



STANDING STILL

NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT BUS SERVICE

A NYPIRG STRAPHANGERS CAMPAIGN STATE OF THE BUSES REPORT • WINTER 2000

CREDITS

Since 1979, the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign has been a leading voice for New York City's more than six million daily subway and bus riders. The New York Public Interest Research Group is a student-directed research and advocacy group that works on a wide range of environmental, consumer and government reform issues.

Standing Still: The State of New York City Transit Buses is the third in a series of annual reports on bus service. It was made possible by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, which is a leader in assessing the quality of local government services. We greatly appreciate the guidance and interest of our program officer, Ted Greenwood.

The report was written by Gene Russianoff, staff attorney for the Straphangers Campaign. It was based on a detailed review of transit data by the campaign's staff analyst, Matthew Glomski. The computer-generated maps were prepared by Steven Romalewski, the director of computer mapping at NYPIRG. Campaign coordinators Neysa Pranger, Farouk Abdallah and Camille Rivera provided feedback. Thanks also to Vincent Grippo and Alex Vasquez in helping with production.

The graphics for the report were expertly conceived and designed by Li Howard.

Our initial report on bus service was developed in consultation with the University Transportation Research Center at City College in 1997 and 1998. We are indebted to the analytic skills of Yuko Nakanishi and Robert Paaswell, the director of UTRC.

The following officials at MTA New York City Transit provided information to us: Martin Krieger at Systems Data and Research in Operations Planning and John Tucker III, head of Operations Planning; Lois Tandler and Debra Hall Moore at Government and Community Relations; and Barbara Spencer, Executive Vice President for MTA New York City Transit.

Over the last decade, the quality and credibility of New York City Transit data on transit service has steadily improved. Much credit goes to the independent Office of the MTA Inspector General, which has been a pioneer in improving the measurement of transit services. From the start of our project, we received expert and generous guidance from Gary Henderson, who has headed the MTA Inspector General's efforts.

Thanks to our colleagues who have reviewed our ideas for improving bus service. They include: Beverly Dolinsky at the New York City Transit Riders Council; Stephen Dobrow of the Committee for Better Transit; Charles Monheim; Joseph G. Rappaport of the Office of Public Advocate; Ira Greenberg of the Office of State Assembly Member Catherine Nolan; Jon Orcutt of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign; and John Kaehny of Transportation Alternatives. The Straphangers Campaign is solely responsible for the views expressed in the report.

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This report documents what riders know from bitter daily experience: Bus service is lousy.

For the third annual NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign's state of New York City Transit buses report¹, we reviewed a range of performance measures produced by the transit system. These document a sad truth. In 1999, overall bus service literally stood still and in several key aspects grew worse.

Comparing the performance of New York City Transit's fleet of 4,100 buses in 1998 to 1999, we found:²

- **On-time performance for buses is a joke and the scourge of bus bunching a constant torment.** Bus "regularity"—transit officials' term of art for bus bunching or gaps in service—and on-time performance remained at the same level as last year. That's a dismal four out of ten buses on key routes arriving irregularly and off-schedule.
- **On the most irregular routes—like the Third/Lexington Avenue M101/102/103 and the M104 Broadway routes—a shocking 60% of the buses arrived bunched together or with significant gaps in service.** And 58% of the buses were off-schedule on the Fifth/Madison Avenue M1, the route with the worst on-time performance.
- **In 1999, buses broke down more than they did in 1998.** While the decline is slight, the trend is disturbing: The average miles traveled between service interruptions caused by mechanical breakdowns decreased by 4% between 1998 and the first nine months of 1999. This drop comes after four years of slow but steady improvement in the breakdown rate. The decline also comes at a time when recent bus purchases reduced the average age of the bus fleet, from 1,315 buses that were 12 years old or older in 1997 to 600 in 1999. (See Chart I.)
- **Worse still, buses are now breaking down far more often than they did back in 1992,** the best year for performance in the 1990's: The average number of miles traveled between service interruptions caused by mechanical breakdowns declined by 41%, comparing the first nine months of 1999 with 1992.
- **In the last year, the passenger environment deteriorated on two critical measures:** Bus interiors grew filthier, with

¹ In the late spring, we will be issuing a companion report comparing service levels to recent ridership gains. In May 1999, we released *More Riders, Less Service*. That report documented a disturbing pattern in which 20% of MTA New York City Transit bus routes experienced service cuts at the same time that ridership increased on these routes.

² In most cases, this report compares MTA New York City Transit performance in the period from October 1997 through September 1998 to October 1998 through September 1999. For shorthand, we refer to these periods as 1998 and 1999, respectively, several times in this report.

the number of buses with no or light interior dirt falling sharply from 92% in 1998 to 80% in 1999. There were fewer understandable and correct announcements, dropping from 38% in 1998 to 34% in 1999—an appalling level of performance.

- **Transit officials have fallen well short of their own goals.** They promised to improve the breakdown rate for buses by 19% in 1999; instead the breakdown rate worsened by 4%. They pledged to improve regularity by 8% and on-time performance by 4% in 1999; instead these key indicators of service remained unchanged.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE SLOWEST BUSES IN AMERICA?

Like many riders, the Straphangers Campaign is very frustrated by the quality of service documented by these findings—and by the daily reality of slow, irregular, crowded, and dirty bus service. Our findings come on top of New York City Transit's own admission in June 1999 that its buses are "the slowest in the country."³ In other major cities, buses cruise at an average of 13 miles per hour; here they crawl at an average of 8 miles throughout the city and at an excruciating 6 miles per hour in Manhattan—the worst record in the nation.

Who is to blame?

Responsibility must rest chiefly with officials at MTA New York City Transit. They have failed to add enough service to meet an enormous surge in ridership. There was a 38% increase in ridership between October 1996 and October 1999, yielding an astonishing 662,000 more riders just on an average weekday. But that tidal wave of new riders has been met by only a 9% increase in service in the same period.

The result: longer boarding times, slower speeds and more bus bunching as too few buses move many more people.

Transit officials deny that lack of service is the problem. They say that many routes had "available capacity to accommodate ridership increases." They say they've added enough service where needed. They say that other bus systems have more crowding, citing Milan, Barcelona, Paris and San Francisco—although admitting that cities like London, Hong Kong, Chicago and Philadelphia are far less crowded.⁴

Transit officials also blame slow and erratic service on traffic congestion. "What's going on is traffic, simple as that. And there's nothing much we can do about it," said a spokesperson for New York City Transit with a shrug of the shoulders in explaining New York's last place standing on bus speeds. "Wear sneakers," he advised, with an insensitivity worthy of a Marie Antoinette.

It is true that City Hall hasn't done enough to speed buses. While there have been some recent welcome initiatives—such as traffic agents on board some buses and increased penalties for drivers who block bus stops—these have not been backed up with adequate resources. And there's been only

3 Managing Transit Service, June 24, 1999, MTA New York City Transit, page 27.

4 Managing Transit Service, June 24, 1999, MTA New York City Transit, page 19.

slight progress on key items, such as expanding the number of exclusive bus lanes; tougher traffic enforcement to make the existing ones work better; redesigning bus stops to discourage private cars parking in them; and giving buses priority turning signals.

