RIDER SURVEY

The Flatbush Avenue Bus Riders Survey was implemented via Survey Monkey from June-September 2024. It included 10 questions, with a mix of multiple-choice and free-form responses, related to rider experience, perceptions, and demographics. The survey was made available in English, Haitian Kreyol, and Spanish. Survey outreach was conducted through a combination of in-person canvassing on various sections of Flatbush Avenue and online through social media posts and ads by Riders Alliance as well as email newsletters from Riders Alliance and partnering organizations. In-person survey outreach was conducted by Riders Alliance staff and interns, primarily in English but also by Spanish-speakers and Haitian Kreyol-speakers. Paper versions of surveys were made available on occasion during in-person surveying, with responses later input via Survey Monkey by Riders Alliance staff. Survey participants were incentivized to respond with the option to enter in a raffle for a \$150 VISA gift card. In-person participants were additionally offered a 2-way MetroCard. A list of survey questions is included alongside our findings in Appendix B.

A total of 2,306 responses were submitted via SurveyMonkey, including 40 in Haitian Kreyol and 55 in Spanish. Of the 2,221 English responses, 1,784 were complete responses, and all 95 in other languages were complete. To maximize quality and accuracy of data, Pratt Center reviewed responses submitted via SurveyMonkey and developed a methodology to review any suspicious responses: Pratt Center disqualified complete responses from bus riders that were completed in less than 60 seconds as suspicious. Pratt Center identified several responses associated with the same email address; where possible, we merged these into one response, but where responses were in conflict, we removed the associated entries.

## BUS RIDER SURVEY (CON'T)

Following this process, Pratt Center reviewed a database of 1860 respondents, 1803 of whom reported taking a Flatbush Avenue bus, and 57 of whom reported “never” riding the bus (and as such were not prompted to provide any further responses in the survey). The analysis summarized here focuses on data from the 1803 responses from bus riders.

For some questions, the pool of responses was narrowed further. Question 5 required respondents to list the zip code they live in, but some responses were removed because they were not verified zip codes. Question 5 also included an optional free-form response to list neighborhood destinations. Questions 7, 8, and 9, which were all related to demographics, included “Prefer not to say” response options, which we excluded from our final analysis. The number of responses analyzed for each question is included in the final survey response data in Appendix B.

## FOCUS GROUPS

Pratt Center designed and facilitated two focus groups of small business owners in September 2024, which included open-ended discussion questions related to businesses’ current uses of Flatbush Avenue, perceptions of data related to the impact of bus service on businesses, and perceptions of street design options. Focus groups consisted of 90-minutes of guided discussion, held in-person. Outreach and recruitment was conducted by Riders Alliance, in collaboration with local organizations and elected officials. Participants received a gift card incentive of \$90. Participation was anonymous and voluntary. Pratt Center conducted two focus groups reaching a total of 6 small businesses:

- **September 10, 2024**, at Brooklyn Commons, which included owners of 3 businesses (1 retail, 2 food service) located between Empire Boulevard and Avenue D, on or adjacent to Flatbush Avenue.
- **September 17, 2024**, at The Bridge Multi Cultural and Advocacy Project, which included owners of 3 businesses (1 retail, 1 beauty, 1 food service) located between Cortelyou Road and Avenue J, on or adjacent to Flatbush Avenue.

Participating businesses included long-time and start-up neighborhood businesses, and several business owners who also live in Flatbush or surrounding neighborhoods.

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE

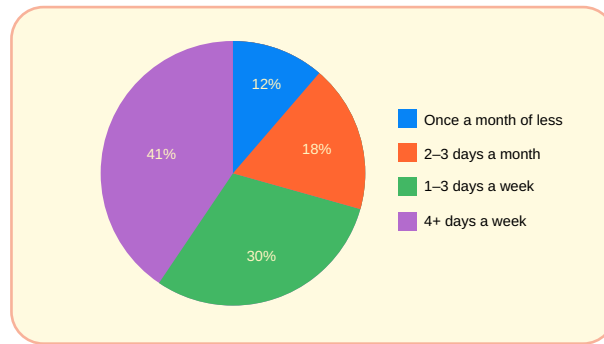
The Advisory Committee for this Participatory Action Research project consists of 10 members, who are residents, community members, researchers, and advocates with knowledge of neighborhoods along the Flatbush Avenue corridor and transportation planning and policy. Members were recruited by Riders Alliance and include:

