Improving Transit in Southeast Queens
Upgrading Public Transportation in One of New York City’s Most Isolated Areas

Thomas Dorante
Fordham University
April 28, 2016
Introduction

In the years of 1929 and 1939, the New York City Board of Transportation (predecessor to the New York City Transit Authority) released major expansion plans for the city’s young subway system. The ambitious plans, now collectively referred to as the IND Second System, proposed to construct numerous new subway lines and extensions of lines already built or then-under construction, stretching through all five boroughs to the city limits. In 1940, the city’s three transit companies (the Interborough Rapid Transit Corporation or IRT, the Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit Corporation or BMT, and the city-owned Independent Subway System or IND) were brought under collective municipal operation, unifying the subway and elevated rail networks, the depleted streetcar system, and the growing omnibus network created to replace the trolley lines. Unification was anticipated to streamline the construction of the new rapid transit lines, which would then lead to development booms in many distant neighborhoods, particularly in the outer boroughs. Most of the Second System routes, however, went unbuilt, derailed by the Great Depression and World War II. The next major plan, the Program for Action in 1968, was largely shelved due to the 1970s fiscal crisis, constructing only two short subway segments and several unused tunnels for the Second Avenue Subway in a span of over thirty years.

Fast-forward to 2016 and the environment for transportation expansion has largely changed. Most of the subway system was completed by the 1950s, built when neighborhoods were sparsely inhabited, and construction was not hindered by safety concerns, labor rights, and disturbances to existing infrastructure, or by NIMBYism and other forms of community opposition. Today, however, nearly every part of the city is developed or otherwise-protected
from future development. Underground construction is much slower and more expensive, necessitating tunnel boring machines to create caverns deep below the city. Resources for new rail construction are severely limited and have been concentrated towards Manhattan, bolstering areas that have relatively adequate transit access.

Meanwhile, the failures of the 20th Century subway expansion plans have left several areas of New York isolated from the rapid transit network and, therefore, isolated from the rest of the city. Some of these areas, such as those in eastern and northern Queens, have developed in such a way that direct subway service is no longer a necessity. Residents of these more affluent and suburban neighborhoods utilize cars, local and limited-stop bus service, along with frequent express bus service to Manhattan, and commuter rail service (the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad). Still, many other outer neighborhoods retain the need for affordable and high-capacity transit service. Bus lines in these neighborhoods are crowded and overworked, attempting to do the job of the subway lines that were never built. Express bus service in these areas is often unreliable, only operating in one peak direction during weekday rush hours (to Manhattan AM; from Manhattan PM) with less than 10 daily trips. Express buses and commuter rail, meanwhile, are not an economically viable option for many residents of these areas.

To improve transit service in areas outside of Manhattan, the MTA and NYCDOT have focused on their Select Bus Service (SBS) program, a bus rapid transit (BRT) service that attempts to weave aspects of rapid transit and light rail into existing bus service. Currently nine bus corridors across the city have been upgraded to SBS, with at least one in every borough. While travel times and reliability have improved along these lines, access to the rest of the city from these neighborhoods is still inadequate, as many of these lines only travel within a single
Dorante 3

borough in order to feed into subway service. SBS routes, like so many other transit proposals, are also subject to opposition from local communities; in this case, fears of traffic congestion and loss of parking space due to the addition of dedicated bus-only lanes. In addition, because SBS is as much a DOT traffic-flow improvement project as it is a transit access program, heavy-use outer borough corridors have to compete with Manhattan’s notoriously slow crosstown buses for priority in the conversion que. These routes typically have lower ridership, and often parallel subway lines. The planned conversion of the B46 route along Utica Avenue in Brooklyn, for example, was delayed in 2015 and has yet to begin operation, while the M86 86th Street Crosstown bus was upgraded during that time. The B46 served over 15 million riders in 2014, in areas without direct subway access; the M86 served around half that amount.¹