But here too transit officials are to blame. They have failed to be vigorous and public advocates for higher street priority for buses, as well as for far greater increases in service.

The explosion in bus riders should mean more clout for the bus system and more energy for new initiatives. But instead transit officials have been moving as slowly as the buses they manage.

Rather than plan optimistically for the future, transit officials have been timid. The business-led Regional Plan Association, for example, has criticized New York City Transit's proposed five-year capital plan as falling 1,000 buses short of what's needed to meet current ridership levels. New York City Transit's plan calls for a ludicrous increase of only 2% in bus service between 2000 and 2004.

Rather than build on ridership gains by increasing service and reducing wait times, they have pursued initiatives that are often a mixed blessing—and worse—for riders. These initiatives include splitting longer routes into shorter routes (requiring riders to transfer to complete trips); rerouting bus services to "avoid congested areas" (taking many riders away from where they really want to go); eliminating bus stops; and lengthening travel times to "improve" on-time performance on paper.

Rather than offer detailed public proposals to press City Hall for new initiatives to speed buses on city streets, they have succumbed to bureaucratic inertia, accepting a few slow-moving pilot projects.

What is to be done to get New Yorkers the bus service they deserve?

The Straphangers Campaign offers two new recommendations aimed at seizing the current momentum provided by the huge surge in ridership:

- **The board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority should replace the current city bus managers unless they achieve their stated goals to improve service by early 2001.** The Straphangers Campaign respects the hard work of the current managers at MTA New York City Transit. They have successfully faced tough challenges, from opening new depots to implementing the historic start-up of free transfer between city buses and subways. But in 1999 these managers failed to meet their own goals for improving the current miserable level of basic service.

The current managers have again promised to improve bus performance in 2000. They say that by the end of the year buses will be breaking down 27% less, that there will be 10% less bus bunching, and that on-time performance will improve 6%.⁵

⁵ MTA New York City Transit is required by state law to set strategic goals for performance. These are contained in the Strategic Business Plan 2000-2004 for MTA New York City Transit. Take the bus breakdown rate for example. The goal for the year 2000 for the "mean distance between service interruptions"—which is how many miles buses travel on average before experiencing service interruptions due to mechanical problems—is one service interruption every 2,900 miles. In this report, we found that the "MDBSI" was 2,272 miles for the first nine months of 1999. To meet the year 2000 goal, transit managers would need to produce a 27% improvement in this measure. The 2000 goal for service "regularity"—the absence of bus bunching or gaps in service—is 65%; we found regularity to be at 59% for the period from October 1998 through September 1999. A 10% improvement would be needed to make New York City Transit's stated goal. The 2000 goal for on-time performance is also 65%; we found it to be at 61% for the period from October 1998 through September 1999. (MTA New York City Transit, Strategic Business Plan, 2000-2004, p. 156.)

The MTA Board should put the managers on notice: They will be held accountable for their success or failure in achieving these goals. The board should direct the bus managers to produce a clear and ambitious blueprint of the steps needed to be taken by both New York City Transit and the City of New York to make the grade.

- **The mayor should commit the city to increasing the speed of buses on its streets.** It should be a matter of civic pride to end New York's last place finish on bus speeds. The first step would be to issue a blueprint for faster buses and then to commit to specific goals for increasing bus speeds over the next five years. The mayor's leadership on this is critical, especially to hold his traffic officials accountable.

In addition to these two proposals, the Straphangers Campaign renews its call for the policies in its "Ten-Point Program for Better Bus Service"—from building more exclusive bus lanes to moving to ending the use of diesel-fuel buses. (The program can be found at the end of this report.)

The State of the Buses

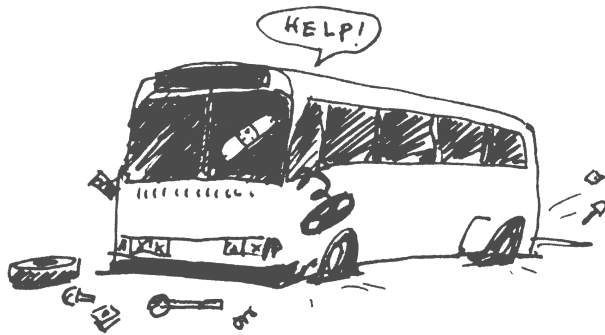
MEAN DISTANCE BETWEEN SERVICE INTERRUPTIONS

New York City Transit buses broke down more in 1999 than they did in 1998.

While the decline is slight, the trend is disturbing: The average miles traveled between service interruptions caused by mechanical breakdowns decreased by 4% between 1998 and the first nine months of 1999. But the drop comes after four years of slow but steady improvement in the number of bus service interruptions caused by mechanical problems. The decline also comes at a time when recent bus purchases reduced the average age of the bus fleet, from 1,315 buses that were 12 years old or older in 1997 to 600 in 1999.

Worse still, buses are now breaking down far more often than they did back in 1992, the best year for performance in the 1990's: The average miles traveled between service interruptions caused by mechanical breakdowns was 41% lower in the first nine months of 1999 than in 1992.

Here's what happened during the 1990's: Back in 1992, mechanical problems caused bus service interruptions every 3,859 miles. But by 1995, the breakdown rate hit bottom with far more frequent service interruptions caused by mechanical problems—on average every 1,840 miles. (The bus breakdown rate is measured in how many miles buses travel before experiencing a mechanical problem that interrupts service and inconveniences passengers. This measure is known as the mean distance between service interruptions or "MDBSI.")