- Kevin Jones, Associate State Director, Advocacy at AARP NY
- Theodore Moore, Executive Director of ALIGN, Flatbush resident
- JP Patafio, Vice President of TWU Local 100
- Lupe Ramsey, Director of Economic Development at Flatbush Development Corporation
- Alison Sant, Partner and Co-Founder of Studio for Urban Projects
- Gregory Smithsimon, Director of the Center for the Study of Brooklyn and Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College, CUNY Graduate Center
- Annie Weinstock, Principal at BRT Planning International; Director of Programs at People-Oriented Cities
- Liz Denys, Riders Alliance Member
- Jibrill Morris, Riders Alliance Member
- Ethan Norville, Riders Alliance Member

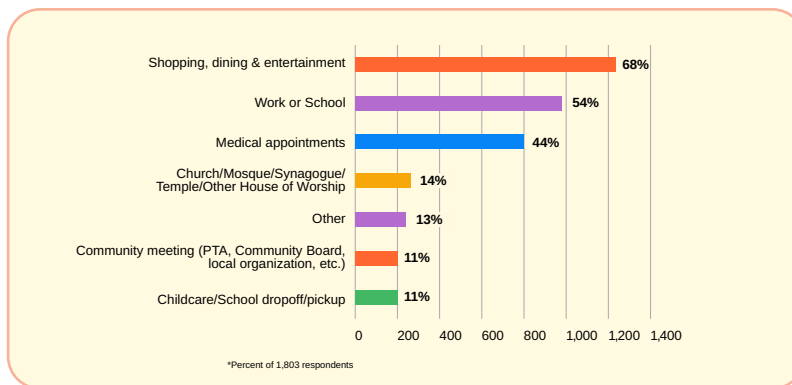
The Advisory Committee was convened by Riders Alliance and Pratt Center 3 times between July and December: first, to review and provide feedback on the research scope and design; second, to provide feedback on preliminary survey and focus group findings, and third, to review and provide feedback on the draft report. Some Advisory Committee members were also engaged on an ad-hoc basis to support with survey outreach or other community engagement efforts.

# APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESULTS

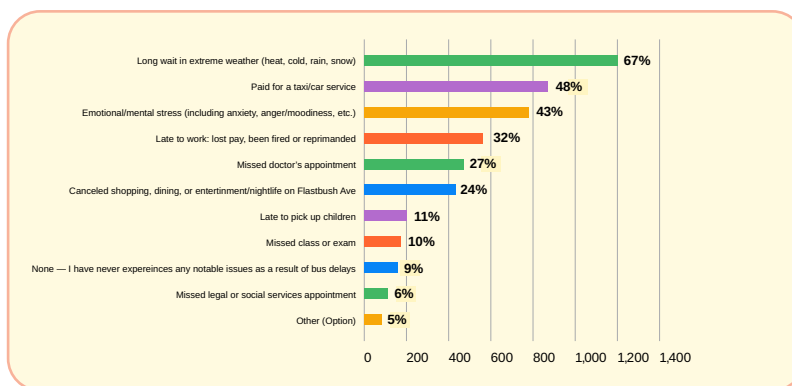
## 1. HOW OFTEN DO YOU RIDE THE BUSES ON FLATBUSH AVENUE?



## 2. WHICH ACTIVITIES DO YOU TAKE THE BUS TO? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.



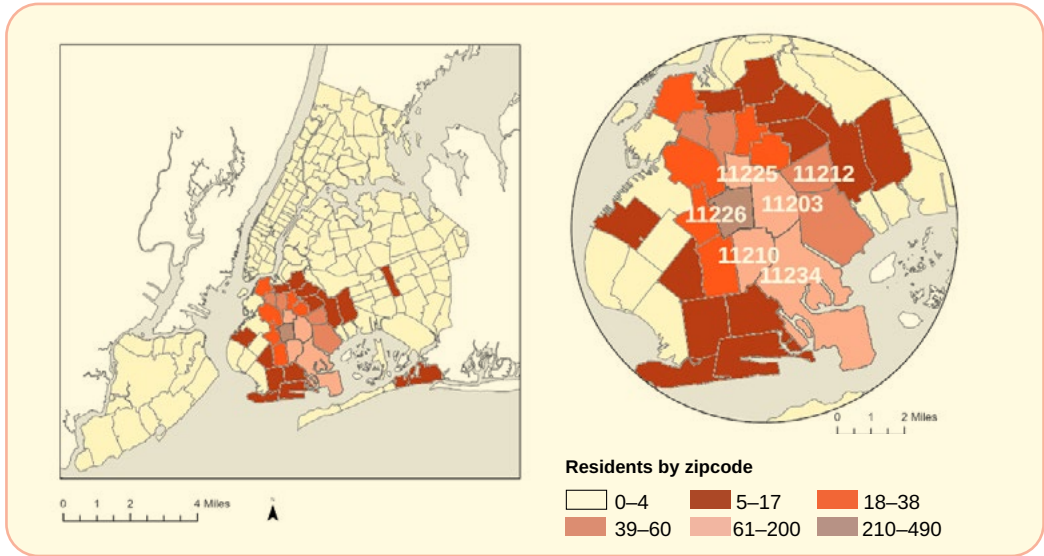
## 3. HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CONSEQUENCES OF A DELAYED BUS ON FLATBUSH AVENUE?