This paper will be a case study on Southeast Queens, one of the most isolated areas in the city in terms of transit access. The first portion of the paper will be an overview of New York City’s transit system in order to give context to the case study findings and solutions. It will begin with a short history of proposed subway expansion periods. It will then outline the city’s bus network, including nuances and flaws in operation. It will conclude with an analysis of Select Bus Service (SBS), the MTA’s version of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). The second portion of the paper will outline transit options currently available in Southeast Queens, including the limited rail access concentrated in Downtown Jamaica, the extensive but flawed local bus network that feeds into Downtown Jamaica, and the substandard express bus service in the area. Local bus service will focus on two corridors that run through the core of Southeast Queens: Merrick Boulevard, and Brewer Boulevard. The final section of the papers will put forward

¹“Annual Bus Ridership”, mta.info.
solutions to upgrade transit in the area, including completing a planned subway line first proposed under the Program for Action, instituting a SBS route along Merrick Boulevard that was cancelled ten years ago, and making several route and service changes to existing bus routes in the area.
Transit in New York City
**Why the train stops “here”?**

The New York City Subway system, operated by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)’s New York City Transit division, is an impressive network of underground, surface, and elevated rapid transit service. The busiest in the world in terms of ridership, it is also one of the largest and most expansive in the world, and stretches to the outer limits of four of the five boroughs of New York City. When combined with its sister Staten Island Railway, New York’s rapid transit system extends to the westernmost extent of the city (Arthur Kill between Staten Island and New Jersey), the northernmost extent of the city (the Bronx borders with Yonkers and Mount Vernon in Westchester County), the southernmost extents of the city (the Atlantic Ocean coasts of Brooklyn and the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens), and one of the easternmost points of the city (the Far Rockaway border with the Nassau County neighborhoods of Inwood and Lawrence).

However, when looking at a map of the subway network (not the geographically inaccurate one provided by the MTA), there are a number of blatant pockets of the city not reached by the system. While most trunk subway lines extend as geographically far as possible, there are several lines that seem to just stop, miles from their logical termini. One example is the IRT Nostrand Avenue subway in Brooklyn (the 2 and 5 trains), which ends in Midwood near Brooklyn College at the intersection of Flatbush and Nostrand Avenues. The line neither continues down Nostrand to Sheepshead Bay, nor turns down Flatbush to the Kings Plaza shopping center. The Flatbush Avenue station, meanwhile, was clearly not designed to be a

---

2 Officially the New York City Transit Authority (NYCTA).
3 “Subways”, Metropolitan Transportation Authority.
terminal station, with two side platforms⁴ that force passengers to scramble if their desired train is not at the track in front of them.⁵ There is also the IND Queens Boulevard subway, which is the only line in the system to end at a four-track express station, located at 179th Street under Hillside Avenue in Jamaica, Queens. This station has an enormous mezzanine⁶ area above the platforms – accommodating transfer options that do not exist – and two levels of tail tracks which extend six blocks east of the station and are currently used for train storage.⁷ Hillside Avenue meanwhile continues within Queens to 268th Street.

The setup of the two aforementioned stations in not a coincidence; both stops were initially planned to be temporary terminals, until the logical extensions of their subway lines to the outer reaches of the city were completed. These and other extensions were proposed under several major extension plans put forward during the 20th Century, particularly the Dual Contracts of the 1910s, the IND Second System of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, and the Program for Action of the 1960s and 1970s. Most of these plans were derailed by lack of financing, and the rest due to political deadlock.⁸ The failure of these expansion plans has left several residential areas of the city – particularly in Queens and Brooklyn – isolated from adequate transit service, while numerous commercial centers and both of New York City’s airports are also without direct subway service. The aforementioned Staten Island Railway is orphaned, requiring transfer to the

