

NYPIRG STRAPHANGERS CAMPAIGN • TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

News Release

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For More Information Contact:
Gene Russianoff (917) 575-9434
Paul Steely White (646) 247-6734

M79 Wins Pokey Award With Slowest Speed: Abysmal 3.2 MPH Crawl “Hawaiian Lava Flow Travels Faster!”

Schleppie Award Goes to Local M15, City’s Least Reliable Bus; 33% Arrive Bunched Together or With Major Gaps In Service

Some Good News: NY Investment in “Faster, More Reliable Bus Routes” Is Paying Off

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

The first is the thirteenth-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 recorded by Straphangers Campaign staff and volunteers on 34 routes. Lines were selected because they had high ridership or were historically slow Manhattan crosstown routes. (See methodology.)

The “winner” of the 2014 Pokey is the M79 crosstown. It had the slowest bus speed at an excruciating 3.2 miles per hour as clocked at 12 noon on a weekday.

In comparison, the groups noted that the fastest recorded Hawaiian lava flow travelled at 6 MPH in contrast to the observed 3.2 MPH speed for the M79.¹

“I’d think twice before trying to evacuate from an erupting volcano in an M79 bus,” said Gene Russianoff, attorney for the Straphangers Campaign. “Fleeing on foot would be faster, with an average human walking speed of about 3.5 MPH.”

In 2013, the M79 moved 17,374 riders on an average weekday and ranked 34th in riders out of 192 local bus routes. The M79 travels crosstown on 79th and 81st Streets between East End Avenue and the 79th Street Boat Basin.²

—more, more, more—

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

B41	5.7 mph	between Downtown Brooklyn and Kings Plaza/Bergen Beach
Bx19	4.8 mph	between NY Botanical Garden in the Bronx and Harlem
M79	3.2 mph	Crosstown on 79 th and 81 st Streets in Manhattan
Q58	7.7 mph	between Ridgewood, Queens and Flushing Main Street
S48/98	8.3 mph	between Mariners Harbor and St. George Ferry Terminal, Staten Island

The second award is the ninth-annual “Schleppe” for the city’s least reliable bus routes and is based on official transit statistics, which measure how well buses keep to scheduled intervals.³ The Schleppe is comprised of golden lumbering elephants on a pedestal.

The “winner” of the 2014 Schleppe is the local M15 with 33 percent of buses arriving with big gaps in service or bunched together.

The M15 goes from downtown to uptown Manhattan along First and Second Avenues. The M15 local and M15 SBS moved 54,310 riders on an average weekday in 2013 and was ranked the highest route in bus ridership in the city out of a total 192 local bus routes.⁴

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

B44	25.4% unreliable between Sheepshead Bay and Williamsburg Bridge
Bx15	21.2% unreliable between Fordham Plaza and Harlem
M15	33.0% unreliable between downtown and uptown Manhattan on First and Second Avenues
S78	27.2% unreliable between St. George Ferry Terminal and Bricktown Mall, Staten Island

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

“New Yorkers know from bitter daily experience that bus service is slow and unreliable,” said Paul Steely White, executive director of Transportation Alternatives. “But there is real hope for dramatic improvement in Mayor de Blasio’s plan to build a rapid network of 20 ‘Select Bus Service/Bus Rapid Transit’ routes.”

Select Bus Service has features that 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 bus lanes by camera to keep the lanes moving. To date, both the City and MTA New York City Transit have constructed seven faster and more reliable SBS routes.⁵

The groups reviewed this year's speed and reliability improvements on SBS routes compared to local bus performance on the same route. We found that the SBS routes were:

- Living up to their promise of faster speeds – with increases on three SBS routes ranging from 19% to 24% to 29%;⁶ and
- Performing more modestly on reliability, with increases of 4% (Bx41), 5% (Bx12), and 16% (B44) and no change on the M15.

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, the M42 tied the M66 in 2012, and the M42 and M50 in 2013.

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 NYC 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 observed was 41. Three routes were dropped because of construction on them during the survey period. Four more routes out of the 41 were dropped because they are slated for significant upgrades as part of the Select Bus Service program. As a result, we included 34 bus routes in this report.

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, the M4 in 2012, and again to the M101/2/3 in 2013. Transit's methodology for calculating this measure was changed in 2008.

