

# Better Buses Restart: Jamaica Bus Improvements

Community Advisory Board Kickoff | July 13, 2020



# Agenda

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1. Better Buses Action Plan and Better Buses Restart
2. Downtown Jamaica Transit Issues and Potential Solutions
  - Jamaica Ave
  - Archer Ave
  - Merrick Blvd
3. Summary and Next Steps

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# Better Buses Action Plan and Better Buses Restart

# 1



# Better Buses Restart

## Better Buses Program

- **Mayor's 2019 State of the City:**  
*Improve bus speeds 25%*
- **Better Buses Action Plan**  
*Released April 2019*
- **Bus Priority Projects**
  - 22 projects implemented in 2019
  - 24 projects were planned for 2020, heavy focus on coordination with NYCT Bronx Bus Network Redesign



# Better Buses Restart

## Impact of COVID-19

### 2020 Work Program was disrupted by the pandemic

- Limited ability to conduct data collection and outreach starting in March
- Bronx Redesign implementation postponed



# Better Buses Restart

## Bus Service During the Pandemic

- **Speeds initially increased by over 20%**
- **Ridership initially decreased about 70%**
- **Highlighted areas of particular need**
  - Essential workers using transit
  - Underrepresented communities hardest hit by virus
- **Good bus service needed for restart**
  - Support essential workers
  - Attract people back to transit

## NYC Reopening

### Phase 1

- **June 8**
- Approx. 300k workers returned
- Construction, manufacturing, some retail

### Phase 2

- **June 22**
- More retail
- Outdoor dining
- Some office

### Phase 3

- **July 6**
- Personal care services, some outdoor recreation, no indoor dining

### Phase 4

- **Timing TBD**
- Schools, entertainment
- Indoor dining

# Better Buses Restart

## *Why New York Buses Are on the Rise in a Subway City*

During the coronavirus pandemic, daily ridership on buses has surpassed the subway for the first time in over half a century.



## Coronavirus Updates: Bus And Subway Riders Jump By More Than 213,000 On First Day Of Reopening

BY ELIZABETH KIM

JUNE 9, 2020 1:50 P.M. • [39 COMMENTS](#)

## Buses more popular than the subway in NYC during coronavirus crisis

By David Meyer

May 20, 2020 | 7:15pm

## Carmageddon' if returning workers avoid mass transit

"Traffic could come to a standstill."

By Gio Benitez and Mina Kaji

June 15, 2020, 12:12 PM • 5 min read





# Better Buses Restart

## Recovery Plan

**In June, Mayor de Blasio announced a plan for fast, reliable transit service during reopening**

- Buses played a vital role during the shutdown and continue to during recovery
- Bus ridership is already at 56% of pre-COVID levels, while subway ridership is only at 21%



The screenshot shows Mayor de Blasio at a podium with the NYC seal, speaking at a press conference. The background is a blue screen with the NYC logo at the top. To the right of the mayor, the text 'SAFER TRANSIT' is displayed in white, followed by orange text detailing the plan: 'City will implement 20 total new miles of busways and bus lanes that will serve nearly 750,000 daily rides'. Below this, in white text, are the points: 'Faster travel, more frequent buses to increase social distance', '5 new busways, similar to 14th Street', '4 new bus lanes with signage and street markings', and '14th Street Busway will be made permanent'. A small inset video in the top right corner shows a person in a dark room.

**NYC**

**SAFER TRANSIT**

City will implement 20 total new miles of busways and bus lanes that will serve nearly 750,000 daily rides