---

⁴ Side platforms only serve individual directions of service, as opposed to island platforms which accommodate two directions of service. The side platforms at Flatbush Av station are connected at the south end in a “U” pattern.
⁵ “Metropolitan Transportation – a Program for Action: Report to Nelson A. Rockefeller, Governor of New York,” (Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Authority, February 1968), pg. 22.
⁶ “Mezzanine” refers to the concourse or station house area of a station, where passengers pay their fare and can transfer between directions of service.
Staten Island Ferry to Lower Manhattan, local buses\textsuperscript{9}\textsuperscript{d} traveling to nearby Brooklyn, or express buses\textsuperscript{10}\textsuperscript{e} running through Brooklyn or New Jersey to Manhattan.

\textit{The Dual Contracts}

Prior to the opening of the initial underground rapid transit lines known as the first “subways”, in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} Century rail service in New York City was provided by steel-framed elevated railroads or “Els”, and numerous surface railroads. Four Els ran north-to-south through Manhattan, while several Els and surface railroads crossed the city of Brooklyn and its outer districts. Several of the surface railroads in Queens and Brooklyn would eventually come under control of the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), which was chartered in 1834 and would later be owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR). The Els, originally operated as independent entities, would also be merged into the folds of two competing companies: the Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT) based primarily in Manhattan, and the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company (BRT) based in Brooklyn. The BRT would also come into control of several surface railroads not owned by the LIRR.\textsuperscript{11}

What we now call the “first subway” was opened on October 27, 1904 by the IRT, owned by Belmont Park-namesake August Belmont. This unusual line consisted of a through service running on the upper half of the IRT Broadway Line (then the IRT West Side Line) and the lower half of the IRT Lexington Avenue Line under Park Avenue (the East Side Line),

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{9}“Local bus” is the collective term for standard-fare local, limited-stop, and Select Bus Service, typically operating intra-borough.  
\textsuperscript{10}“Express bus” refers to premium-fare service from the outer boroughs or Upper Manhattan, to Midtown or Lower Manhattan.  
\textsuperscript{11}The Wheels That Drove New York, pg. 53-61, 89-136; “MTA Long Island Rail Road: Honoring 175 Years of Service,” (MTA, 2009); “MTA Twenty-Year Capital Needs Assessment: 2015-2034,” (MTA Capital Program, October 2013), pg. 13.}
connected by what is today’s 42nd Street Shuttle line. The IRT Lenox Avenue line in central Harlem, which contained the IRT’s first repair shops and its primary storage yard, was opened the next month.\textsuperscript{12} The BRT (which would become the Brooklyn Manhattan Transit Corporation or BMT in 1923) inaugurated its first subway on September 16, 1908. It consisted of only one station in the Lower East Side, adjacent to the old Essex Street Trolley Terminal, with service from one of the BRT’s primary elevated railroads – today’s BMT Jamaica Line along Broadway in Brooklyn – connected via the Williamsburg Bridge.\textsuperscript{13} The IRT and BMT were built to different specifications, the BMT using wider and longer train cars.\textsuperscript{14}

In 1913, the IRT and BMT signed what are now known as the “Dual Contracts”, the first major subway expansion program in the system’s short existence. Contracts were signed with the city’s Public Service Commission – Contract 3 by the IRT and Contract 4 by the BRT – to construct new underground and elevated lines and complete rail projects already under construction. As part of the deal, the city would assist with the construction of the new lines, with the provision that any lines built under the Dual Contracts could be “recaptured” and put into operations under a municipally-owned subway system. Under the Dual Contracts period, which lasted until the mid-1920s, many of the major subway lines in operation today were constructed. The logical extensions of the IRT’s Manhattan trunk lines – the West Side Line south to South Ferry, and the East Side line north to East Harlem and the South Bronx – were


\textsuperscript{13} “Mayor Runs a Train Over New Bridge,” (The New York Times, 17 September 1908).

