

# Woodhaven/Cross Bay Boulevard Select Bus Service Public Workshop I: April 23, 2014 Meeting Summary



The first Woodhaven/Cross Bay Boulevard Select Bus Service public workshop took place on April 23, 2014. 92 participants attended the evening's activities which were broken into three sections and ended with an opportunity for questions and answers. The three sections included:

### 1) Select Bus Service presentation

The workshop began with a brief presentation from the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) that discussed the history of the project, and the short- and long-term implementation plans, and the community participation process. In 2008, the New York City Department of Transportation began the Woodhaven Boulevard Congested Corridors Study to identify and evaluate short- and long-term improvements to help reduce congestion, improve mobility, and reduce vehicular emissions. The study found that Woodhaven Blvd is one of the most dangerous corridors in the city for drivers and pedestrians and that side medians force buses to use the service roads and lead to slow bus service. Initial improvements to the corridor were implemented in 2010 and more improvements were implemented in 2011, 2012, and 2013. Additionally, one of the major recommendations that came out of the study was to implement short-term recommendations for buses such as implementing dedicated bus lanes and restriping the roads to reduce traffic conflicts, and long-term recommendations which would include a capital roadway project and Select Bus Service.

Implementation of the short-term recommendations will begin in the fall of 2014 and will include offset bus lanes between Eliot and Metropolitan Avenues (reducing congestion by eliminating the need for general traffic to merge onto to the overpass) and curbside bus lanes approaching Rockaway Boulevard (allowing buses to reach subway connections faster without removing travel lanes).

Planning for the long-term for Select Bus Service will include a community input process that is comprised of a Community Advisory Committee, public workshops (such as this first workshop), and meetings with Community Boards and community stakeholders/institutions. Through discussion with and input from the community, the project planning team will be able to develop a plan and design that will improve bus service while maintaining appropriate traffic flow for local and through drivers. The project will look at all potential changes, focusing on faster bus service, safer streets for all, and maintaining appropriate traffic flow for local and through drivers. [Download the full presentation \(pdf\).](#)

### 2) Mapping and small group discussion

The workshop included eight breakout tables where a facilitator led participants through two exercises. The first exercise engaged participants in an activity where they were asked to think about their daily travel, what those trips are like, and why they chose the method of transportation and then share their commute with the group by documenting the trips on a map. Participants were then asked to identify positive and negative aspects of their commutes and discuss how the positive could be enhanced and how the negative could be mitigated.

The second exercise engaged participants in a discussion specific to the Woodhaven/Cross Bay Blvd corridor that centered around the following questions:

- When given the choice, how do you decide between driving and taking the bus along Woodhaven?
- How do you think that improving bus service along the corridor will benefit you/your community, why?
- What improvements to the corridor would make you more likely to walk when taking local trips?
- What is something about the corridor that only a local would know?

### 3) Worldwide examples of Bus Rapid Transit

During the third section, participants were shown images of BRT projects that have been implemented in other U.S. cities and abroad. Participants were asked to share what resonated



Example: Median bus lanes in Cali, Colombia



Example: Offset bus lanes in Bronx, NY



Example: Protected bike lanes in Chicago, IL



with them in the images, what gave them cause for concern, which images made them excited by the possibilities, and how that made them feel about SBS being implemented along the corridor.

Through all of the feedback, we were able to identify some common areas of concerns:

**Bus service and reliability**, with particular concerns about buses being slow during peak hours and having long wait times;

**Congestion** during daily rush hour and extreme weather conditions;

**Safety** of drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians;

**Streets designed for all users** that included improve signage and navigation to make the corridor more user friendly;

**Comfort** levels including ways to address air pollution and noise and to make waiting for and riding the bus a more enjoyable experience; and,

**Enforcement** of the traffic laws and parking regulations.

Participants with a range of transit options shared that all of the above themes play a major role in their decision-making process when deciding on a mode of travel, while those whose sole transportation option is the bus expressed that they felt limited and frustrated by current service and that improving bus service would improve their overall quality of life. In particular, residents and bus customers traveling to Far Rockaway expressed serious concerns with the Q52 and suggested extending service further into Far Rockaway to better serve their daily needs and limit the amount of transfers needed to get to their destinations.

