



June 10, 2020

Hon. Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

We write in support of fast, efficient bus service for our constituents, and especially essential workers, across New York City. We accordingly seek full funding for the Better Buses Action Plan in FY20 and FY21. Moreover, we endorse a citywide expansion of the bus lane and busway network in line with the 60 miles proposed by the MTA. As the state identified in the June 4 letter from New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg, this 42% increase in bus priority infrastructure will be vital in helping ease traffic congestion and complement subway service as the city recovers from the COVID pandemic.

While the City faces a fiscal crisis due to COVID, the MTA, which relies heavily on fares, is in even worse shape. With a \$17 billion annual budget, the agency is losing approximately \$1 billion each month in foregone fares, tolls, and dedicated tax revenues. While the federal government has provided support, so far aid has not been sufficient to meet even the most conservative projections of the losses to public transit. Even now, the agency serves nearly a million riders each day--primarily essential workers, more than half of whom are on the bus.

As you well know, 75 percent of bus riders are low-income New Yorkers of color. The availability and reliability of transit, particularly bus service, is often under-appreciated as a matter of racial justice. Improving bus service for communities of color is an essential element of a racial equity agenda.

Before the pandemic, two million New Yorkers were subjected to slow and unreliable bus service due to the historically low priority transit received on city streets. We now know that nearly 50 percent of bus riders are also essential workers, which helps explain why bus ridership has fallen the least of any transit service. Bus riders in frontline sectors are fighting the pandemic to keep the rest of us safe and lay the foundation for rebuilding our damaged economy.

While New Yorkers shelter in place, essential bus riders have experienced faster, more reliable bus service than before. With fewer cars on the streets, ambulances are also better able to reach stricken COVID patients and deliver them to hospitals for treatment. And the decline in traffic has significantly improved air quality, which is closely correlated with public health, in particular the outcomes of respiratory illness in urban communities of color.

After COVID, the experiences of other global cities suggest that traffic can be worse than before. Yet the enormous obstacle of slow traffic to quality bus service is one the MTA and its riders can afford less than ever. New Yorkers, especially essential workers most dependent on



our bus network cannot bear the immense excess costs in time, labor, equipment, and fuel associated with the slowest bus service of any big city in the nation.

This is doubly true given the new importance bus service will have as we rebuild. More frequent service, especially to and near hospitals, will be critical to helping riders maintain a safe distance and help avert a second COVID spike. Further, more frequent and reliable bus service adjacent to subway lines will be pivotal to transit riders who feel more comfortable taking the bus than returning directly to the enclosed, underground subway.

We urge you to cement the gains of better bus service that are among the very few rays of hope visible through the pandemic fog. Unfortunately, proposed cuts to the Better Buses Action Plan of \$2.7 million in FY20 and \$5.7 million in FY21 all but ensure bus riders a grim return to miserable pre-COVID levels of service. The cuts also condemn the MTA to waste its increasingly scarce resources in stalled, inefficient street traffic. With public transit so fiscally imperiled and at the same time the basis of our city's economic recovery, we implore you to take the critical step of investing in a more efficient and effective street network.

Most important, 60 new miles of bus priority along busy commercial streets in neighborhoods throughout the city and along corridors adjacent to subway routes will support an equitable recovery. Permitting unplanned traffic congestion to roar back will paralyze the economy. Given the immense benefits of better bus service to essential workers, emergency response, and air quality, the choice is obvious to us.

Sincerely,

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Brooklyn Borough President

Gale Brewer
Manhattan Borough President

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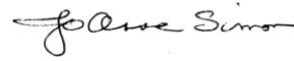
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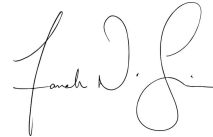
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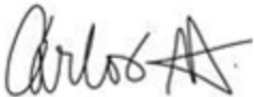
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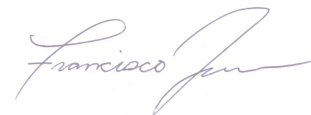
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