\textsuperscript{14} Raskin, The Routes Not Taken; The Wheels That Drove New York, pg. 237, 381, 386.
completed, as well as the IRT’s entire Brooklyn division. Several new elevated lines were constructed in the Bronx, connected to the west side and east side IRT subways. The BRT’s three major trunk lines – the BMT Broadway Line between Midtown and Whitehall Street/South Ferry, the Nassau/Centre Street line south from Essex Street to Chambers Street near City Hall, and the Fourth Avenue Subway along the west side of Brooklyn – were constructed, as were connections between the Fourth Avenue Line and the two Manhattan lines via the Manhattan Bridge and Montauge Street Tunnel. Several BRT-owned surface railroads were converted into elevateds or “open-cut” lines and connected to the Fourth Avenue Subway. These former surface railroads – the West End, Sea Beach, Culver, and Brighton lines – were also funneled into the reconstructed West End Terminal (today’s Stillwell Avenue terminal) at the resorts and amusement area of Coney Island. The Dual Contracts also built the first rapid transit lines in Queens, including the Astoria and Queensboro lines (the latter today’s IRT Flushing Line) connected by the massive Queensboro Plaza terminal in Long Island City, and an extension of the BMT Jamaica El along Jamaica Avenue east into Richmond Hill and the downtown Jamaica business district.\textsuperscript{15}

In spite of its success, the Dual Contracts also displayed some of the first failures in subway construction plans. The biggest of these failures were two planned connections to the Staten Island Railway from the BMT Fourth Avenue Line in Brooklyn. One of the connections – known now as the “Staten Island Tunnel” – actually began construction in 1921, with tunneling...
shafts sunk in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and underneath the St. George rail and ferry terminal in Staten Island, and around 150 feet of tunneling work completed. However the project would be abandoned in 1925, attributed to lack of funding, and the insistence of then-Mayor John Hylan to build the tunnel for joint subway and freight service. The plans for freight service had been prohibited via New York State legislation under Governor Al Smith, allegedly leading Hylan to abandon the once lucrative project.\textsuperscript{16} The Dual Contracts projects such as the Fourth Avenue Subway would be built with infrastructure provisions for future extensions such as the Staten Island Tunnel. In subway tunnels, these consisted primarily of tunnel widenings and turnouts – often referred to as “bellmouths” – to ease future construction without disrupting existing service. Several Els such as the BMT Jamaica Line were built with extra trackways to add express tracks in the event that service increases would justify new express service. The Fourth Avenue Subway south of 59th Street was built on the west side of Fourth Avenue for this same reason, with two additional tracks planned to be added on the east side of the street, lining up with the four tracks on the rest of the line.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{IND Second System}

Mayor John Francis Hylan, nicknamed “Red Mike”, has the unique distinction of being both a major proponent of and a stubborn roadblock in the expansion of rapid transit in New York City.
York City. As the story goes, Hylan was a motorman for the then-BRT elevated system while working through law school, but was fired in 1897 after nearly running over a supervisor. Following this, Hylan allegedly held a grudge against the BRT and later BMT as well as the IRT. Under his two-term mayoralty from 1918 to 1925, he led several efforts to cripple the companies into bankruptcy and block further expansion of the private systems beyond the Dual Contracts. This included the stoppage of the Staten Island Tunnel, and the maintenance of the five-cent fare imposed on the companies, which was believed to be too low for efficient and profitable operations.  

Hylan also had a vision for expanding transit in the city, via a municipally-owned system that would compete with the private companies. He first pushed for the creation of a city Board of Transportation (predecessor to today’s New York City Transit Authority, which is now part of the MTA), which would operate outside of the State’s jurisdiction. He then released plans for a city-operated subway system. Hylan’s subway system, revealed over his mayoralty from 1922 to 1925, would have its first groundbreaking on August 3, 1923, but would be completed under his successor, fellow Tammany Hall Democrat Jimmy Walker. The city-owned system would use the ironic moniker “Independent Subway System”, abbreviated today as IND. By no coincidence, several Independent Subway lines were placed in areas where they would be in direct competition with private operations. The IND Eighth Avenue Line for example, considered the core line of the IND, runs for its entire length one block away from the IRT West Side Line. The IND Concourse Line meanwhile, the only original IND line in the Bronx, was