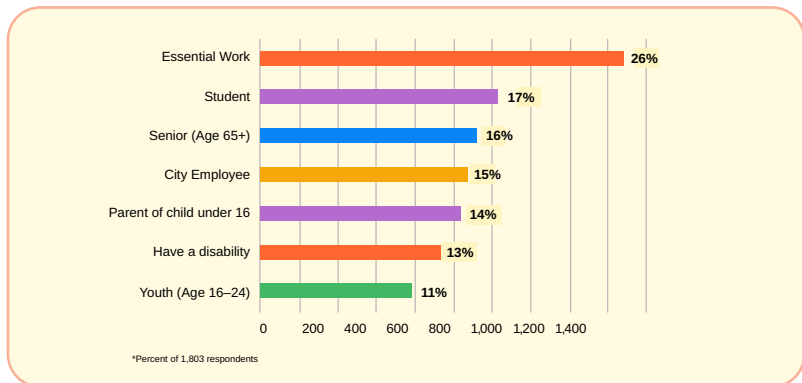
**4. HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?**

Response	No. of Respondents	Percent of Respondents*
<b>Do you trust the buses on Flatbush Ave. to get you to your destination on time?</b>		
Yes	651	37%
No	1,117	63%
<b>Would you take the bus more often if it was faster and more reliable?</b>		
Yes	1,654	93%
No	116	7%
<b>Would you shop or dine on Flatbush Ave more if buses were more reliable?</b>		
Yes	1,498	85%
No	269	15%
<b>Should Flatbush Ave buses have their own lane so they don't get stuck in traffic?</b>		
Yes	1,541	87%
No	229	13%
<b>In local elections, are you more likely to vote for candidates who prioritize improving bus services?</b>		
Yes	1,544	87%
No	225	13%