Faster travel, more frequent buses to increase social distance

5 new busways, similar to 14th Street

4 new bus lanes with signage and street markings

14th Street Busway will be made permanent

**NYC**

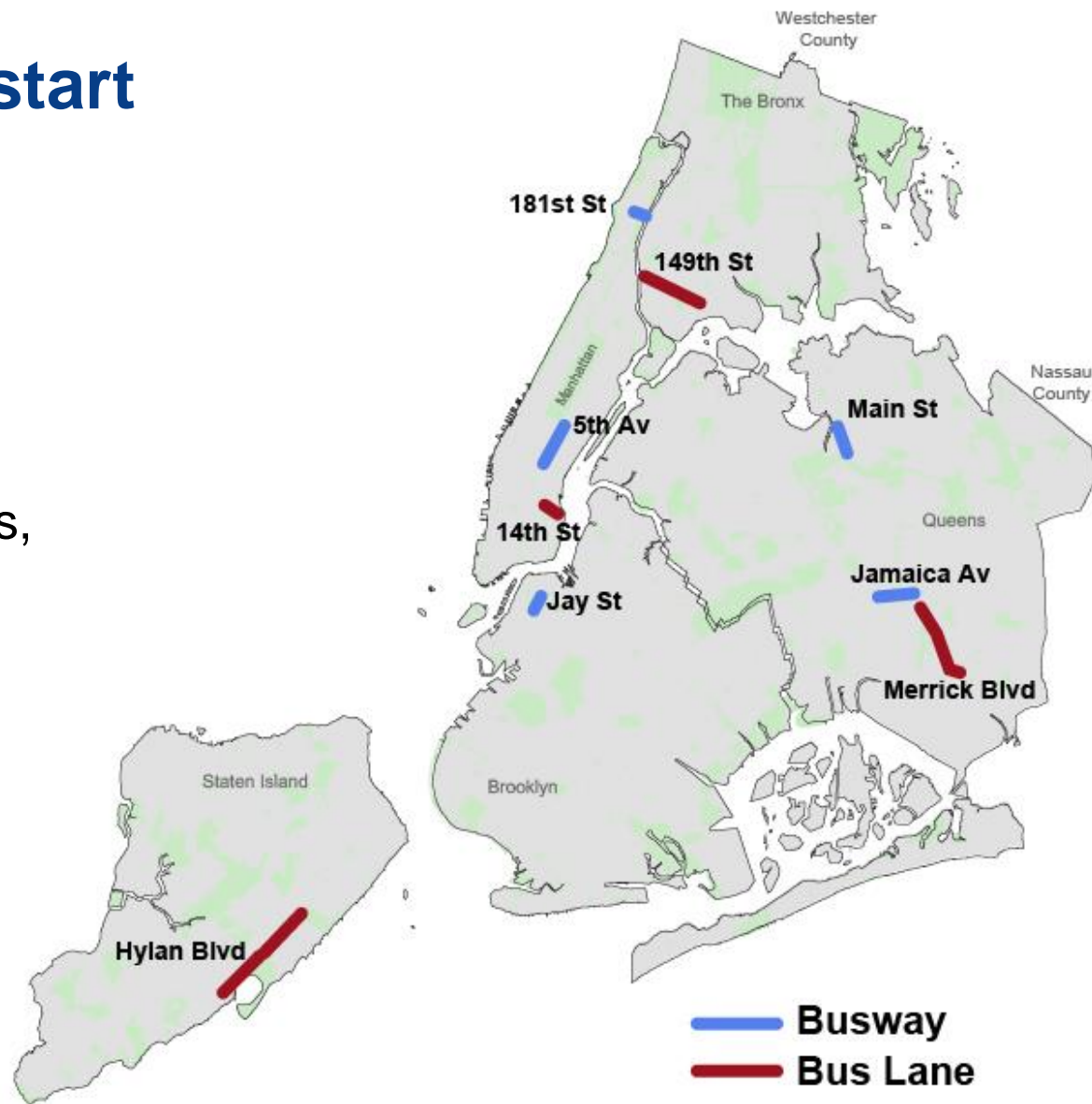


# Better Buses Restart

## Recovery Plan

### 9 busway & bus lane projects announced, focused on:

- Vulnerable populations, essential workers
- Number of bus passengers served
- Ability to implement quickly
- Geographic equity



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## Downtown Jamaica Transit Issues and Potential Solutions