Some participants stated that improvements to bus service could inspire drivers to give buses a try which would lead to a reduction in congestion along the corridor, improve access for police, ambulance, and fire trucks, and lead to safer streets, less stress, and more time to spend with family. Others, however, felt that the corridor would not be able to handle a dedicated bus lane and that the project would lead to an increase in traffic.

Improving safety and creating a corridor that is accommodating for all types of users was agreed upon across the board. Participants offered ideas for creating shared streets that could include design features such as shortened crosswalks, protected bike lanes, and improved signage as well as better enforcement of traffic laws and parking regulations.

When it came to looking at worldwide examples of Bus Rapid Transit, some found it difficult to envision the central median approach used in places like Bogotá, Colombia, expressing difficulty in visualizing this treatment as there are no examples in NYC to turn to. Others, however, were excited about the center median designs and felt that the Woodhaven/Cross Bay corridor has the potential to transform the city around them, arguing the NYC should go big and build off of international best practices. In addition, a group in support of the Rockaway Beach Branch rail line suggested that a study be conducted on the potential to reinstate rail service.

The next step in the project planning is to gather community input on the integration and design of Select Bus Service along the corridor and to begin planning the stop locations along the route.

This “design charrette” will take place on **Wednesday, June 25, 2014 from 7:00 – 9:00 PM**. More details will follow but please save the date, we hope to see you there!



# Public Feedback by Theme

## Bus Service and Reliability

- Off-peak bus service moves quickly and reliably
- Bus runs extremely slowly during peak hours due to traffic/congestion ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
- Long wait times for the bus/bus not keeping to schedule ✓ ✓ ✓
- Bus to bus transfers are very hard to make, sometimes have to wait ½ hour for transfer
- In some cases a 5 minute car ride takes 50 minutes by transit
- Buses run with no set pattern, you may see the same bus pass by 3-4 times before you see others that run on that same route (four Q21s before you see one Q52)
- Does the bus route really serve Far Rockaway considering the difficulty of the final segment home?
- The bus is most useful when the weather is bad and walking/biking is not an option
- Frustrating to have to take three buses and pay for another trip
- Wait time is very long for Q53
- The Q52 should be extended further into Rockaway ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

## Enforcement

- Truck rules not being followed or enforced ✓ ✓
- Double-parking south of Liberty with no enforcement
- NYPD needs to enforce traffic rules in relation to trucks who don't stay within the rules posted on the streets

## Shared Streets

- Amount of space that the road has that can be better allocated to bus or bike lanes means lots of opportunity
- Road is supposed to be for drivers and pedestrians but doesn't function that way ✓ ✓ ✓
- Signage for traffic movement is hard to read on Woodhaven ✓ ✓ ✓
- Roads are hard to navigate and are unsafe
- Confusion of traffic movement near Liberty and Rockaway Blvd and heading north on Cross Bay
- Bike racks on buses should be explored

## Safety

- Perceived danger of crossing the Blvd. due to high traffic volumes and crosswalks that are too long for the walk signals ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
- Dangerous and confusing roadway
- Difficult for disabled and elderly to cross, not enough time on the signals ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
- Trucks line up and block south crosswalk at Liberty and Cross Bay Blvd
- Medians are not wide enough for people to stand if they don't make it across in time
- A median lane would make accessing the bus in a rush even more dangerous
- Crime needs to be addressed when talking about safety

## Congestion

- A lot of congestion caused by airport and casino shuttle buses ✓ ✓
- Traffic flow is terrible during bad weather ✓ ✓ ✓
- Beach traffic during the summertime is terrible
- South of Metropolitan Avenue, everything flows
- Heading south to Park Lane, median ends, cars don't let you in and it is a dangerous spot
- Difficult cross-town travel ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
- Trip from Rockaways -> J -> Manhattan is congested
- Challenge to get home from the end of the Q52 service in Far Rockaway
- Elliot Avenue overpass is a major downside to journeys along the route

## Comfort

- Reduce air and noise pollution ✓ ✓
- Use EZ-pass technology for off-board fare payment ✓
- Feature wi-fi on the bus
- Add heating lamps to bus stations
- Trip is stressful along Atlantic Ave
- Positive feedback about the median lanes and bus shelters in Bogotá