**5. WHAT NEIGHBORHOODS DO YOU TAKE THE FLATBUSH AVENUE BUSES TO AND FROM?: "ZIP CODE I LIVE IN"**

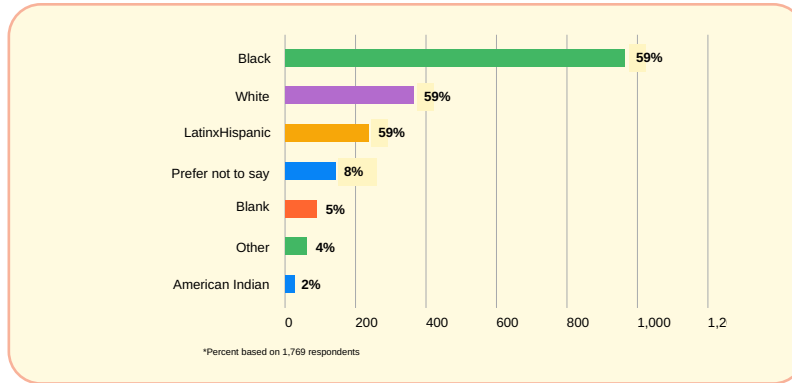


**6. WHICH OF THE BELOW DESCRIBE YOU? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

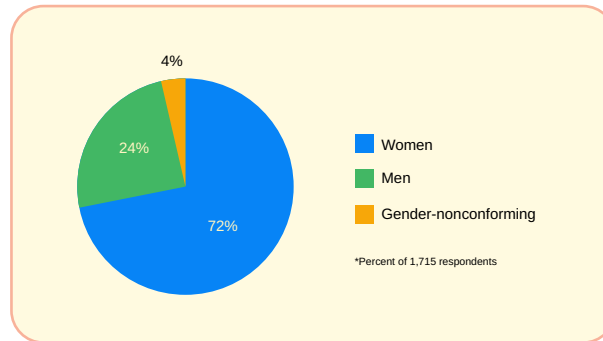




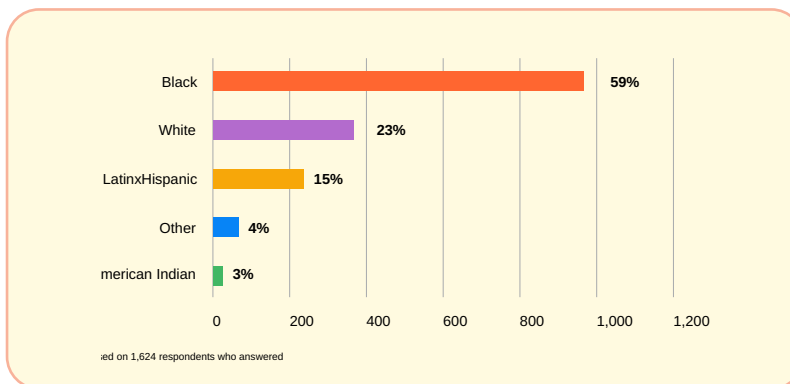
**7. WHICH RACES AND ETHNICITIES DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH?  
CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**



**8. WHAT IS YOUR GENDER IDENTITY?**



**9. WHAT INCOME RANGE IS YOUR HOUSEHOLD IN?**



**10. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO SHARE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE RIDING THE BUS ON FLATBUSH AVENUE, HOW IT AFFECTS WHAT ACTIVITIES YOU DO/DON'T PARTICIPATE IN ON FLATBUSH AVENUE AND IN THE SURROUNDING AREAS, OR HOW BETTER BUS SERVICE WOULD IMPROVE YOUR LIFE?**

# APPENDIX C: ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

## ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/405-22/mayor-adams-mta-hold-first-transit-improvement-summit-plans-immediately-improve-mass>
2. <https://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/flatbush-ave-cb8-jun2024.pdf>
3. 2022 ACS, for the top five zip codes where respondents reported living
4. According to 2022 American Community Survey five-year estimates, 50.2% of women citywide take public transportation to work, compared to 44.6% of men. (Table S0801) These trends bear out nationally as well, according to research from the [American Public Transit Association](#).
5. New York City's Area Median Income (AMI) as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is \$108,700 for a single-person household and \$139,800 for a family of 3. Households earning less than 80% of AMI are considered low-income (or extremely- or very-low income at even lower levels). The low-income threshold is \$86,960 for a single-person household and \$111,840 for a three-person household. While this survey did not ask respondents for their household size, these income levels are below low-income thresholds for all household sizes in New York City as defined by HUD. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hpd/services-and-information/area-median-income.page>
6. Based on 1,744 cleaned responses from surveyed bus riders: 28% live in zip code 11226, which incorporates much of Flatbush south of Prospect Park, 12% live in 11210, which includes Flatbush and Midwood, 10% live in 11225, which includes more Northern parts of Flatbush and Prospect Lefferts Gardens, 9% live in 11234, which includes Flatlands and parts of Marine Park and Bergen Beach, and 7% live in 11203 in East Flatbush. See Figure 4 for a map of respondents' residential zip codes
7. [Brooklyn Bus Network Redesign: Existing Conditions Report](#), p. 66.
8. [NYC DOT Better Buses Action Plan, 2019](#)
9. [Brooklyn Bus Network Redesign: Existing Conditions Report](#) p.59
10. [Brooklyn Existing Conditions Report 2019](#), p.59
11. [Brooklyn Bus Network Redesign: Existing Conditions Report](#), p. 66
12. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/mopd/publications/disability-statistics-in-nyc.page#:~:text=Did%20you%20know%20that%20there,the%20total%20population%20of%20NYC.>
13. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6205043>
14. <https://www.nyc.gov/html/brt/downloads/pdf/better-buses-action-plan-2019.pdf>
15. [MTA Performance Dashboard](#): Daily Bus Ridership as a Percentage of Pre-Covid Rates, 2020-2024, Queried November 11, 2024

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December 2024