¹ “The fastest recorded Hawaiian lava flow was the first of three flows from the 1950 Mauna Loa...eruption. This flow advanced from its vent...at an average speed of 6 MPH.” http://hvo.wr.usgs.gov/volcanowatch/archive/1998/98_03_25.html (Volcano Watch: A weekly feature provided by scientists at the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory, March 25, 1998)

² Bus Ridership numbers last accessed on November 6, 2014 at http://web.mta.info/nyct/facts/ridership/ridership_bus.htm.

³ MTA NYC Transit uses a measure of reliability 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 recent WA statistics can be found in the MTA New York City Transit Committee Agenda from September 2014 on pages 279-280.

⁴ Email to Cate Contino from Robert Marino, October 8, 2014: “The WA assessment for the M15 and M15 SBS did drop, the M15 by 10% (from 77% to 67%) and the M15 SBS by 13.9% (from 81.2% to 67.3%). There were specific circumstances that contributed to the drops. Poor weather was a factor in the first quarter of 2014. Additionally, construction on 2nd Avenue subway, bus bulb work on 1st Avenue, and water main construction at Houston and Allen Street all significantly affected WA performance in the first half of 2014 which are still active construction projects...”

⁵ These are:

- B44 SBS on Nostrand and Rogers Aves between Sheepshead Bay and Williamsburg Bridge in Brooklyn
- Bx12 SBS on Pelham Pkwy and Fordham Rd between Pelham Bay Park and upper Manhattan
- Bx41 SBS on Webster Avenue between Williamsbridge and the Hub in the Bronx
- M15 SBS on First and Second Avenues between lower Manhattan and Harlem
- M34 SBS and M34A SBS crosstown on 34th Street in Manhattan
- M60 SBS on 125th Street in Manhattan to LaGuardia Airport
- S79 SBS on Hylan Boulevard between Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and the Staten Island Mall, Staten Island

⁶ Looking at the three SBS/BRT buses that can be fairly compared to local service on that route, we found:

- **SBS on the Bx12 increased bus speeds by 24 percent the Bx12 local.** The Bx12 local was clocked by our surveyors at 7.4 MPH. But the Bx12 SBS traveled at 9.2 MPH — 24 percent faster than the Bx12 local.
- **SBS on the Bx41 increased bus speeds by 29 percent over the Bx41 local.** The Bx41 local was clocked by our surveyors at 6.5 MPH. But the Bx41 SBS traveled at 8.4 MPH, 29 percent faster than the Bx41 local.
- **SBS on the M15 increased bus speeds by nearly 20 percent over the M15 local.** The M15 local was clocked by our surveyors at 5.4 MPH. But the M15 SBS traveled at 6.4 MPH, 19 percent faster than the M15 local.

Table One:
THE POKEY AWARD
 Slowest to Fastest
 Average Noontime Speeds, Both Directions
 of 34* Selected New York City Transit Local Bus Routes
 May 20 - August 21, 2014

Route	Average MPH, beginning at 12:00 Noon
M79	3.2
M23	3.6
M42	3.8
M57	3.8
M50	4.0
M14A	4.1
M14D	4.4
M86	4.6
M21	4.7
M66	4.8
Bx19	4.8
M106	4.9
M8	5.0
M101	5.0
M96	5.2
M15	5.4
M116	5.6
B41 LTD	5.7
M72	5.7
Bx2	5.9
B35 LTD	6.2
M15 SBS	6.4
Bx41	6.5
Bx1 LTD	7.1
Bx12	7.4
Q58	7.7
S48/98	8.3
Bx41 SBS	8.4
Q44 LTD	8.4
B6	8.6
Bx12 SBS	9.2
Q27	9.6
S53	10.1
S79 SBS	14.8