# 2

# Transit in Downtown Jamaica

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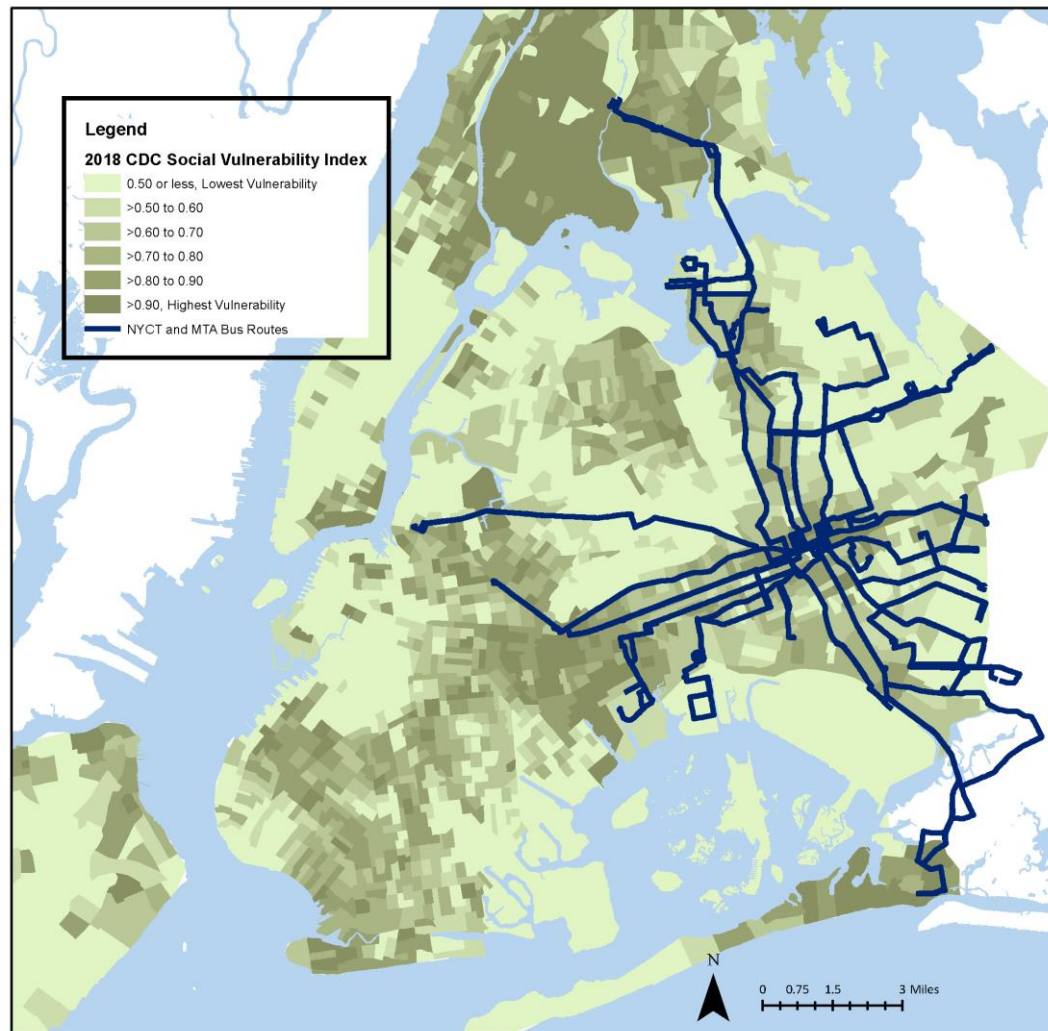
- Downtown Jamaica is the busiest bus hub in NYC, with over 45 NYCT, MTA Bus and NICE bus routes with connections to the E, J, and Z subway lines and LIRR
- Buses using Archer Ave
  - Serve 225,000 daily riders
  - Existing speeds of 5.7 to 6.1 MPH (PM)
- Buses using Jamaica Ave
  - Serve 147,000 daily riders
  - Existing speeds of 4.7 to 4.9 MPH (PM)
- Several bus routes operate on both Archer Ave and Jamaica Ave
- Congestion is a major issue for buses, passenger vehicles, and pedestrians
- Pedestrian realm lacks adequate space, amenities, and connectivity

# Transit in Downtown Jamaica

- Many of these bus routes travel through neighborhoods that rank high on the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index (SVI)
- SVI is based on factors such as:
  - Socioeconomic status
  - Car-free households
  - Non-white population
  - Population aged over 65
- Communities with high vulnerability often have limited transportation options, making fast and reliable transit critical

