

**NYPIRG STRAPHANGERS CAMPAIGN  
TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES**

## **News Release**

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**A Tie!  
Pokey Award Goes to M42 and M50;  
Clocked at “Dreadful Crawl” of 3.4 MPH**

**A Wooden Row Boat Goes Faster!**

**Schleppie Award Goes to M101/2/3, City’s Least Reliable Bus;  
More Than 30% Arrive Bunched Together or With Major Gaps**

**But “Help is on the Way” Say Groups,  
Noting de Blasio Pledge of Faster, More Reliable Buses**

**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 twelfth-annual “Pokey” for slowest local bus route in New York City.

The uncoveted Pokey award is a golden snail on a pedestal. The award is based on the speed of rides taken by Straphangers Campaign staff and volunteers on 34 routes. Lines were selected because they: 1) had high ridership; or 2) were historically slow Manhattan crosstown routes. (See methodology.)

The “winner” of the 2013 Pokey is ... It’s a tie! The **M42 and M50** which both had the slowest bus speed at 3.4 miles per hour as clocked at 12 noon on a weekday.

The groups noted that an average wooden row boat can travel at 3.5 mph or more in still water without wind, compared to the average 3.4 mph speed for this year’s winners of the Pokey Award.<sup>1</sup>

“Our advice to the M42 and M50: Don’t challenge a row boat to race around the Central Park Reservoir,” said Gene Russianoff, attorney for the Straphangers Campaign. “These crosstown buses are losers.”

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://forum.woodenboat.com/showthread.php?145940-Average-Rowing-Speeds> for a discussion of row boat speeds from which the 3.5 mph figure was derived.

“Thankfully help is on its way,” said Paul Steely White, Executive Director of Transportation Alternatives. “Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio has pledged to build a rapid network of buses with the goal of greatly improving transit in the boroughs outside Manhattan’s Central Business District.”<sup>2</sup>

Six faster bus routes - known as "Select Bus Service" - were opened during Mayor Bloomberg's Administration, with a seventh due out in spring 2014.

In 2012, the M42 moved 14,829 riders on an average weekday and ranked 50th in riders out of 177 local bus routes. The M42 travels crosstown on 42nd Street between FDR Drive and Twelfth Avenue.

In 2012, the M50 moved 3,383 riders on an average weekday and ranked 150th in riders out of 177 local bus routes. The M50 travels crosstown on 49th and 50th Streets between First and Twelfth Avenues.

According to the groups, the slowest bus routes in each borough are:

B41LTD	5.7 mph	btwn Downtown Brooklyn and Kings Plaza/Bergen Beach
Bx19	4.9 mph	btwn NY Botanical Garden in the Bronx and Harlem
M42	3.4 mph	Crosstown on 42nd Street in Manhattan
M50	3.4 mph	Crosstown on 49th and 50th Streets in Manhattan
Q58	7.0 mph	btwn Ridgewood, Queens and Flushing Main Street
S48	7.7 mph	btwn Mariners Harbor and St. George Ferry Terminal, Staten Island

The second award is the eight-annual “Schleppe” for the city’s least reliable buses and is based on official transit statistics, which measure how well buses keep to scheduled intervals.

The Schleppe is comprised of golden lumbering elephants on a pedestal.

The “winner” of the 2013 Schleppe is ... **the M101/2/3** with more than thirty percent of M101/2/3’s arriving with big gaps in service or bunched together.<sup>3</sup>

The M101/2/3 goes from Washington Heights in Upper Manhattan to the East Village on 3rd and Lexington Avenues. The three routes share the “trunk route” of 3rd and Lexington Avenues. The M101 moved 29,341 riders on an average weekday in 2012 and was ranked the 13th highest route in bus ridership in the city out of a total 177 local buses. The M102 moved 15,284 riders and was ranked 46th. The M103 moved 12,548 riders and was ranked 66th.

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<sup>2</sup> “Bill de Blasio will work to phase in the creation of a citywide Bus Rapid Transit network with more than 20 lines, linking communities underserved by transit to the city’s primary transportation and employment hubs. De Blasio will allocate funding from the city’s capital budget to accelerate implementation—at a fraction of the cost of major subway projects. Bus Rapid Transit has the potential to save outer-borough commuters hours off their commute times every week and stimulate economic activity in neighborhoods the subway system doesn’t reach.” <http://www.billdeblasio.com/issues/transportation>

<sup>3</sup> The measure is known as “wait assessment.” It “is measured weekdays between 7 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 the peak (7 a.m. to 9 a.m., 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.) and plus 5 during off-peak (9 a.m. to 4 p.m., 7 p.m. to 12 p.m.) The results are presented for a sample of 42 high-volume routes.”