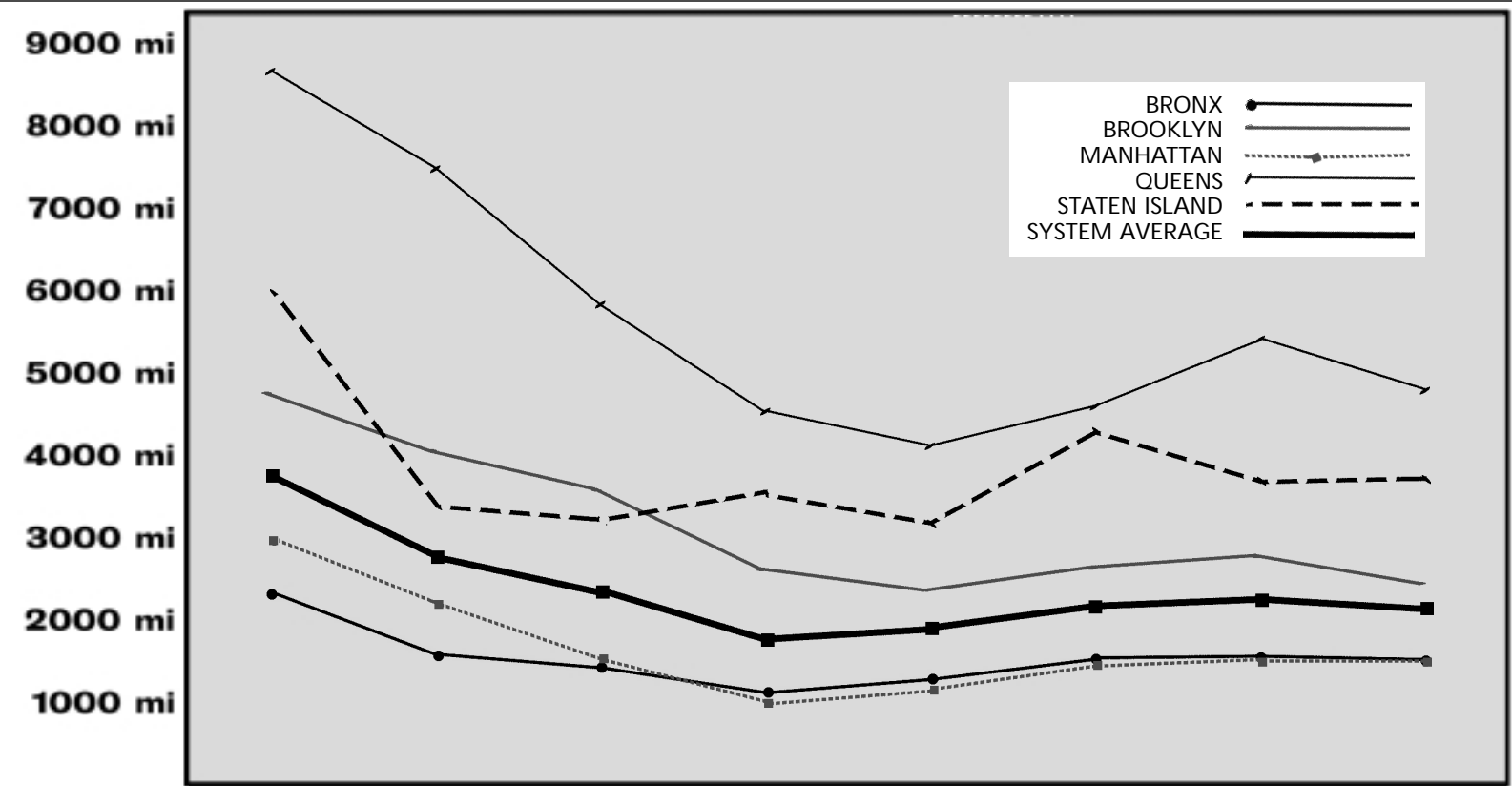


Service interruptions on buses had improved to one every 2,359 miles in 1998. But in the first nine months of 1999 the breakdown rate worsened for the first time since 1995, dropping by 4% to one every 2,272 miles. The greatest deterioration was for Brooklyn and Queens buses, where performance dropped 12%. Of the five boroughs, the breakdown rate improved in two, although only slightly: 3% in the Bronx and less than one-half of 1% in Staten Island.

The bottom line: New York City Transit's buses traveled 41% fewer miles between service interruptions caused by mechanical break-

INTERRUPTIONS
IN SERVICE

Mean Distance Between Service Interruptions



	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Bronx	2381	1604	1462	1175	1354	1537	1516	1557
Brooklyn	4749	4034	3596	2614	2385	2626	2786	2447
Manhattan	3032	2264	1604	1045	1218	1498	1580	1544
Queens	8664	7504	5858	4545	4182	4631	5435	4809
Staten Island	5980	3401	3239	3353	3197	4371	3702	3718
System Average	3859	2830	2408	1840	1944	2278	2359	2272

downs in 1999 than they did back in 1992. Manhattan saw the worst decline, 49% fewer miles traveled comparing 1999 to 1992. Even the "best" borough—the Bronx—fell 35% since 1992.

Transit officials had set a goal of improving the service interruption rate to every 2,800 miles in 1999. That's according to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's 2000-2004 Strategic Business Plan (page 156). But the agency has fallen far short of that goal. Indeed, it is headed in the other direction.

New York City Transit has set a goal of getting the service interruption rate up to one every 3,150 miles by 2004. That would represent a 39% improvement. But even if the agency achieves this goal over the next five years, the interruption rate would still be 18% poorer than it was in 1992.

Hope for the future lies in the agency's receiving funding for new buses. The MTA proposed a five-year transit rebuilding plan that is now being reviewed by the state legislature. However, that plan remains controversial. There are strong concerns about the need to purchase more clean fuel buses, as well as on the agency's plans to increase capacity through the purchase of 400 articulated buses. These larger buses can move more riders but transit officials have said they will likely provide less frequent service on routes with these buses.

The State of the Buses

SERVICE RELIABILITY

ON-TIME PERFORMANCE AND REGULARITY OF SERVICE ON 40 KEY SELECTED BUS ROUTES

The Straphangers Campaign reviewed the performance of 40 key routes for which New York City Transit compiles data on regularity of service and on-time performance. A low rate of "regularity" reflects what bus riders dread the most: bus bunching and gaps in service. On-time performance measures how well bus routes stick to schedule.⁶

Comparing the period October 1997 through September 1998 to the same period in 1998-1999, we found on key routes:

Bus service has literally stood still: Overall, bus regularity and on-time performance remained at the same dismal level as last year—with four out of ten buses on key routes arriving irregularly and off-schedule.

The average daily regularity of service was an awful 59% in 1998-1999—the same as the regularity rate in 1997-1998.

This stands in stark contrast to the stated goals of transit officials, who predicted that regularity of service would rise to 64% in 1999.⁷

Regularity declined on 15 bus routes, stayed largely the same on 13 and improved on 12.

On key routes, on-time performance also stagnated. Buses were on time 61% of the time in 1998-1999, largely unchanged from 62% in 1997-1998. On-time performance declined on 15 bus routes, stayed largely the same on 14 and improved on 11.

Here too, transit officials failed to reach a promised 64% on-time rate in 1999.

This report documents that service is worst where traffic is the worst, with Manhattan buses posting far and away the poorest regularity and on-time performance. That underscores the need for City Hall to give more priority to moving buses caught in traffic congestion.

⁶ MTA New York City Transit measures regularity and on-time performance on 42 routes. The agency has selected these as typical of the system's 203 local bus routes. About half of these are the most-used bus routes in the city. The other half are either the most-used bus routes in each borough or routes that have travel and commuter patterns that reflect other routes around the system. Two routes were eliminated from comparisons because of recent changes in routes and operations. These are the Q-44/20 and Q-85.

⁷ MTA Strategic Business Plan, 2000-2004, page 156.

There was a wide disparity in regularity and on-time performance among the 40 bus routes:

The least regular key bus route was the M104 Broadway route,⁸ with a record of 40%. That means that 60% of the buses on this route arrived bunched together or with significant gaps in service. The M104 operates on Broadway and 42nd Street between Harlem and the United Nations.

The most regular route was the S53, with a 79% record. The S53 operates between Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and Port Richmond, Staten Island.

