

Methodology:

2009 Pokey, Schleppe and Trekkie Awards

I. Pokey Awards

This report is a follow-up to the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign seven previous *Pokey Award* reports issued annually from 2002 to 2008. The methodology used by the campaign in this report is identical to the ones used in 2005 through 2007,¹ and nearly identical to the one used in 2008.²

Selection of Routes

The twenty-three routes measured in our sample are the same as those in our 2005, 2006 and 2007 reports; they had been selected on the basis of slow performance as reported by New York City Transit in 2004. This list includes: the ten slowest routes system-wide, plus the three slowest from each borough outside Manhattan. As the ten slowest in 2004 were all Manhattan routes, our sample included three routes each from the Bronx, Brooklyn³, Queens and Staten Island.

Due to significant differences between route patterns of the Manhattan M14A and M14D, these routes were measured separately. In total then, our sample includes 23 local bus route designations.

Bus Speed Measurement

Surveys were conducted by two Straphangers Campaign staff members and five volunteers, between June 16 and August 21, 2009. Each route was measured with an actual trip in both directions,⁴ beginning with the first bus departing from a terminus after 12:00 noon. The return trip was made from the second terminus back to the first on the next bus available.

During each trip, surveyors recorded to the second the amount of time taken from terminus to terminus in each direction. Timing began as each bus pulled out of the first stop and concluded immediately after stopping at the last. In our analysis, times were converted to a fraction of an hour. Distances covered were measured to the nearest 1/100th mile using GIS software.

Bus speeds were calculated by dividing the total number of miles per run by the fraction of the hour taken to cover the total distance. Below is an example of how this methodology was applied to a sample route, Manhattan's M86.

¹The 2005 Pokey awards methodology represented a significant departure from the one used in the 2002-2004 reports. In previous reports, Straphangers Campaign relied on MTA New York City Transit bus profiles to determine average local bus speeds. In the 2005 report, we decided to measure distances and times recorded from actual trips conducted by campaign staff.

² In September 2008, MTA New York City instituted its *Select Bus Service* program to increase bus speeds on Manhattan's M34 route. In our 2008 report, we decided to drop measurement of this route during the early phases of the program. In 2009, we did include the M34 in this report, although the M34 does not use all the SBS strategies as the SBS Bx12, such as off board fare collection.

³ In 2008 and 2009 we rates speeds for the B35 ltd instead of the B35 local. The B35 does not have local service at 12:00 noon on weekdays for the full length of its route, while the Limited B35 does.

⁴ Due to its unusual route pattern, the Staten Island S60 was measured in one closed loop, departing from the terminus at Clove Road near Seneca Avenue, and returning to the same location.

Sample Calculation—M86

Bus speeds on the M86 were measured on July 13, 2009. Surveyors boarded an eastbound M86 which pulled out of its terminus at West 86th Street and Broadway at 12:08:01 PM. The bus came to a stop at its eastern terminus — East 92th Street near 1st Avenue — at 12:33:16 PM. This trip represents a distance of 2.32 miles, which was covered in 25 minutes, 15 seconds.

Immediately following their eastbound measurement, surveyors boarded the next westbound M86 at its eastern terminus at East 92nd Street and 1st Avenue. This trip began at 12:43:09 PM and concluded at 1:08:30 PM at the western terminus, West 87th Street and West End Avenue. The westbound trip represents a distance of 2.26 miles, which was covered in 25 minutes, 21 seconds.

In total then, the two M86 trips covered a distance of 4.58 miles in 50 minutes 36 seconds. This represents an average speed of 5.4 miles per hour.

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II. Schleppe Award

This report is also a follow-up to the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign three previous *Schleppe Awards* issued in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

In awarding the Schleppe, the campaign uses official “wait assessment” data released in September 2009 by MTA New York City Transit for bus service during the first half of 2009, the most recent period available. The measure is reported for 42 high-volume routes.⁵

“Wait assessment” is a measure of reliability and is defined as follows by transit officials:

“Wait Assessment is measured weekdays between 7:00 a.m. and midnight, when service is relatively frequent. It is defined as the percentage of observed service intervals that are no more than the scheduled interval plus 3 minutes during peak (7 a.m. – 9 a.m., 4 p.m. – 7 p.m.) and plus 5 during off-peak (9 a.m. – 4 p.m., 7 p.m. – 12 a.m.)”

The campaign believes that this is the best measure provided by transit officials that shows how closely buses are sticking to their scheduled intervals. As such, it reflects the degree to which buses bunch together, or arrive with big gaps, a gauge of what riders experience.