---

placed in close proximity to the IRT’s Jerome Avenue El (today’s 4 train) in western Bronx.\textsuperscript{20} By December 1940, most of the IND system had been completed, including the Eighth Avenue and Concourse Lines, the Sixth Avenue Line, the Brooklyn-Queens Crosstown Line (the G train), and most of the Queens Boulevard and Fulton Street Lines.\textsuperscript{21}

On August 23, 1929, the Board of Transportation released a massive plan for expansion of rapid transit lines in the city. This and several other plans over the 1930s and 1940s are now referred to as the “IND Second System”. The second major release of Second System plans occurred on July 5, 1939. Most of the second system lines would be new city-operated routes, or extensions of IND “first system” lines then-under construction, the crown jewel of which was a massive new subway line under Second Avenue extending to the Bronx and Brooklyn. Several of these extensions would involve the recapture of existing IRT and BMT elevated lines, including the Culver Line to Coney Island and Fulton Street El to Queens, as well as commuter railroads including the Rockaway Beach and Montauk Divisions of the Long Island Rail Road. Projects such as the Second Avenue Subway and the Fulton Street subway would replace private elevated lines; the Second Avenue line would replace IRT Els above Second and Third Avenues. Other IND extensions would takeover projects previously proposed for the private operators, such as the long-delayed Utica Avenue subway in Brooklyn, and the partially built Staten Island Tunnel. For these reasons, the IND had been built to the wider BMT subway specifications, similar to LIRR and Staten Island Railway standards, to ease these system mergers. In spite of the clear focus on the IND, a number of extensions of IRT and BMT lines were also proposed under the plan, including the IRT Nostrand Avenue Line extension to Sheepshead Bay. The

\textsuperscript{20} Raskin, \textit{The Routes Not Taken}.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{The Wheels That Drove New York}, pg. 199-222
Second System would have brought robust rapid transit facilities to areas then-without subway service, such as Northeast Bronx and the Rockaway Peninsula, and areas that today remain without rapid transit, including much of Northern, Central, and Southeast Queens, Southeast Brooklyn, Southeast Bronx, and Staten Island. 

The IND Second System was perhaps the city’s most ambitious subway expansion plan to date, but it was also the least successful. The 1929 plan was a victim of that year’s Stock Market Crash and the Great Depression; most of the original IND lines were barely completed in the 1930s using federal public works funds. Just after the 1939 Second System release, in June 1940 the city would purchase the IRT and BMT systems – successfully run out of business by the city-imposed fare prices – placing all three rapid transit systems under municipal operations; this event is referred to as “unification” of the New York City Subway. Unification was anticipated to expedite the construction of the new extensions and the integration of the three systems. As part of the unification process, two of the three remaining IRT elevated lines above Second and Ninth Avenues were closed that month; the El above Sixth Avenue had already been demolished at that point. The Manhattan portion of the Third Avenue El would be removed in 1955, leaving only its Bronx segment in service. The elimination of the Els was undertaken in

---


23 Raskin, *The Routes Not Taken*.

order to facilitate development in Manhattan, with the soon-to-be-opened Sixth Avenue IND line and the planned Second Avenue line set to replace them.\textsuperscript{25} The final nail in the coffin of the Second System, however, was the onset of World War II and the lack of supplies and manpower that would continue into the next decade. Portions of the IND Queens Boulevard and Fulton Street Lines were delayed until 1950. The only real progress of the Second System was the recapture of the BMT Culver El for service from the IND South Brooklyn Line to Coney Island, and the capture of the eastern Fulton El and the LIRR Rockaway Beach Branch for a connection with the IND Fulton Subway; both were completed in the 1950s after the death of the Second System.\textsuperscript{26}