✓ = Number of times mentioned



# Small Group Discussion about Woodhaven and Cross Bay Boulevards

## When given the choice, how do you decide between driving and taking the bus along Woodhaven?

Bus doesn't go where you need to go	Destination	Safety issues for biking on Woodhaven, not a problem on Cross Bay though
Ease of parking at destination ✓ ✓ ✓	Bus frequency makes the choice (if too infrequent will drive)	If carrying too many bags more incentivized to drive ✓ ✓
Necessity (transit doesn't reach destination)	Convenience ✓ ✓	Choose bus over driving because bus allows for multi-tasking
Don't drive, only transit option from home is bus ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	Bus is always there/always reliable	
Bus requires too many transfers, gets expensive	Time of day	Inclement weather sometimes excludes biking so bus is good option
	Longer buses would help	

## How do you think that improving bus service along the corridor will benefit you/your community, why?

Queens College students will benefit from improved service	Increased frequency of service	Would improve access for police, ambulance, fire trucks
No improvement is possible given the increasing use of the corridor and maximum space available to share between modes	Will provide multiple levels of service	Less time on bus means more time for family
Adding bike racks on the bus would make travel better for bikers	Safer streets for pedestrians	Q53, Q52, Q11, Q21 signal priority will make bus service better
Would lead to less stress and better quality of life	Bike lanes can be separated by bus lanes making safer streets for bikers	People that drive may choose the bus leading to less congestion/pollution and better streets ✓ ✓ ✓
Articulated buses are better for commute ✓ ✓	Extending the Q52 further into Far Rockaway ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	

## What improvements to the corridor would make you more likely to walk when taking local trips?

Lengthening the timing of the walk signals near myrtle and near park where there are kids	20mph speed limit	Shortening crosswalks using planters/space markings to make the pedestrian safer ✓ ✓
Bike lane striped on Bridge over Montauk RR near Home Depot	Safer streets/pedestrian refuges ✓ ✓	Widen more curbs so it's better to walk ✓ ✓ ✓
Bus lanes, bumpouts, service lane improvements	Police/photo enforcement	Improved signage, wayfinding, markings, and guidance for pedestrians
Depressing the Montauk Line to accommodate an at-grade crossing	Protected bike lanes ✓ ✓ ✓	Better access to bus stops, sidewalk re-construction, repave/re-stripe streets
	"Sharrow" marks so car riders lookout for bicycles	
	Less garbage and debris ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	

## What is something about the corridor that only a local would know?

Sightlines are difficult for drivers and pedestrians at crosswalks because of parking too close to the intersections (cannot see the people stepping into crosswalk)	Toll plaza at Cross Bay Bridge floods during storms, so crossing is banned
Local buses are very slow	Q53 is fastest but Q11/21 is more frequent than Q52
Q52 needs to be more frequent in both directions	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge should be flag stop if SBS is implemented, make permanent
Cross Bay at 157 Av and 164 Ave are good for strolling/shopping	Crossing at Liberty Ave and Woodhaven Blvd is very dangerous for pedestrians when traffic merges
The quick connection to Rockaways is good	Service/local roads are best way around traffic when Woodhaven is congested
Shops at Woodhaven and Metropolitan are big attractions	

# Questions from the Workshop (with answers provided by NYCDOT and MTA)

## Q: If SBS is added what happens to the limited?

A: The limited-stop route (Q52 and/or Q53) would be replaced by Select Bus Service, similar to how Select Bus Service has been implemented on other bus routes in New York City.

## Q: If there is a 10% increase in ridership, how will it affect the present situation: will that require more buses, cause more congestion?

A: MTA Bus would schedule the bus service to accommodate any increase in ridership. Our experience with other Select Bus Service routes has been that because the buses travel faster, the MTA is able to provide more service and more reliable service.

## Q: Where will bus lane end up? The road is too narrow to handle the DOT's plans to expand bus service with SBS?

A: Bus lane locations will be planned where they would benefit bus riders, and where traffic analysis shows that they can be installed without undue impact on general traffic.

## Q: How will BRT affect service roads and local traffic/buses?

A: We will look closely at how the service roads work for local access, general traffic, and bus routes. If a center median busway design is chosen for this project, many of the buses that now use the service roads would instead use the busway.