The most improved route for regularity in the last year was the M4, which operates between Penn Station and Washington Heights on Fifth and

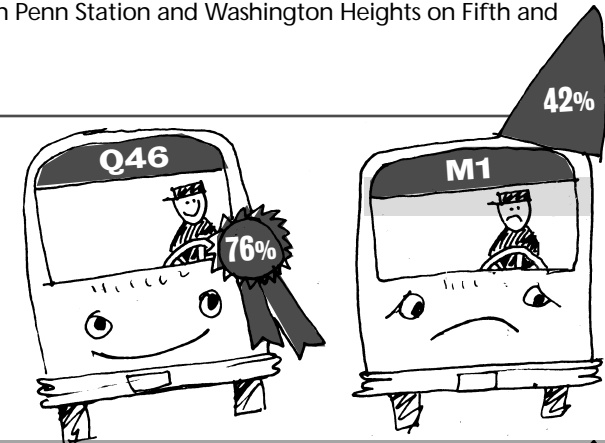
TABLE 2

ON-TIME PERFORMANCE FOR NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT BUS ROUTES BY BOROUGH

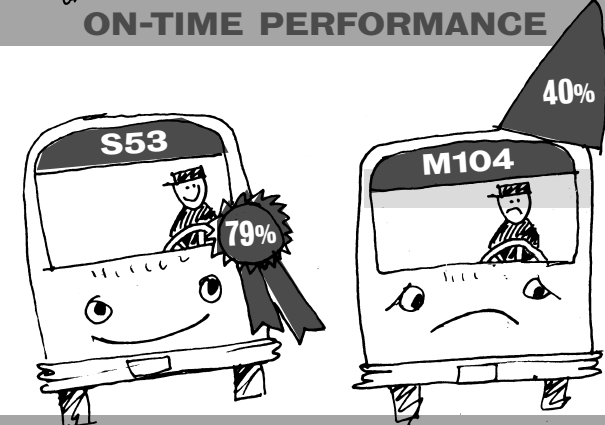
	OCTOBER 1997- SEPTEMBER 1998	OCTOBER 1998- SEPTEMBER 1999	CHANGE
Bronx	65%	64%	-1.0%
Brooklyn	63%	62%	-1.2%
Manhattan	56%	54%	-4.1%
Queens	66%	67%	1.1%
Staten Island	66%	69%	3.9%
System Average	62%	61%	-0.7%

REGULARITY FOR NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT BUS ROUTES BY BOROUGH

	OCTOBER 1997- SEPTEMBER 1998	OCTOBER 1998- SEPTEMBER 1999	CHANGE
Bronx	59%	60%	1.6%
Brooklyn	57%	56%	-1.4%
Manhattan	54%	52%	-3.1%
Queens	66%	64%	-3.6%
Staten Island	72%	72%	1.2%
System Average	60%	59%	-1.0%



ON-TIME PERFORMANCE



REGULARITY

⁸ In 1999, regularity on the M104 was measured at 39.95%; regularity on the M101/102/103 was 40.15%. Similar small differences in scores are not evident due to rounding of numbers.

TABLE 3

MOST AND LEAST ON-TIME

MOST AND LEAST ON-TIME ROUTES IN EACH BOROUGH
OCTOBER 1998 TO SEPTEMBER 1999

BOROUGH	MOST ON-TIME BUS ROUTES		LEAST ON-TIME BUS ROUTES		GREATEST IMPROVEMENT			GREATEST DECLINE		
Bronx	Bx55	71%	Bx41	60%	Bx40/42	67%	up from 61%	Bx12	63%	down from 71%
Brooklyn	B35	65%	B6	53%	B44	61%	up from 60%	B41	61%	down from 64%
Manhattan	M86	65%	M1	42%	M10	57%	up from 51%	M101	52%	down from 59%
Queens	Q46	76%	Q58	58%	Q43	72%	up from 70%	Q58	58%	down from 63%
Staten Island	S79	72%	S74	67%	S74	67%	up from 60%	S53	68%	down from 71%

MOST AND LEAST REGULAR

MOST AND LEAST REGULAR ROUTES IN EACH BOROUGH
OCTOBER 1998 TO SEPTEMBER 1999

BOROUGH	MOST REGULAR BUS ROUTES		LEAST REGULAR BUS ROUTES		GREATEST IMPROVEMENT			GREATEST DECLINE		
Bronx	Bx40/42	66%	Bx41	51%	Bx36	61%	up from 55%	Bx19	53%	down from 55%
Brooklyn	B46	61%	B6	49%	B46	61%	up from 58%	B41	50%	down from 56%
Manhattan	M66	68%	M104	40%	M4	52%	up from 46%	M15	42%	down from 50%
Queens	Q43	71%	Q58	59%	Q43	71%	steady at 71%*	Q83	65%	down from 71%
Staten Island	S53	79%	S44	68%	S74	72%	up from 69%	S53	79%	down from 82%

*Regularity on all measured Queens routes remained even or declined.

Madison Avenues and Broadway. Regularity for the M4 rose 13%—from 46% in 1997-1998 to 52% in 1998-1999. **The route that declined the most in regularity in the last year was the M15, the most-used bus route in the city.** The M15 operates on First and Second Avenues between South Ferry and East Harlem. Regularity on the M15 sank by 15%—from 50% in 1997-1998 to 42% in 1998-1999. **The route with the worst on-time service was the M1,** with an abysmal 42% on-time record in 1998-1999. It operates between the East Village and Harlem on Fifth and Madison Avenues. **The best on-time record—76%—was achieved by the Q46,** which operates between Kew Gardens and Glen Oaks in Queens.

The most improved route for on-time service in the last year was the S74, which operates between the Ferry Terminal and Tottenville on Richmond and Arthur Kill Avenues. On-time performance on the S74 rose 12%—from 60% in 1997-1998 to 67% in 1998-1999. **The route that declined the most in on-time service in the last year was the Bx12,** which operates on Pelham Parkway and Fordham Road in the Bronx running from Co-op City to Inwood in Manhattan. On-time performance on the Bx12 sank 11%—from 71% in 1997-1998 to 63% in 1998-1999.

TABLE 4

ON-TIME PERFORMANCE OF 40 KEY NEW YORK CITY BUS ROUTES

	OCTOBER 1997- SEPTEMBER 1998	OCTOBER 1998- SEPTEMBER 1999	CHANGE
Bx1/2	67%	66%	-0.9%
Bx9	63%	66%	5.5%
Bx12	71%	63%	-11.3%
Bx19	63%	60%	-4.5%
Bx36	61%	65%	6.4%
Bx40/42	61%	67%	10.0%
Bx41	61%	60%	-2.9%
Bx55	71%	71%	-0.1%
B6	55%	53%	-5.1%
B15	63%	63%	0.3%
B35	69%	65%	-4.9%
B41	64%	61%	-5.2%
B44	60%	61%	2.7%
B46	66%	65%	-0.8%
B63	63%	61%	-2.6%
M1	43%	42%	-3.2%
M2	53%	54%	1.1%
M3/18	55%	52%	-3.9%
M4	53%	54%	2.4%
M7	43%	46%	7.6%
M10	51%	57%	10.9%
M14	68%	61%	-9.8%
M15	58%	52%	-9.9%
M27/50	49%	46%	-7.1%
M31	58%	55%	-4.7%
M66	57%	58%	1.1%
M86	68%	65%	-5.0%
M101/102/103	59%	52%	-11.0%
M104	54%	51%	-4.6%
Q43	70%	72%	3.8%
Q46	73%	76%	3.5%
Q58	63%	58%	-8.5%
Q83	63%	65%	2.9%
S44	68%	68%	0.7%
S48	67%	69%	2.4%
S53	71%	68%	-4.6%
S74	60%	67%	12.3%
S76	63%	69%	9.4%
S78	66%	68%	4.2%
S79	68%	72%	5.4%