Because of the ambitious vision and ultimate failure of the city plans, the IND is littered with provisions and infrastructure for extensions never built, including bellmouths, tunnel extensions outside of revenue operations, extra levels of tunnel, and several stations overbuilt due to planned extensions. Station shells for Second System routes were built at several locations adjacent to existing stations, including Second Avenue/Houston Street and East Broadway/Essex Street on the Lower East Side, the Broadway station of the Crosstown Line (to have been called South Fourth Street) in Williamsburg, and the Utica Avenue/Fulton Street station in Brooklyn. An entire station on the Fulton Street Line – Court Street in Downtown Brooklyn – was put into operation before being closed a decade later due to lack of service; it would have connected to the Second Avenue Subway in Lower Manhattan, and is now the New York Transit Museum.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{26} Raskin, \textit{The Routes Not Taken}.
\textsuperscript{27} Raskin, \textit{The Routes Not Taken}; “Complete Text of TA’s Queens Subway Plan”; “Finds Many Unused Subway Tunnels Under City Streets”; Randy Kennedy, “TUNNEL VISION; Next Stop, ‘Twilight Zone’ (a k a 76th St. Station),” (\textit{The New York Times}, 21 January 2003); Douglas Martin, “Subway Planners’ Loft Ambitions Are
Program for Action

In spite of unification of the subway system, the first actual integration of the three system’s operations would not occur until 1955, when the BMT’s 60th Street tunnel under the East River was connected to the IND Queens Boulevard subway in Long Island City, allowing service from Queens Boulevard to the BMT Broadway Line (today provided by the R train). The next major integration of BMT and IND infrastructure was the “Chrystie Street Connection”, opened from 1967 to 1968. The project, built as a precursor to yet another attempt at completing the Second Avenue Subway, added two major BMT-IND connections underneath Chrystie Street in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The most important link was between the IND Sixth Avenue express tracks, and the BMT Southern Division (the Fourth Avenue Subway and the Coney Island-bound Brooklyn lines), via the Manhattan Bridge. This allowed the B and D trains of the IND to travel to Coney Island via the West End and Brighton Lines respectively; the routes have since been switched. The project also added a connection between the Sixth Avenue local tracks and the BMT Jamaica Line, now used by the M train. A new Midtown terminal would be constructed for the Sixth Avenue line at 57th Street, and a new station for the B and D routes at Grand Street. The projects of the Chrystie Street Connection would serve as the first step in the final major subway expansion plan in New York City history.

---


In February 1968, the Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Authority (which would become the MTA later that year) submitted a report to New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller entitled “Metropolitan Transportation – a Program for Action”, the successor to several preliminary proposals going back to 1963. The massive plan, also known as the “New Routes” program, proposed a downsized Second Avenue Subway project (two tracks instead of up to six planned under the Second System), along with numerous lines in areas of Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx that were either underserved by transit or poised to experience economic or residential booms. As was done under the IND Second System, old and dilapidated elevated lines were to be torn down in major business districts, primarily the remaining Bronx spur of the IRT Third Avenue El through the Hub and Fordham Plaza, and the eastern end of the BMT Jamaica Line in Downtown Jamaica, Queens. The Els had been scapegoated for the blight and economic decline in these neighborhoods, though the city never owned up for allowing the railroads to decline into their decrepit state. The Program for Action, unlike its predecessors, was a regional transit plan as much as it was a subway expansion proposal. It sought to expand the facilities of the LIRR and Metro-North commuter railroads, including a new Midtown terminal for the LIRR at 34th Street, and a commuter rail link between the new rail terminal and John F. Kennedy Airport. It also planned several regional airports located in suburban Long Island and upstate New York. The total cost of the plan was estimated to be $2.9 billion.³⁰