## Q: Will the fare be different for SBS, what about transfers?

A: The base cost of riding a Select Bus Service bus is \$2.50, the same as riding the subway or the local or limited-stop bus. Transfer policies are the same as other bus-to-bus, bus-to-subway, and subway-to-bus policies.

## Q: Other places have better transit options, why not here? It feels like we are forgotten neighborhoods.

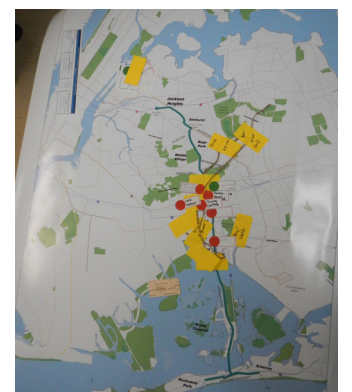
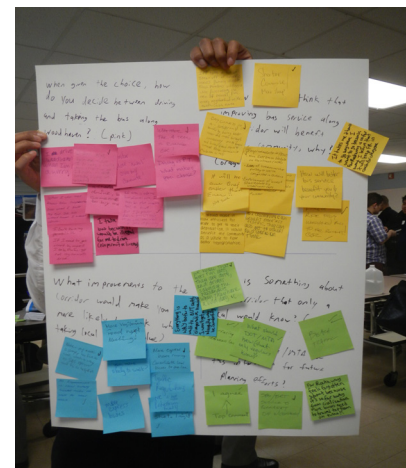
A: We believe that the Woodhaven/Cross Bay Select Bus Service route will greatly improve transit options for neighborhoods along this corridor. We look forward to working closely with the communities in the area to address their transit needs and hope that the added and improved service will help residents feel more connected to the rest of New York City.

## Q: Are both the Q52 and Q53 needed to run all the way to Woodside at the top of the route? The road is not as wide there and it will make it harder to accommodate the SBS.

A: Currently only the Q53 provides service north of Queens Boulevard to Woodside, primarily because there is not as much ridership in that area. For the same reason, it is possible that not all SBS buses would serve Woodside. MTA Bus will closely evaluate ridership patterns and needs as part of this project.

## Q: Why is this study not considering reactivating rail on the currently abandoned Rockaway Beach Branch right-of-way?

A: The Woodhaven Boulevard SBS study is focused on bringing better bus service to Woodhaven Boulevard, as well as improving the street in other dimensions, such as street safety, and local access. We think that Select Bus Service is the way to bring all of these needed improvements to Woodhaven Boulevard. As part of this study, we are not taking any position for or against reactivation of rail on this right-of-way (or for or against use of that right-of-way for any other purpose), which could have potential benefits. However, any change there would take many years, be very expensive, and would not address the other goals of this project for Woodhaven Boulevard. Therefore, we believe that SBS will have substantial benefits, irrespective of any work that happens on the rail line.





# General Comments

- Difficult to envision the central median approach on Woodhaven Blvd because there are none in NYC to see firsthand
- Center median designs (like those in Brazil) have the potential to transform the city around them: NYC should go big and do full, international best practice style intervention
- Using median route might be a way of making a real demonstration project for the rest of the city ✓
- Need to change the time horizon that is used to discuss the payoff of major BRT interventions in NYC
- Whatever intervention is used, DOT should take the opportunity to really address the turn signals and traffic flow more generally at tricky intersections along the route
- A physically separated designated lane for buses would be helpful
- Should study Rockaway Beach Branch of the LIRR and reinstate rail service ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
- Giving us a bus lane makes it more congested for cars
- Better bus shelters (covered, more seating) would make for a better experience ✓ ✓ ✓
- Sign that tells you how many minutes instead of stops away the bus is ✓ ✓
- Next stop signs on the bus like the ones on the subways
- Schedules aren't accurate so real-time signs are important because there's a lot of anxiety not knowing when the bus is coming
- Very narrow sidewalks creates a space issue
- Bus lane is a good idea
- The workshop is not really beginning of the process because bus lanes are already going in – already have decided where things will go
- Consider combined HOV lane or no lane at all
- Should consider ways to address cyclists through local projects/proposals such as the Queensway
- It is really important to come up with a design that works: something has got to be done, not satisfactory right now
- There are not enough buses running on Woodhaven Blvd