REGULARITY OF 40 KEY NEW YORK CITY BUS ROUTES

	OCTOBER 1997- SEPTEMBER 1998	OCTOBER 1998- SEPTEMBER 1999	CHANGE
Bx1/2	51%	54%	5.6%
Bx9	56%	61%	9.0%
Bx12	68%	65%	-4.4%
Bx19	55%	53%	-4.7%
Bx36	55%	61%	11.8%
Bx40/42	63%	66%	5.1%
Bx41	53%	51%	-4.5%
Bx55	64%	66%	3.1%
B6	55%	49%	-11.3%
B15	57%	60%	4.5%
B35	53%	54%	0.9%
B41	56%	50%	-11.5%
B44	54%	54%	0.4%
B46	58%	61%	5.2%
B63	63%	60%	-4.5%
M1	46%	45%	-3.7%
M2	57%	58%	1.8%
M3/18	57%	57%	-0.7%
M4	46%	52%	13.0%
M7	47%	52%	10.8%
M10	56%	58%	2.3%
M14	49%	49%	-1.5%
M15	50%	42%	-15.1%
M27/50	58%	62%	6.4%
M31	62%	57%	-8.8%
M66	75%	68%	-8.6%
M86	60%	55%	-8.9%
M101/102/103	44%	40%	-9.6%
M104	42%	40%	-5.3%
Q43	71%	71%	-0.4%
Q46	68%	67%	-2.0%
Q58	63%	59%	-6.4%
Q83	71%	65%	-7.6%
S44	69%	68%	-0.6%
S48	68%	68%	-0.1%
S53	82%	79%	-4.0%
S74	69%	72%	4.5%
S76	71%	74%	3.8%
S78	67%	69%	1.9%
S79	74%	77%	3.2%

The State of the Buses

PASSENGER ENVIRONMENT

PASSENGER ENVIRONMENT

In the last year, the passenger environment on buses deteriorated on two critical measures: Buses became dirtier and announcements grew poorer. On the positive side, the number of correct and legible maps in buses increased.

Comparing the period between October 1997 through September 1998 with the period from October 1998 through September 1999, we found:⁸

Bus interiors grew dirtier, falling sharply from 92% with no or light dirt in 1997-1998 to 80% in 1998-1999. This is a poor level of performance and is in stark contrast to the finding in our last report, that bus cleanliness improved between 1996-1997 and 1997-1998 (from 83% to 92% with no or light dirt).

There were fewer understandable and correct announcements, dropping from 38% in 1997-1998 to 34% in 1998-1999—an appalling level of performance. This is also a disappointment, since we found improvement in our last report (from 31% to 38%). Our finding also comes after transit officials have made serious efforts to improve the very poor level of announcements, through driver training and new equipment.

There are more correct and legible maps on buses, going from 86% in 1997-1998 to 90% in 1998-1999. Maps on buses are a very useful amenity, giving riders information on where the bus is going and where to make transfers.

There was a range of performance in the bus passenger environment among the boroughs:

The Manhattan bus division had the most buses with no or light interior dirt (84%), although this was a decrease from 94% in 1997-1998. Buses in the Bronx division had the least (72%), dropping from 90% in 1997-1998.



⁸ MTA New York City Transit collects information on several aspects of the quality of the bus environment for the 203 local bus routes that operate out of its depots. See methodology in appendix for a discussion of how these measures are compiled and why we chose to review cleanliness, announcements and maps.

Buses in the Manhattan bus division had the most correct and understandable announcements (37%); the Bronx and Staten Island the least (30% each).

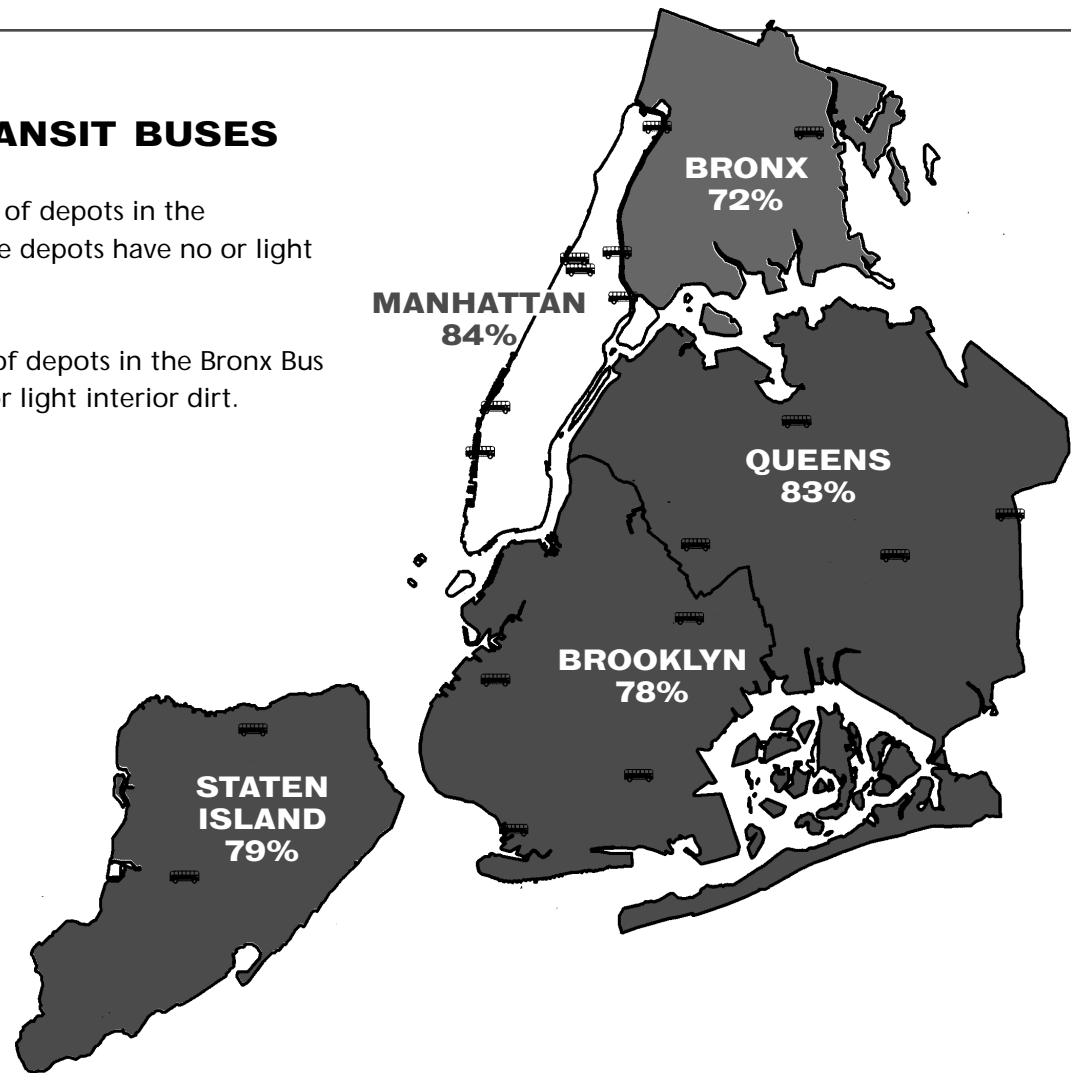
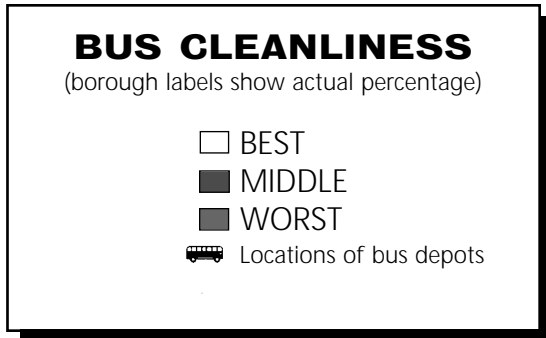
Manhattan and Queens division buses had the most correct and legible maps (97%); the Staten Island bus division had the least (85%).