*\*Routes running between Sutphin Blvd & 168 St only*

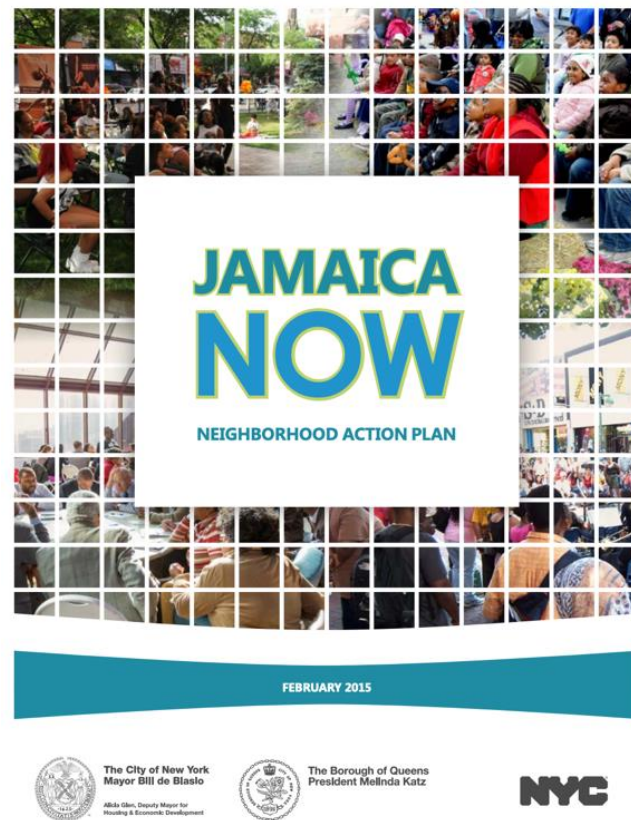
Jamaica Ave and Archer Ave NYCT and MTA Bus Routes\*





# Recent Planning Efforts in Jamaica

- Jamaica Bus Improvement Study (DOT, 2010-2012)
  - Led to implementation of curbside bus lanes on Jamaica Avenue
- Jamaica Now Action Plan (Multi-agency, 2015)
  - Led to streetscape study of Jamaica Avenue
- Downtown Jamaica: Gateway to the New York Region (GJDC, RPA, 2016)
- Queens Bus Network Redesign (MTA, 2019-present)
  - Draft Plan explores routing and stop changes borough-wide
- Downtown Jamaica Transportation Study (DOT, 2019)
  - Evaluated busway treatment on Archer Avenue



# Jamaica Ave: Current Conditions

- Carries Q6, Q8, Q9, Q41, Q54, Q56, Q110, Q24, Q30, Q31, Q34, Q25, Q65, and Q112 buses
- Serves 147,000 daily riders
- Existing bus speeds of **4.7 to 4.9** MPH (PM)
- Major regional commercial corridor with significant curb demand
- Narrow sidewalks and high pedestrian activity creates sidewalk congestion
- Intermodal transit connections between buses, AirTrain JFK, LIRR, and the subway
- Existing curbside bus lanes in both directions





# Jamaica Ave: Current Conditions



# Jamaica Ave: Transit Issues

## Street Is Not Working for Any of Its Users

- Existing bus lanes are ineffective, and are often parked up with placard vehicles or blocked by trucks making deliveries
- Existing curbside lanes are only in effect 7 hours a day due to competing curb demands even though bus ridership is heavy throughout day
- Compared to Archer Ave:
  - Buses are slower
  - Bus stop and lane blockages are more mostly due to personal and delivery vehicles