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

B44	25.1% unreliable btwn Sheepshead Bay and Williamsburg Bridge
Bx55	28.3% unreliable btwn Williamsbridge and the Hub on Webster Avenue <sup>4</sup>
M101/2/3	31.6% unreliable btwn Washington Heights and East Village on 3rd and Lexington Aves
Q85	21.0% unreliable btwn Jamaica, Queens and Valley Stream, Nassau County
S74	25.8% unreliable btwn St. George Ferry Terminal and Bricktown Mall

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

Both the City and MTA New York City Transit have substantially implemented six faster and more reliable “Select Bus Service” routes. These are:

- B44 SBS on Nostrand and Rogers Aves btwn Sheepshead Bay and Williamsburg Bridge in Brooklyn
- Bx12 SBS on Pelham Pkwy and Fordham Rd btwn Pelham Bay Park in the Bronx and upper Manhattan
- Bx41 SBS on Webster Avenue btwn Williamsbridge and the Hub in the Bronx
- M15 SBS on First and Second Avenues btwn lower Manhattan and Harlem
- M34 SBS and M34A SBS crosstown on 34th Street in Manhattan
- S79 SBS on Hylan Boulevard btwn Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and the Staten Island Mall, Staten Island

A seventh SBS route, the M60 SBS on 125<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem to LaGuardia Airport in Queens, is due in the Spring of 2014.

SBS employs a number of strategies to provide faster service, such as collecting fares before boarding buses; buses with three doors and low floors to speed up boarding and alighting; reconfiguring bus stops and bus lanes to reduce conflicts with other traffic; wider subway-style spacing between stops; and enforcement of the bus lane by camera to keep the lane moving.

The groups found that three of the SBS routes – those that can be fairly compared to local service on the route – are living up to their promise.

**For example, SBS on the Bx12 increased bus speeds by more than half over the Bx12 local.** The Bx12 local was clocked by our surveyors at 6.6 mph. But the Bx12 SBS traveled at 10.1 mph — 53 percent faster than the Bx12 local.

**SBS on the Bx41 increased bus speeds by 23 percent over the Bx41 local.** The Bx41 local was clocked by our surveyors at 6.8 mph. But the Bx41 SBS traveled at 8.4 mph, 23 percent faster than the Bx41 local.

**SBS on the M15 increased bus speeds by nearly 28 percent over the M15 local.** The M15 local was clocked by our surveyors at 5.5 mph. But the M15 SBS traveled at 7.0 mph, 28 percent faster than the M15 local.

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<sup>4</sup> The Bx55 has been replaced by the Bx15 Limited Stop Service. The current schedule has been in effect since September 8, 2013.

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, the M42 in 2009 and 2010, the M50 in 2011 and the M42 tied the M66 in 2012.

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 criterion for selecting buses to be evaluated for speed is largely the same as in our 2010 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 the 2011 survey, the number of routes surveyed increased from 29 to 35. In the 2012 survey, the number of routes surveyed dropped from 35 to 34.

In this survey, the total number of routes stayed at 34. Two routes were dropped because of construction during the survey period. Three more routes out of the 34 were dropped because they are slated for significant upgrades as part of the Select Bus Service program. Three new routes were added because of current or future inclusion in the Select Bus Service program.

Schleppies went to any route with an average "wait assessment" 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 Schleppe went to the M1 in both 2006 and 2007, to the M101/2/3 in 2008, the B44 in 2009, the Bx41 in 2010, the M101/2/3 in 2011 and to the M4 in 2012. Transit's methodology for calculating this measure was changed in 2008.

Table One:  
**THE POKEY AWARD**  
 Slowest to Fastest  
 Average Noontime Speeds, Both Directions  
 Of 34\* Selected New York City Transit Local Bus Routes,  
 June 5 - August 14, 2013

Route	Average MPH, beginning at 12:00 Noon
M42	3.4
M50	3.4
M14A	4.2
M23	4.2
M57	4.4
M14D	4.6
M66	4.7
Bx19	4.9
M79	4.9
M86	4.9
M106	4.9
M96	5.1
M101	5.2
M8	5.4
M116	5.4
M15	5.5
B41 LTD	5.7
Bx2 LTD	5.8
M72	6.0
Bx1 LTD	6.1
B35 LTD	6.2
Bx12	6.6
Bx41	6.8
M15 SBS	7.0
Q58	7.0
S48	7.7
Bx41 SBS	8.4
Q44 LTD	8.5
B6	8.6
M60	8.7
Q27	9.8
Bx12 SBS	10.1
S53	11.1
S79 SBS	17.0