MAP 1

CLEANEST/DIRTIEST NYC TRANSIT BUSES

On average, NYC Transit's cleanest buses run out of depots in the Manhattan Bus Division. 84% of buses from these depots have no or light interior dirt. The system average is 80%.

On average, NYC Transit's dirtiest buses run out of depots in the Bronx Bus Division. 72% of buses in these depots have no or light interior dirt.



MAP 2

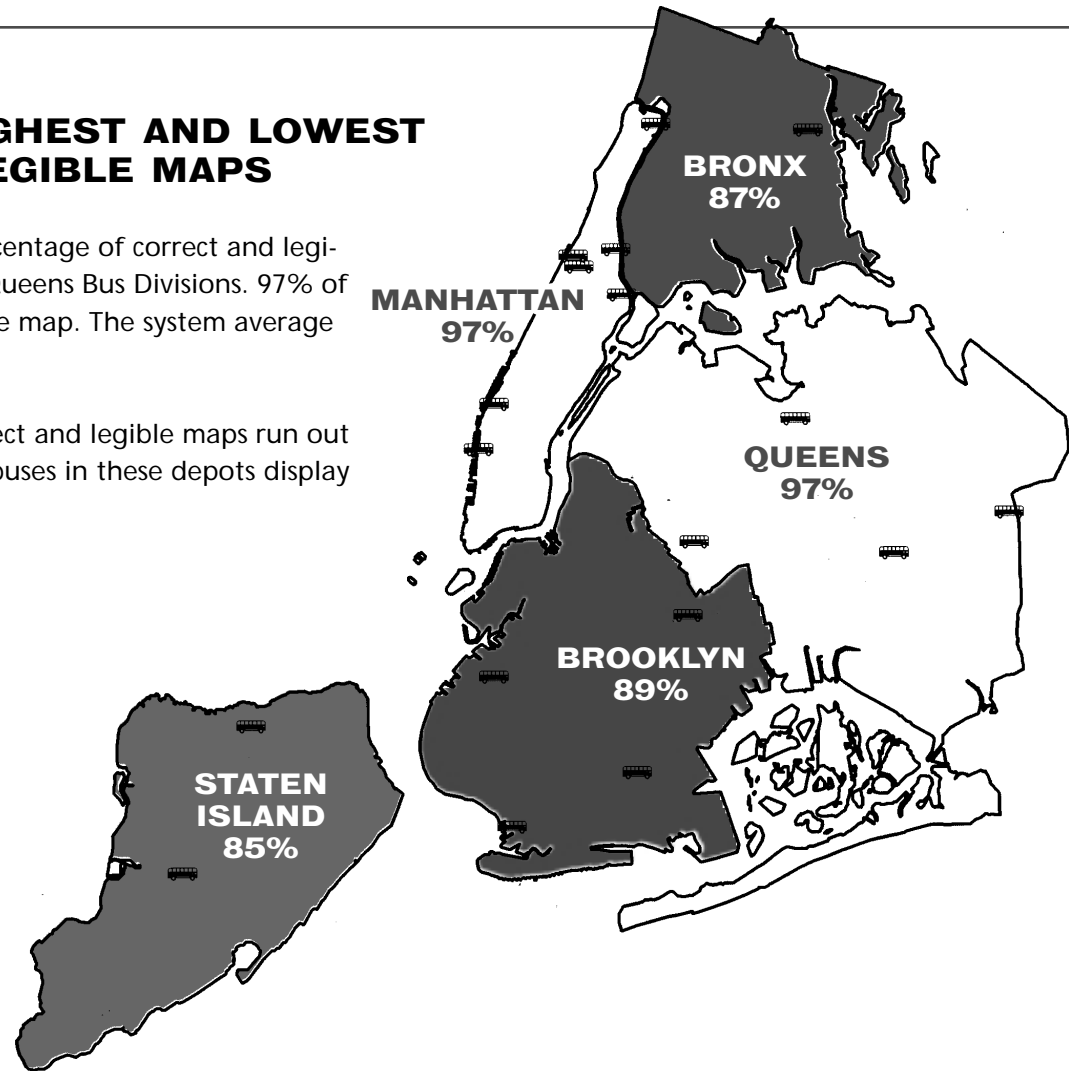
NYC TRANSIT BUSES WITH HIGHEST AND LOWEST PERCENT OF CORRECT AND LEGIBLE MAPS

On average, NYC Transit buses with the highest percentage of correct and legible maps run out of depots in the Manhattan and Queens Bus Divisions. 97% of buses from these depots display a correct and legible map. The system average is 90%.

On average, NYC Transit buses with the fewest correct and legible maps run out of depots in the Staten Island Bus Division. 85% of buses in these depots display a correct/legible map.