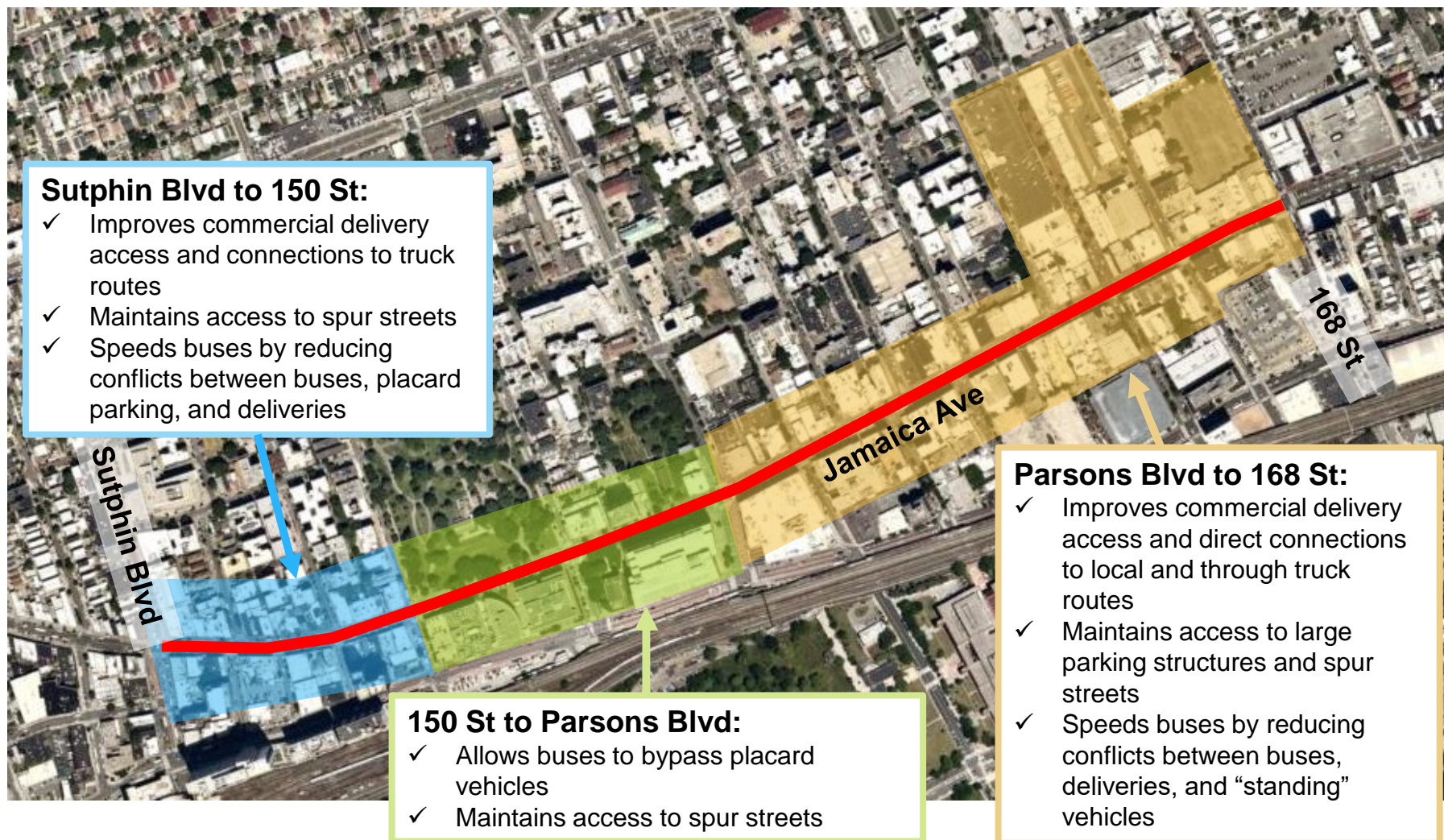
# Jamaica Ave: Potential Solution

## Busway from Sutphin Boulevard to 168th Street

- “Offset” bus lanes are not feasible on most of the corridor due to narrow width
- Buses, trucks and local access only
  - Frequent cross-streets allow for local access vehicles to enter and exit busway
- Current curbside bus lane would be repurposed, potentially restoring parking and loading
- Turn restrictions will be studied
- Expanded pedestrian space is under consideration



# Jamaica Ave: Benefits of a Busway





# Archer Ave: Current Conditions

- Carries Q30, Q31, Q20A, Q20B, Q44 SBS, Q25, Q34, Q65, Q24, Q83, Q111, Q112, Q4, Q5, Q84, Q85, Q42, Q113, Q114, and N4/N4X buses
- Serves 225,000 daily riders
- Existing bus speeds of **5.7 to 6.1 MPH (PM)**
- Intermodal transit connections between buses, AirTrain JFK, LIRR, and the subway
- Less retail density than nearby Jamaica Ave
- Existing curbside bus lanes
- Limited access to roadways south of the LIRR tracks
- Heavy pedestrian activity



# Archer Ave: Transit Issues

- Bus delays are due to pulling in/out of crowded stops and commuter vans blocking bus stops and bus lanes
- Commuter vans that operate as buses are difficult to enforce
- Placard parking on "teardrop" prevent pedestrian access
- Narrow sidewalks near York College/bus stops
- Faster bus speeds than Jamaica Ave





