

# **NYPIRG STRAPHANGERS CAMPAIGN TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES**

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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**“Pokey” Award Goes to M42, City’s Slowest Bus Clocked at 3.6 MPH;  
As Slow As Walking**

**“Schleppie” Award Goes to Bx41, City’s Least Reliable Bus**

**Number of Unreliable Buses More Than Doubles;  
From 4 in 2009 to 11 in 2010, Out of 42 Surveyed by MTA**

**Good News: “Select Bus Service” on Bx12  
Almost 25% Faster Than Local**

New York, New York — The NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign and Transportation Alternatives today gave out two awards for poor bus service in New York City.

The first is the ninth-annual “Pokey” for slowest local bus route in New York City. The uncoveted Pokey award is a golden snail on a pedestal. It’s based on actual rides taken by Straphangers Campaign staff and volunteers on 29 bus routes. These lines were selected either because: 1) they had high ridership; or 2) the bus was an historically slow Manhattan crosstown route. (See methodology.)

The “winner” of the 2010 Pokey is ... the M42, which had the slowest bus speed at 3.6 miles per hour as clocked at 12 noon on a weekday. It also “won” in 2009. (The route was shortened in June 2010, terminating at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It no longer goes down 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue to Javits Center at 34<sup>th</sup> Street. We surveyed the route in August after the change was made.)

“Many city buses travel in excruciating slow motion,” said Gene Russianoff, staff attorney for NYPIRG’s Straphangers Campaign. Russianoff noted that for some routes, the pace is not much faster than a young person walking, which averages about 3.6 miles per hour.

The M42 moves 12,847 riders on an average weekday and ranks 79<sup>th</sup> in riders out of the 194 local bus routes. According to the groups, the slowest bus routes in each borough are:

B35	5.4 mph	Between Sunset Park and Brownsville
Bx19	5.1 mph	Between Botanical Gardens in the Bronx and Harlem
M42	3.6 mph	Crosstown on 42 <sup>nd</sup> Street in Manhattan
Q58	6.6 mph	Between Ridgewood, Queens, and Flushing/Main Street
S48	8.2 mph	Between Richmond Terrace and St. George Ferry Terminal, Staten Island

The second award is the fifth-annual “Schleppe” for the city’s least reliable buses and is based on official transit statistics. The Schleppe is comprised of golden lumbering elephants on a pedestal.

The “winner” of the 2010 Schleppe is ... the Bx41, which runs on White Plains Road and Webster Avenue between the Wakefield and the Hub in the Bronx.\* The route moves 27,383 riders on an average weekday and has the fifteenth-highest bus ridership in the city.

Almost one in four Bx41 buses — 23.5% — arrived bunched together or came with big gaps in service during the first half of 2010. Last year’s “winner” with the worst reliability was the B44, which runs between Williamsburg and Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn.

The groups noted, however, that the number of unreliable buses had more than doubled in the past year.

MTA New York City Transit measures a “borough-representative sample of 42 high-volume bus routes” for unreliability. In the first half of 2009, the groups found four routes out of those 42 had more than one in five buses arriving off schedule. However, that has grown to 11 routes in the first half of 2010.

The most unreliable bus routes in each of four boroughs with over 20% of buses bunched together or big gaps in service are:

B44	21.7% unreliable btw Sheepshead Bay and Williamsburg on Nostrand Avenue
Bx41	23.5 % unreliable btw Wakefield and The Hub on White Plains Rd/Webster Ave
M101/2/3	22.3% unreliable btw Upper and Lower Manhattan on 3 <sup>rd</sup> and Lexington Avenues
S78	21.8% unreliable btw St. George Ferry and Tottenville on Hylan Boulevard

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\*The Bx41 was restructured in June 2010 to terminate at Gun Hill Road in the Williamsbridge section of the Bronx rather than in Wakefield.

“The next generation of buses is making inroads in New York City — Select Bus Service can cut travel time for riders,” said Paul Steely White, executive director of Transportation Alternatives. “Where these fast buses have been tried in the Bronx, travel times dropped at least 20 percent. Similar improvements were recently installed on Manhattan’s East Side. Rather than pokey and schleppie buses, New Yorkers deserve quick and efficient bus service. We are encouraged by the city’s willingness to make New York’s buses work better.”

Bus Rapid Transit has brought better transit to many cities around the globe. A limited version known as “Select Bus Service” (SBS) is being tested here. The first two SBS routes have started, one on Pelham Parkway and Fordham Road in the Bronx (Bx12) and another on First and Second Avenues in Manhattan (M15). Several SBS features are also being used on the M34 crosstown route. Additional SBS routes are planned for Nostrand Avenue (B44) and Hylan Boulevard on Staten Island.