CORRECT/LEGIBLE MAPS
(borough labels show actual percentage)

- BEST
- MIDDLE
- WORST
- 🚌 Locations of bus depots

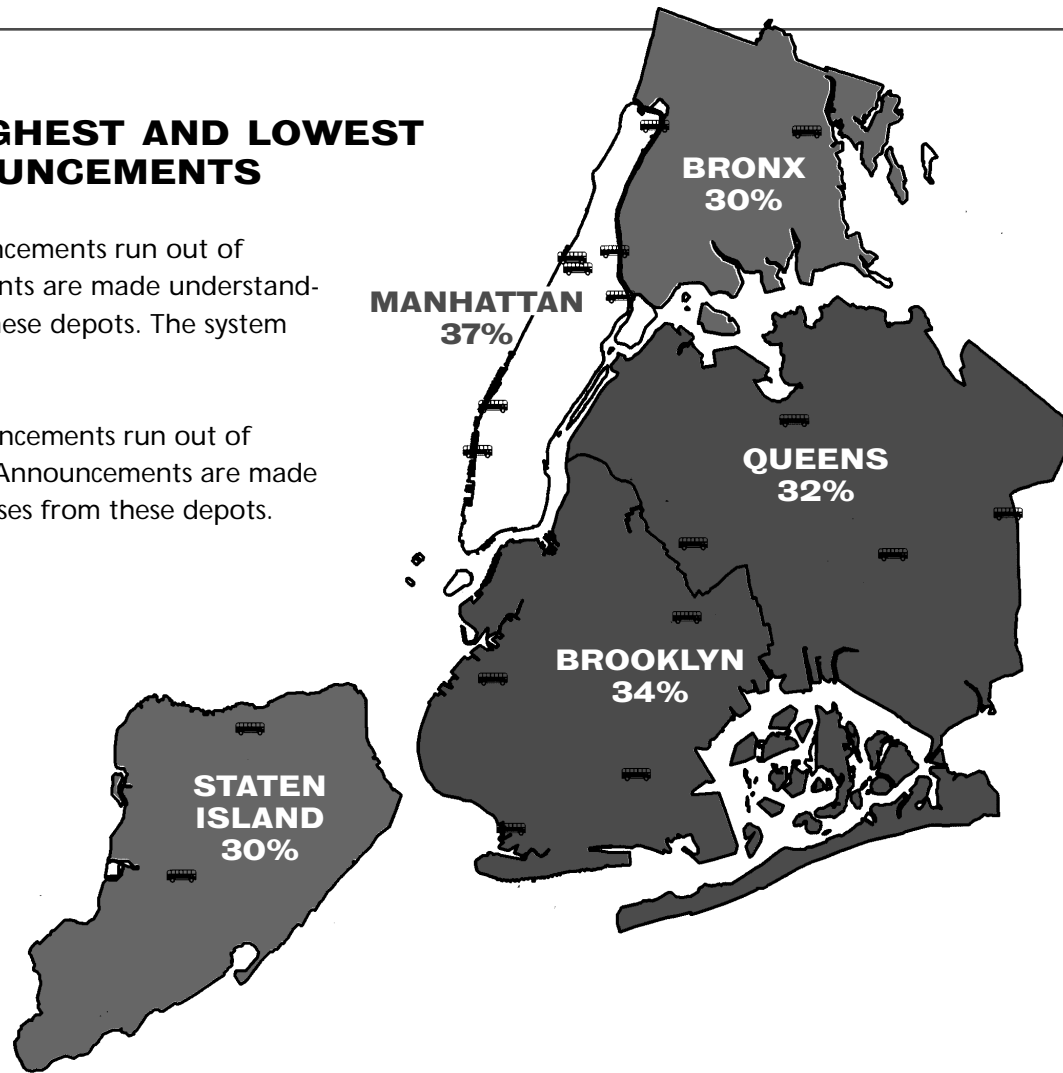
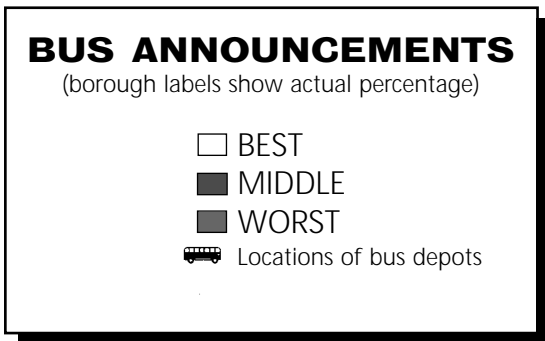


MAP 3

NYC TRANSIT BUSES WITH HIGHEST AND LOWEST PERCENT OF ADEQUATE ANNOUNCEMENTS

On average, NYC Transit buses with the best announcements run out of depots in the Manhattan Bus Division. Announcements are made understandably and correctly 37% of the time on buses from these depots. The system average is 34%. See appendix 1 for details.

On average, NYC Transit buses with the worst announcements run out of depots in the Bronx and Staten Island Bus Divisions. Announcements are made understandably and correctly 30% of the time on buses from these depots.



The State of the Buses

10-POINT PLAN

10-POINT PROGRAM: BETTER BUS SERVICE

As bus ridership booms, there's an historic opportunity to strengthen the role buses play in the life of New York City. How can transit and city officials build on this success? Here's a blueprint:

1. Add more bus service to reduce waits and crowding. Bus ridership has skyrocketed, fueled by free transfers between subways and buses, attractive fare discounts and a good local economy. But service has lagged badly. There was a 38% increase in ridership between October 1996 and October 1999, yielding an astonishing 662,000 more riders just on an average weekday. But this tidal wave has been met by only a 9% increase in service in the same period. The result: longer boarding times, slower speeds and more bus bunching as too few buses move many more people. Much more service needs to be added. But current plans only call for less than a 2% increase in bus service between 2000 and 2004! Unless plans change, transit officials risk losing their newly-won riders.

2. Buy more buses to provide more service. The MTA has proposed buying 1,056 new buses by 2004. That's far less than recommended by knowledgeable groups like the Regional Plan Association. RPA has called for buying 2,100 buses—mostly compressed natural gas—over the next five years. Transit officials acknowledge that a lack of buses limits their ability to meet rider demand.

3. Give buses greater priority on city streets. New York City has the slowest buses America. In other major cities, buses cruise at an average of 13 miles per hour; here they crawl at an average of 8 miles throughout the city and at an excruciating 6 miles per hour in Manhattan—the worst record in the nation. The mayor should commit the city to increasing the speed of buses on its streets. It should be a matter of civic pride to end New York's last place finish on bus speeds. The first step would be for the mayor to issue a blueprint for faster buses and then to commit to specific goals for increasing bus speeds over the next five years. We need real progress on key items, such as expanding the number of exclusive bus lanes, tougher traffic enforcement to make the existing ones work better; redesigning bus stops to discourage private cars parking in them; and giving buses priority turning signals.

4. Increase traffic enforcement to speed buses. City Hall needs to do more to make sure that buses run reliably and at decent speeds. There have been some recent welcome initiatives, such as traffic agents on board some buses and increased penalties for

drivers who block bus stops. But these have not backed been up with adequate resources. They should. The MTA and the New York Police Department should release periodic statistics on their enforcement efforts.

5. Adopt a policy of no new diesel buses. Instead, the MTA is now proposing to spend nearly 80% of its bus funds over the next few years to buy two-and-a-half times as many polluting diesel buses (756) as clean-fuel buses (300). It also wants to add two new diesel bus depots and to expand diesel capacity at six existing depots. This plan would extend reliance on toxic, asthma-triggering diesel buses for decades to come. This is unacceptable in the midst of a city-wide asthma epidemic.

6. Attack bus bunching. Nothing outrages riders more than waiting a long time for a bus, only to see a pack of buses arrive in a bunch. New York City Transit has recently hired more dispatchers and is experimenting with an "automated vehicle locator system" to foster more regular service. But there's been no real progress to date. Transit officials need to redouble their efforts and be held accountable for achieving their own goals to reduce bunching.