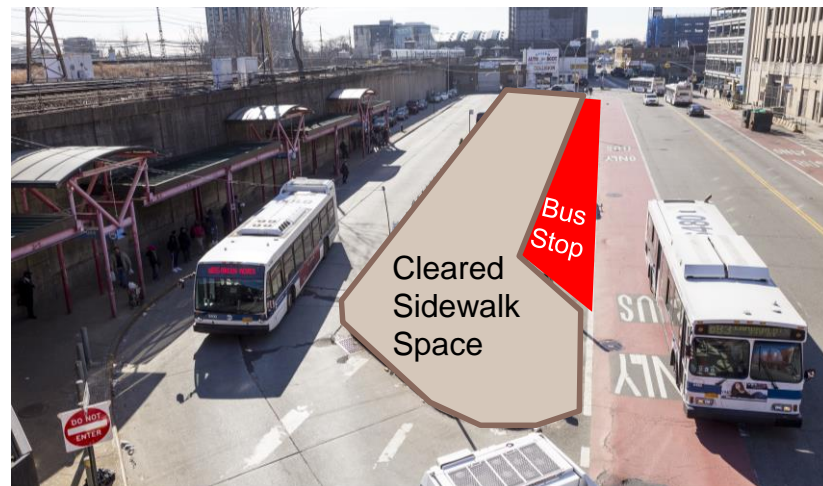
# Archer Ave: Potential Solutions

## “Teardrop” Parcel

- Add and relocate bus stops to reduce passenger and bus congestion under the canopies
- Improve bus operations and the rider experience while providing additional space for social distancing



**Current Configuration**



**Proposed Configuration**

# Archer Ave: Potential Solutions

## Sidewalks Near York College

- New bus stop amenities for riders such as leaning bars or additional shelters
- Work with MTA to determine feasibility to upgrade/replace pedestrian ramps
- Work with MTA to investigate sidewalk widening to expand space for riders / pedestrian flow and provide additional space for social distancing



Current Configuration



Potential Configuration

# Archer Ave: Potential Solutions

## Improving Bus Lane Operation

- Work with MTA to prioritize corridor for on-bus camera enforcement
- Build on ongoing DOT protected bus lane pilot using jersey barriers and/or concrete curbs to help keep the bus lanes clear, reduce commuter van conflicts, and prevent illegal U-turns
- Turn restrictions to discourage non-MTA buses from using Archer Ave near the canopy





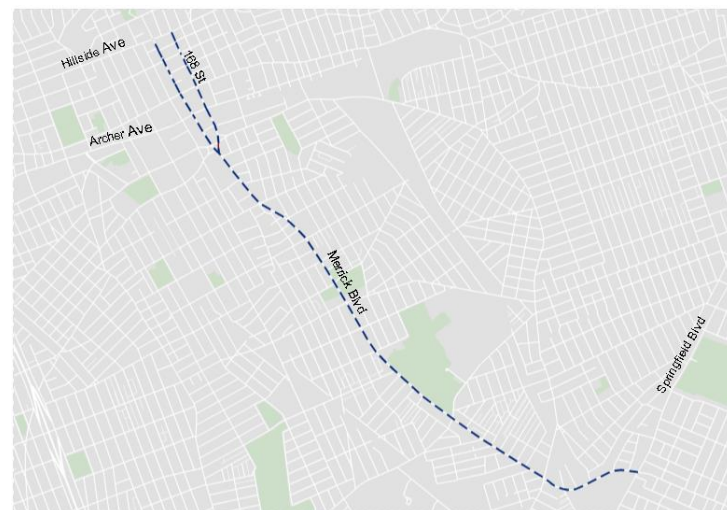
# Merrick Blvd/168 St Transit Improvements

As part of the Better Buses Restart, DOT is proposing offset bus lanes along Merrick Blvd and 168 St from Downtown Jamaica to Springfield Gardens.

A Community Advisory Board is currently being formed and will meet regularly.

## Corridor Background:

- 7 bus routes along Merrick Blvd Corridor including NICE bus
- 55,000 daily riders with existing bus speeds of **5.5 to 8.2** MPH (PM)
- Dozens of bus routes on both streets in the core of downtown Jamaica
- Wide commercial street with generally 2 lanes and parking in each direction





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## Summary and Next Steps

# 3

# Summary

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- Downtown Jamaica is the busiest bus hub in the city and delays in the area can have negative impacts throughout the Queens bus network
- Buses on Jamaica Ave are often delayed by trucks making deliveries and placard parking
- Bus riders on Archer Ave are often blocked by commuter vans and face sidewalk congestion near bus stops
- Jamaica Ave, Archer Ave, and Merrick Blvd all have their own unique issues that impact bus service, which require different, but holistic solutions along each corridor

# Next Steps

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- Project scoping and design underway
  - Analysis of traffic data, traffic circulation
- Additional meetings with stakeholders
- Implementation this summer
- Ongoing outreach and monitoring
  - Expedited implementation must be paired with continuous engagement and feedback
  - Community Advisory Board will be convened to relay project outcomes and community concerns on a rolling basis

# Thank You!

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## Questions?



NYC DOT



NYC DOT



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