To be eligible for a Schleppe, a route must have at least 20% of its buses arriving bunched or with big gaps in service. No route in Queens or Staten Island had 20% of its buses performing this poorly. As a result, no Queens or Staten Island route received a Schleppe Award.

⁵The wait assessment data can be found at pages 189-192 of the September 2009 MTA New York City Transit Committee agenda, Book Two.

Since our 2007 Schleppe Awards, transit officials significantly changed this measure. In the past, the agency reported a different measure for evening service. It used to compare how closely service arrived according to printed schedules at night. Now the agency reports only wait assessment for the entire day. As a result, historical comparisons of Schleppe Awards before 2008 are not meaningful.

Before our next survey in 2010, the Campaign will consider whether to set a higher standard than 80% or better for wait assessment.

III. Trekkie Award

This report includes a new award, the Trekkie.

The Trekkie is given to those bus routes that have as long or longer scheduled running times than regular — non-Acela, non-Metroliner — Amtrak service between New York and Philadelphia. It recognizes those lines that are a “major trek” to take from beginning to end.

In awarding the Trekkie, the Straphangers Campaign used the official schedules for weekday afternoons for: 1) Amtrak service from New York City to Philadelphia; and 2) 194 New York City Transit local bus routes.

Regular weekday afternoon New York City to Philadelphia Amtrak runs between 1 hour and 18 minutes and 1 hour and 27 minutes.

A local New York City Transit bus route qualifies for a Trekkie if the last local bus that departs before 5:00 p.m. and travels the entire route takes 1 hour 18 minutes or longer. If both directions qualify for a Trekkie, we took the longer of the two.

Calculating New York City to Philadelphia Amtrak Trip

We used two Amtrak schedules for calculating the length of New York City to Philadelphia trips.

The first was the Northeast Corridor schedule. It runs from New York City to Washington, D.C. with a stop for Philadelphia. The schedule went into effective on August 9, 2009. It can be found at: <http://www.amtrak.com/timetable/aug09/W02.pdf>.

For example, train 127 leaves New York City’s Penn Station at 4:05 p.m., Monday through Friday, and arrives in Philadelphia’s 30th Street Station at 5:32 p.m.⁶. That results in a trip that is 1 hour and 27 minutes in length.

The second schedule was Keystone Service. That runs from New York City to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania with a stop for Philadelphia’s 30th Street Station. The schedule went into effective on August 9, 2009. It can be found at: <http://www.amtrak.com/timetable/aug09/W10.pdf>.

⁶ Arrival time for Philadelphia’s 30th Street Station was found using Amtrak’s Fare Finder at www.amtrak.com as the Northeast Corridor schedule only lists a departure time for train 127, a difference of 3 minutes.

For example, under this schedule, train 651 leaves New York City's Penn Station at 4:03 p.m., Monday through Friday and arrives at Philadelphia's 30th Street Station at 5:21 p.m. That results in a trip that is 1 hour and 18 minutes in length.

Calculating Long New York City Transit Local Bus Trips

We used official schedules for 194 MTA New York City Transit local bus routes. These can be found at: <http://www.mta.info/nyct/service/bus/bussch.htm>.

For example, under Transit's schedule, the M4 leaves the Penn Station-area, Monday through Friday, at 4:30 p.m. and arrives at 6:20 p.m. at Fort Tryon Park in Upper Manhattan. That results in a trip that is 1 hour and 50 minutes in length. That is 32 minutes longer than the schedule for train 651 above from New York City to Philadelphia.

In all, the regular weekday schedules for 25 New York City Transit local buses took 1 hour and 18 minutes or longer.

Only MTA New York City Transit local bus routes – no Limiteds – were used to allow for a comparison of regular Amtrak service with local bus service.

We decided not to consider any local buses run by the MTA Bus Company. In 2006, the operations of bus routes run by seven private bus companies were taken over by a new subsidiary to the MTA, the MTA Bus Company.

The Straphangers Campaign did not think it was fair to award Trekkies to bus routes that have only been run recently by the MTA and were not designed by the agency. These routes are operated separately from New York City Transit, although by the same top management.

A spot check found only one route, out of 44 local routes operated by the MTA Bus Company, to take longer than Amtrak from New York City to Philadelphia. That was the Q60, which runs from South Jamaica to East 60th Street and Second Avenue in Manhattan. The route is scheduled to take 1 hour and 20 minutes.