White noted that the groups found Select Bus Service on the Bx12 increased bus speeds by nearly 25 percent over the Bx12 local. The Bx12 local was clocked by our surveyors at 6.9 mph. But the Bx12 SBS traveled at 8.6 mph, nearly 25 percent faster than the Bx12 local.

The groups did not feel it was timely to survey the speed of the M15 local bus or the M15 SBS, which only began service in early October.

Among bus speed improvement strategies now being tested in Phase One on the M15 SBS are:

- Exclusive bus lanes painted in terra cotta to discourage cars from entering;
- Payment of fare before boarding bus;
- Buses with three doors and low floors to speed up boarding;
- Distinctive branding of SBS buses and flashing blue lights to heighten rider recognition;
- Wider subway-style spacing between stops; and
- Enforcement of the bus lane by camera to keep the lane moving, starting in November.

In Phase Two next year, features to be added to M15 SBS are:

- Traffic signal priority for buses to help them stick to schedule; and
- Reconfigured bus stops to speed boarding and reduce conflicts with other vehicles.

Full tables of bus speeds and buses with unreliable service are attached.

In the 2002 Pokey Awards, the groups found that the city's slowest bus route was the M96. In 2003, the groups awarded the Pokey to the M23, in 2004 and 2005 to the M34, in 2006 to the M14A, in 2007 to the M23, the M96 in 2008 and the M42 in 2009.

The groups cautioned that comparisons with past findings were difficult due to changes in methodology and bus routes over the years. In addition, changes in bus speeds since 2004 have generally been too small to demonstrate significant trends. (See methodology.)

The criteria for selecting buses to be evaluated for speed changed in this survey.

Between 2005 and 2009, bus routes to be surveyed were selected based on New York City Transit data. Specifically, we surveyed the ten slowest routes (all in Manhattan), as determined by Transit in bus profiles compiled in 2000. We also surveyed the three slowest routes in the other boroughs.

In this survey, the number of routes surveyed increased from 23 to 29. Eleven routes were dropped, while 17 new routes were added based on high ridership. Additionally, most of the crosstown routes between 14<sup>th</sup> Street and 96<sup>th</sup> street were surveyed.

Schleppies went to any route with an average unreliability greater than 20%. This determination is based on official "wait assessments" for "42 high-volume routes," chosen by Transit. Wait assessment measures how closely a line sticks to scheduled intervals for arrival. Wait assessment becomes poorer the more buses arrive in bunches or with major gaps in service.

The Schleppie went to the M1 in both 2006 and 2007, to the M101/102/103 in 2008 and the B44 in 2009. Transit's methodology for calculating this measure was changed in 2008. (See methodology.)

The full report is available at [www.straphangers.org](http://www.straphangers.org). Additionally, StreetFilms has created a video about New York City's slow and unreliable buses. Please visit [www.streetfilms.org](http://www.streetfilms.org) to view the film.

Table One:  
**THE POKEY AWARD\***  
**SLOWEST TO FASTEST**  
Average Noontime Speeds, Both Directions,  
of 29 Selected New York City Transit Local Bus Routes,  
June 30 – August 19, 2010

Route	Average MPH, beginning at 12:00 Noon
M42	3.6
M14A	3.7
M66	4.0
M79	4.2
M23	4.2
M34	4.4
M14D	4.5
M50	4.7
M96	4.9
M86	5.0
Bx19	5.1
M57	5.1
M101	5.2
B35	5.4
M72	5.6
Bx2	5.9
B41	6.0
Bx1	6.2
Q58	6.6
B46 Ltd	6.6
Bx12	6.9
B44 Ltd	8.1
B6	8.1
S48	8.2
Q44 Ltd	8.4
SBS Bx12	8.6
Q27	9.9
S53	10.6
S79	11.8

\* See "Selection of Routes" in the methodology.