*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 2014

Route	% Unreliable From/To	
M15	33.0%	East Harlem to Lower Manhattan on 1st and 2nd Avenues
M15 SBS	32.7%	East Harlem to Lower Manhattan on 1st and 2nd Avenues
M101/2/3	32.0%	Upper to Lower Manhattan on 3rd/Lexington/Lenox/Amsterdam Aves
M4	28.6%	Fort Tryon Park to Penn Station on 5th/Madison Aves and Broadway
M3	28.2%	Fort George to East Village on 5th/Madison/St. Nicholas Avenues
M7	27.7%	Harlem to Chelsea on 6th/7th/Columbus/Amsterdam Avenues
S78	27.2%	St. George Ferry Terminal to Bricktown Mall on Hylan Boulevard
M2	26.9%	Washington Heights to East Village on 5th/Madison Aves & AC Powell Blvd
M1	26.4%	Harlem to East Village on 5th and Madison Avenues
S74	26.2%	St. George Ferry to Bricktown Mall on Richmond/Arthur Kill Roads
B44	25.4%	Sheepshead Bay to Williamsburg on Nostrand and New York Avenues
M31	24.4%	Yorkville to Clinton on York Ave and W. 57th Street
B15	23.9%	Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn to JFK Airport, Queens
B41	23.5%	Downtown Brooklyn to Kings Plaza or Bergen Beach on Flatbush Avenue
B46	21.3%	Kings Plaza to Bedford-Stuyvesant or Williamsburg Bridge Plaza
Bx15	21.2%	Fordham Plaza, Bronx to Harlem on 3rd/Willis Aves and W. 125th St
M66	20.7%	Upper East Side to West Side on E.65th/E.66th/E.67th/E.68th Streets
S76	20.4%	Oakwood Beach and St. George on Richmond Rd and New Dorp Ln
B35	20.1%	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%.

The following document has been edited. A previous version inaccurately described the final step used to calculate average bus run speeds.

Methodology: 2014 Pokey and Schleppe Awards

I. Pokey Award

This report is a follow-up to the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign twelve previous *Pokey Award* reports issued annually from 2002 to 2013. 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 41 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 four routes — the B35, B41, Bx1, 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 B44, B44 SBS, B46, Bx36, M34 SBS, M34A SBS, M60, and M60 SBS because of substantial construction at the time of the survey, resulting in 34 reported routes.

Bus Speed Measurement

Surveys were conducted by Straphangers Campaign Field Organizer Jason Chin-Fatt and seven volunteers between May 20 and August 21, 2014. 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 for each trip were calculated by dividing the total number of miles per trip by the fraction of the hour taken to cover the total distance. For each route surveyed, bus speeds for each trip were finally averaged to calculate the overall run speed. This method represents a small departure from calculations used in previous Straphanger Campaign Pokey Award reports. 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 June 27, 2014. Surveyors boarded a westbound M86, which pulled out of its terminus at E. 92nd Street and York Avenue. This trip began at 12:30:35 PM and concluded at 1:00:29 PM at the western terminus, W. 87th Street and Broadway. The westbound trip represents a distance of 2.27 miles, which was covered in 29 minutes, 54 seconds—corresponding to an average trip speed of 4.56 miles per hour.

Immediately following their westbound measurement, surveyors boarded the next eastbound M86 at its western terminus — W. 86th Street and Broadway — at 1:19:54 PM. The bus came to a stop at its eastern terminus — E. 92nd Street and York Avenue — at 1:49:34 PM. This trip represents a distance of 2.25 miles, which was covered in 29 minutes, 40 seconds—corresponding to an average trip speed of 4.55 miles per hour. Finally, we averaged the speed of these two trips to calculate the average run speed for the M86 at 4.55 miles per hour.

The Straphangers Campaign wishes to thank the volunteers who assisted in the survey: Shayna Chung, Marissa Combs, Chelsea Gardner, Naledi Kekana, Phil Laudo, Etinosa Osage, and Kevin Perez.

II. Schleppe Award

This report is also a follow-up to the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign's eight previous *Schleppe Awards* issued annually from 2006 to 2013.

In awarding the Schleppe, the campaign used official “wait assessment” data released in September 2014 by MTA New York City Transit for bus service during the first half of 2014, the most recent period available. The measure is reported for 42 high-volume routes.⁷

“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.).”⁸

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. No route in Queens had 20% of its buses performing this poorly, and as a result, no Queens route received a Schleppe 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 Schleppe Awards before 2008 are not meaningful.

⁷ Wait assessment data can be found at pages 279-280 of the September 2014 MTA New York City Transit Committee Agenda.

⁸ 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%.