Much like the Second System, however, the Program for Action was a victim of financial turmoil in the city. This time, the mid-1970s Fiscal Crisis was the culprit, instigating the darkest era in the subway system’s history, with high crime along with poor equipment maintenance leading to abundant graffiti and vandalism. Nearly all the subway and rail lines proposed under the New Routes program were abandoned prior to construction.\textsuperscript{31} The Third Avenue and Jamaica Avenue Els, meanwhile, were torn down, with no subway to replace the Bronx line. Service on Third Avenue was instead replaced by a bus line – the Bx55 – which was eliminated in 2013.\textsuperscript{32} Several tunnel sections of the Second Avenue Subway were completed only to be abandoned in 1975; only a few of them will be used in the contemporary project.\textsuperscript{33} The only two lines completed under the Program for Action were the Archer Avenue Subway in Jamaica, Queens, which partially replaced the Jamaica El, and the upper subway level of the 63rd Street tunnel and subway line between western Queens and Midtown Manhattan. The two short spurs were to be integral parts of several planned extensions. The 63rd Street Line – in addition to the Sixth Avenue F train connection used today – was built to facilitate service for the Second Avenue Subway, with a planned spur from the BMT Broadway Line going north (to be used by the Q train in the modern project), and service from Queens going south to Midtown and Lower Manhattan;\textsuperscript{34} a link of this kind had been proposed since the IND Second System.\textsuperscript{35}


\textsuperscript{32} “A Sentimental Journey on the BMT…”; “City Plans to Raze 3d Ave. El in Bronx”; “3d Avenue El Closes Saturday; Fleet of 60 Buses to Replace It,” (*The New York Times*, 22 April 1973); “+selectbusservice; Bx41 on Webster Avenue; Progress Report,” (*MTA, NYCDOT*, 25 August 2014), pg. 10.


\textsuperscript{34} “Program for Action,” pg. 19-21, 29-32; “Complete Text of TA’s Queens Subway Plan”; “Shortage of U.S. Funds May Delay Subway Link”.

\textsuperscript{35} Both the 63rd...
Street and Archer Avenue projects were part of a joint plan to increase service and capacity on the IND Queens Boulevard Line. Although most of the money left in the New Routes program was now funneled into the two lines, the projects suffered several setbacks due to the fiscal crisis, as well as construction flaws and supply delays. The two lines opened in 1988 and 1989 respectively, twenty years after the proposal and at least ten years behind schedule. The 63rd Street Line abruptly stopped at the Queensbridge Houses in Long Island City, further solidifying the nickname stamped on it since its proposal, the “tunnel to nowhere”. The final project under the program, a short 1,500 foot connector between the 63rd Street Line and the Queens Boulevard Line to pipe F trains into the tunnel, was completed in 2001.

In spite of the minimal progress accomplished during that time, the Program for Action did display the new obstacles of subway construction post-World War II. At this point the city had already been significantly built up in nearly all the areas where new subway lines were proposed. For the subway segments that were completed, deep tunnels had to be excavated in order to avoid disturbing existing structures, some of which had to be underpinned. This is contrary to early subway construction that took place in relatively undeveloped areas, in which the street would simply be dug up and crudely covered in plywood in order to build a subway

tunnel ten-to-thirty feet below ground level; this process is typically referred to as “cut-and-cover”. The new tunnels and stations were much deeper, making construction more expensive and time consuming. This necessitated blasting and mining techniques previously used only for stations near river tunnels or located underneath the varying topography in Upper Manhattan. This period also introduced tunneling machines to New York City subway construction. Systems of escalators and elevators, meanwhile, had to be installed in stations to shuttle passengers from the surface to platform level.40