Table Two:  
**THE SCHLEPPIE AWARD\***  
**WORST TO BEST**  
**More Than One in Five Buses On Route**  
**Arrived with Major Gaps (or Bunched Together)**  
**or Left Significantly Off Schedule,**  
**First Half 2010**

Route	% Unreliable	From/To
Bx41	23.5	Wakefield to the Hub on White Plains Road and Webster Avenue
M101/2/3	22.3	Upper to Lower Manhattan on 3rd/Lexington/Lenox Avenues
S78	21.8	St. George Ferry Terminal to Tottenville on Hylan Boulevard
B44	21.7	Sheepshead Bay to Williamsburg on Nostrand Avenue
B41	21.5	Kings Plaza to Downtown Brooklyn on Flatbush Avenue
Bx36	21.4	Soundview to Washington Heights on E. 174/E. 180 Streets and Tremont Avenue
M4	21.3	The Cloisters/Fort Tryon to Penn Station on 5th and Madison Avenues
B15	20.7	Bedford-Stuyvestant to JFK on New Lots and Marcus Garvey Avenues
S44	20.7	St. George Ferry Terminal to New Springville on Richmond Avenue
S74	20.7	St. George Ferry Terminal to Tottenville on Arthur Kill Road
M15	20.2	East Harlem to Lower Manhattan on 1st and 2nd Avenues

\*Schleppie Awards are based on the percentages of buses departing significantly off scheduled interval, based on MTA New York City Transit data. A Schleppie is awarded to any route with an average unreliability greater than 20%.

## **Methodology: 2010 Pokey and Schleppe Awards**

### **I. Pokey Awards**

This report is a follow-up to the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign eight previous *Pokey Award* reports issued in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. The methodology used by the campaign in this report is similar to the ones used in earlier reports.

#### *Selection of Routes*

The Straphangers campaign chose to measure speeds on a sample of twenty-nine bus routes. The sample frame was selected to provide a 'snapshot' of the most-used routes in the system and in each borough, as well as traditionally slow-moving crosstown bus routes in Manhattan. Because of significant differences between route patterns of the Manhattan M14A and M14D, these routes were measured separately. Similarly, the Bx12 local and Bx12 SBS routes were also measured separately. On three routes — B44, B46 and Q44 — regular local bus service did not run terminal to terminal on weekdays at 12:00 noon, and therefore limited bus service speeds were measured on these routes. Due to construction on First and Second Avenues, the system's most used local bus — the M15 — was not included in the sample.

#### *Bus Speed Measurement*

Surveys were conducted by two Straphangers Campaign staff members and seven volunteers, between June 30 and August 19, 2010. Each route was measured with an actual trip in both directions, 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 1/100<sup>th</sup> 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.

#### *Sample Calculation — M86*

Bus speeds on the M86 were measured on August 5, 2010. Surveyors boarded an eastbound M86 which pulled out of its terminus at West 86<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway at 12:06:28 PM. The bus came to a stop at its eastern terminus — East 92<sup>nd</sup> Street near First Avenue — at 12:32:04 PM. This trip represents a distance of 2.45 miles, which was covered in 25 minutes, 36 seconds.

Immediately following their eastbound measurement, surveyors boarded the next westbound M86 at its eastern terminus at East 92<sup>nd</sup> Street and York Avenue. This trip began at 1:01:40 PM

and concluded at 1:32:30 PM at the western terminus, West 87<sup>th</sup> Street and West End Avenue. The eastbound trip represents a distance of 2.26 miles, which was covered in 30 minutes, 50 seconds.

In total then, the two M86 trips covered a distance of 4.71 miles in 56 minutes, 26 seconds. This represents an average speed of 5.0 miles per hour.

The Straphangers Campaign wishes to thank staff and volunteers who assisted in the survey: Ben Callinder, Cate Contino, Jason Chin-Fatt, Tamar Davis, Sabrina Fong, Lovia O. Gyarkye, Julia Lee, Kyle Remy and Chelsea Weinberg.

## II. **Schleppie Award**

This report is also a follow-up to the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign's four previous *Schleppie Awards* issued in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009.

In awarding the Schleppie, the campaign uses official “wait assessment” data released in September 2010 by MTA New York City Transit for bus service during the first half of 2010, the most recent period available. The measure is reported for 42 high-volume routes.<sup>1</sup>

“Wait assessment” is defined as follows by transit officials:

“Wait Assessment is measured weekdays between 7:00 a.m. and midnight. 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.).”<sup>2</sup>

The campaign believes that this is the best measure made by transit officials which 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 Schleppie, a route must have at least 20% of its buses arriving bunched or with big gaps in service. No route in Queens had 20% of its buses performing this poorly, and as a result, no Queens route received a Schleppie Award.

Since 2008, 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 Schleppie Awards before 2008 are not meaningful.

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<sup>1</sup>Wait assessment data can be found at pages 108-111 of the September 2010 MTA New York City Transit Bus Operations Committee agenda.

<sup>2</sup> Since September 2010, transit officials have measured wait assessment differently for the subways. It is reported on a monthly basis and is measured on weekdays between 9 a.m. and midnight. It is defined as the percent of actual intervals between trains that are no more than the scheduled interval plus 25%.