\*See "selection of routes" in the report 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 2013

Route	% Unreliable	From/To
M101/2/3	31.6%	Upper to Lower Manhattan on 3rd/Lexington/Lenox/Amsterdam Aves
M4	28.7%	Fort Tryon Park to Penn Station on 5th/Madison Aves and Broadway
Bx55	28.3%	Williamsbridge to the Hub on 3rd and Webster Avenues
S74	25.8%	St. George Ferry to Bricktown Mall on Richmond/Arthur Kill Roads
B44	25.1%	Sheepshead Bay to Williamsburg on Nostrand and New York Avenues
Bx41	24.2%	Williamsbridge to the Hub on Webster Avenue
B41	23.7%	Downtown Brooklyn to Kings Plaza or Bergen Beach on Flatbush Avenue
M2	23.6%	Washington Heights to East Village on 5th/Madison Aves & AC Powell Blvd
M3	23.5%	Fort George to East Village on 5th/Madison/St. Nicholas Avenues
M1	23.0%	Harlem to East Village on 5th and Madison Avenues
M15	23.0%	East Harlem to Lower Manhattan on 1st and 2nd Avenues
S78	22.3%	St. George Ferry Terminal to Bricktown Mall on Hylan Boulevard
Bx1/2	21.5%	Mott Haven to Kingsbridge or Riverdale on Grand Concourse
Bx36	21.4%	Soundview to Washington Heights on E 174/E 180 Sts and Tremont Ave
Q85	21.0%	Jamaica, Qns to Valley Stream, Nassau Co. on Merrick Blvd/Conduit Ave
B35	20.5%	Sunset Park to Brownsville on Church Avenue and 39th Street

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

# Methodology:

## 2013 Pokey and Schleppe Awards

### I. Pokey Award

This report is a follow-up to the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign eleven previous *Pokey Award* reports issued annually from 2002 to 2012. 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 thirty-four bus routes. The survey was designed 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. On five routes — the B35, B41, Bx1, Bx2, 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. The Bx12 local and Bx12 SBS routes, as well as the M15 and M15 SBS routes, and the Bx41 and Bx41 SBS routes, were measured separately. We did not include the M21, M34 SBS, M34A SBS, B44 and B46 because of substantial construction at the time of the survey.

#### *Bus Speed Measurement*

Surveys were conducted by Straphangers Campaign Field Organizer Jason Chin-Fatt and 15 volunteers between June 5 and August 14, 2013. 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. 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.

#### *Sample Calculation — M86*

Bus speeds on the M86 were measured on July 15, 2013. Surveyors boarded an eastbound M86 which pulled out of its terminus at West 86<sup>th</sup> Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. This trip began at 12:01:48 PM and concluded at 12:29:25 PM at the eastern terminus, First Avenue between East 91<sup>st</sup> and East 92<sup>nd</sup> Streets. The eastbound trip represents a distance of 2.25 miles, which was covered in 27 minutes, 37 seconds.

Immediately following their eastbound measurement, surveyors boarded the next westbound M86 at its eastern terminus — East 92<sup>nd</sup> Street at York Avenue — at 12:43:35 PM. The bus came to a stop at its western terminus — West 87<sup>th</sup> Street between Broadway and West End Avenue — at 1:11:50 PM. This trip represents a distance of 2.27 miles, which was covered in 28 minutes, 15 seconds.

In total then, the two M86 trips covered a distance of 4.52 miles in 55 minutes, 52 seconds. This represents an average speed of 4.9 miles per hour.

The Straphangers Campaign wishes to thank the staff and volunteers who assisted in the survey: Sumya Akkas, Dion Aljure, Jonathan Avila, Brittany Bing, Armando Chapelliquen, Dustin Cintron, Nico Connolly, Jorge Inamagua, Paul lee, Nicole Navarrete, Oona Newman, Christopher Ratsimbazafy, Keanu Renne-Glover, Brian Shelton, and Daphne Thompson.

## **II. Schleppe Award**

This report is also a follow-up to the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign's seven previous *Schleppe Awards* issued annually from 2006 to 2012.

In awarding the Schleppe, the campaign uses official “wait assessment” data released in September 2013 by MTA New York City Transit for bus service during the first half of 2013, 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 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.

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 Schleppe Awards before 2008 are not meaningful.

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<sup>1</sup> Wait assessment data can be found at pages 331-335 of the September 2013 MTA New York City Transit 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%.