7. Build on the new fare discounts. Unlimited-ride passes and free subway-bus transfers show that if you offer fare incentives, more riders will come. Transit officials should build on this progress by: promoting TransitChek, which allows employers to provide tax-free transit benefits to employees; installing MetroCard vending machines in heavily trafficked locations outside the subways; finding ways to insure MetroCards from loss; and putting the \$4 unlimited-ride pass on sale at subway station booths. Officials should consider adding new discounts in the future, including weekend and off-peak reduced fares, as well as discounts for families traveling together.

8. Give riders more information. Transit officials need to do a much better job of making announcements on buses. The City Transportation Department should better maintain its bus stop schedules and route maps. There's much promise in New York City Transit's slow-moving pilot project for "smart bus shelters," which uses satellite technology to give its customers real time information on the arrival time of buses.

9. Keep buses cleaner. New York City Transit's own surveys show that many routes are filthy. The agency is implementing a new approach to cleaning buses; we will monitor their progress.

10. Make transit managers more accountable. Transit should post the names and phone numbers of depot and route managers at bus shelters, on Guide-A-Rides and in buses. It should also regularly post statistics at these sites on how bus routes are performing.

The State of the Buses

APPENDIX

METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

This report serves as a follow up to the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign studies of New York City bus service: *The Best of Times, the Worst of Times*, released in January 1998, and *Slow Going*, released in February 1999. In preparing those reports, we identified three key measures of the quality and quantity of bus service for which MTA New York City Transit compiles data: interruptions in service; service reliability; and quality of "passenger environment." These three areas—described in detail below—were included in our initial report for their importance to riders, as well as the availability, reliability and comparability of the data.

SELECTION OF DATA

The Straphangers Campaign reviewed extensive MTA New York City Transit data measuring the quality and quantity of bus service at the system, division, depot and route levels. The three monitored areas of performance break down as follows:

- Interruptions in service
 - mean distance between service interruptions
- Service reliability
 - enroute schedule adherence
 - service regularity
- Quality of passenger environment
 - cleanliness of bus interiors
 - adequacy of announcements
 - presence of correct and legible bus system maps

We could not include several service quality measures of concern to riders. Crime statistics, for example, are not kept at the route or depot level. Also, we could not include data on crowding, as the degree of detail in the data measured by MTA New York City Transit is not uniform. We also determined that NYC Transit data on bus speeds was not usable. In addition, certain passenger environment indicators, such as absence of exterior graffiti, were not included in the analysis because

nearly universal high compliance limits the usefulness of any comparisons among bus divisions or depots.

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE INDICATORS

Interruptions in Service

Mean Distance Between Service Interruptions (MDBSI) is one of several performance indicators compiled by MTA New York City to measure dependability of buses. It is defined as the number of miles traveled by buses of any depot, divided by the total number of chargeable "road calls"—including mechanical swaps—that interrupt service. In our analysis, we focused on a historical trend of annual MDBSI division (or borough) and system averages, for the period January 1992 through September 1999.

Service Reliability

MTA New York City Transit compiles reliability data for 42 routes it has selected as typical of the system's 203 bus routes. Roughly half of these routes are the most used in the city. Other routes included are either the most used in each borough, or routes that have travel and commuter patterns that reflect other routes throughout the system. Our review of service reliability focuses on the performance of 40 of these 42 routes. Two others—the Q44/20 and the Q85—were eliminated from consideration as major changes in route operation made comparison inappropriate.

Service reliability is generally tracked through two measures—enroute schedule adherence (often referred to as on-time performance) and service regularity. Our analysis includes a comparison of average service reliability data for the periods from October 1, 1997 through September 30, 1998, and October 1, 1998 through September 30, 1999.

1. Enroute Schedule Adherence

MTA New York City Transit defines enroute schedule adherence as the percentage of trips departing from all scheduled timepoints, such as bus stops but not including terminals, between 0 and 5 minutes after their scheduled departing time.

2. Service Regularity

Service regularity is defined as the percentage of actual intervals between bus trips which are within plus or minus 50% of the scheduled interval (for intervals of less than 10 minutes), or within plus or minus five minutes of the scheduled interval for intervals of 10 minutes or more. For example, if a bus is scheduled to arrive every 8 minutes but in fact there are 14 minutes between buses, this would be rated as an irregular interval.

Service regularity and on-time performance is measured and reported quarterly by MTA New York City Transit. By-route reliability figures for the one-year periods from October 1, 1997 through September 30, 1998 and October 1, 1998 through September 30, 1999 were calculated by averaging the reliability rates for each route, division and for the system over the four quarters comprising each one-year period analyzed. Change in a route's average on-time performance or regularity rate over the two one-year periods examined was considered significant if the absolute difference in rates exceeded 2%. For the entire system, change was considered significant if the absolute difference between the rates in the two periods exceeded 1%.

Quality of Passenger Environment

New York City Transit conducts a quarterly "passenger environment survey" (PES) to measure the quality of the transit rider's environment. The PES is performed by "surveyors who are specifically trained for this function and who have no direct association with the departments affected by the survey evaluations. The surveying [of buses] is conducted throughout each quarterly recording period to the extent necessary to depict a 'representative' sample of NYC Transit's vehicles" (source: MTA New York City Transit Passenger Environment Survey, Second Quarter, 1997 p.1).

PES data included in this report is an average of ratings from October 1, 1998 through September 30, 1999. For each PES indicator, we first calculated a "quarterly percentage" for each bus division by averaging the scores of its component depots. The four quarterly percentages were then averaged to create a one-year division percentage for each measure. This methodology is slightly different than that used by MTA New York City Transit in compiling system and division averages. In their analysis, the system average of each PES indicator is calculated under a weighting function to reflect the contributions of any under-sampled depots.

In the second quarter of 1998, MTA New York City Transit substantially changed its depot structure: the Walnut and 100th Street depots closed, the Westside depot opened, and authority over the Amsterdam depot transferred from the Manhattan to the Bronx division. These changes were taken into account in calculating division averages for each PES indicator for the period October 1, 1997 to September 30, 1998 and were reported in *Slow Going*. PES data from this time period is comparable to current data.

1. Cleanliness of bus interiors

The PES includes a rating of the cleanliness of the floors and seats of buses—each bus surveyed is rated as having "no interior dirt," "light dirt," "moderate dirt," or "heavy dirt." A car with a light degree of dirtiness is defined as one with occasional 'ground-in' spots, but generally clean. In this report, depot cleanliness rates reflect the sum of the percentages of buses rating no or light dirt.

2. Adequacy of announcements

On-board announcements are also monitored in the PES. New York City Transit requires bus operators to announce upcoming transfer points and major intersections. For an announcement to be rated as adequate, it must be made accurately and understandably.

3. Presence of correct and legible bus system maps

Each bus system map produced by MTA New York City Transit is labeled with a "commodity number" which corresponds to the date of its release. If a minor change has been instituted since the release of any version of the maps, there is a grace period extending to the end of the current quarter of the calendar year. During this period, otherwise adequate bus maps are rated as correct; after this period, maps with non-current commodity numbers fail the rating. In the case of major route changes, there is no grace period, and outdated maps are rated as not correct.