Rail service projects in the 21st Century

Since the demise of the Program for Action, most of the rail construction in New York City has been concentrated towards two areas: lines feeding into Midtown Manhattan, and new rail lines to better serve JFK and LaGuardia Airport. The most notable of these projects are the LIRR East Side Access (using the dormant lower level of the 63rd Street tunnel built in the 1980s), AirTrain JFK and the planned AirTrain LaGuardia, and the latest push to complete the Second Avenue Subway. These lines are the successors to Program for Action proposals, and were largely put forward by the Regional Planning Association in their 1999 “MetroLink” proposal.41 The other notable project, the Hudson Yards extension of the 7 line, emerged under several major development plans for the West Side and the Javits Center,42 but thus far ridership

to the new station at West 34th Street is low and well-below the MTA’s exaggerated predictions of 32,000 riders a day.\textsuperscript{43}

The focus of the MTA on the Second Avenue and Hudson Yards projects as opposed to potential outer borough subway projects displays, among other things, contrary definitions of transit accessibility. The rationale behind both projects is that they serve areas (the far East Side and far West Side of Manhattan respectively) that are distanced from “excellent rapid transit access”, with the east side only served by the overcrowded IRT Lexington Avenue Subway, and the west side by the IRT West Side and IND Eight Avenue Lines which are several blocks from the Hudson Yards site. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Hudson Yards extension describes the distance to the preexisting subway lines as “beyond a 10-minute walk” and therefore inadequate.\textsuperscript{44} These projects along with LIRR East Side Access and the purely-aesthetic Fulton Center project also display a focus by the MTA on improving transit opportunities for economic development areas in Manhattan, and for white-collar workers who work in Manhattan and live outside of New York City, but not for the working and middle-class residents of the city.\textsuperscript{45}

In addition to blasting and mining, the new projects have extensively utilized tunnel boring machines (TBMs), essentially giant drills with numerous smaller cutting wheels on the rotary head. These machines allow tunnels to be dug either through solid rock or frozen soil and

\textsuperscript{43} Rebecca Harshbarger, “Fewer than 6,000 riders daily are using new $2.4 billion subway station,” \textit{(AMNY}, 26 October 2013).

\textsuperscript{44} “Metrolink,” pg. 7; “No. 7 Subway Extension: Executive Summary,” pg. 4-6, 14-15; “No. 7 Subway Extension: Chapter 1: Project Purpose and Need,” \textit{(NYCDCP}, 30 August 2004), pg. 8-9; “Second Avenue Subway FEIS: Executive Summary,” \textit{(MTA}, 2004), pg. S-4;

immediately reinforced by pre-cast concrete sections, deep underneath the city to avoid buildings and existing utilities, and only necessitating minimal disruption of streets. With TBMIs, the only required sites for cut-and-cover construction are at the launch box (where the machine parts are placed and assembled), and at the sites of stations. The process, however, is very slow and very expensive compared to shallow-tunnel construction.\textsuperscript{46} For these reasons, as well as financial mismanagement by the city, state, and MTA, new rail construction in New York City costs more than in any other city in the world, at $1.5 billion or more per-kilometer. The East Side Access project is astronomically expensive, at over $5 billion per-kilometer. Meanwhile, projects in other cities cost less than $500 million per kilometer, with rail lines in Italy and South Korea costing only around $100 million per kilometer.\textsuperscript{47}

Meanwhile, besides the small-scale AirTrain projects, little attention has been paid to potential new rail lines in the outer boroughs, which contain not only most of the city’s residents, but an increasing portion of the city’s job base including many of the blue-collar job centers. Residents in the outer boroughs suffer from long trips on subway lines, compounded by additional trips on buses to feed into the subway; a ten-minute walk to the subway would be a godsend for these neighborhoods. The lack of focus on the outer boroughs is in spite of several existing railroad rights-of-way (ROWs), either active and underused or inactive, that could be


\textsuperscript{47} “Williamsburg Could Really Use That South 4th Subway Line Now”; John Ricco, “If we lowered transit construction costs, we could build more transit,” (Greater Greater Washington, 5 January 2016); Dana Rubinstein, “Where the transit-build costs are unbelievable,” (Politico New York, 31 March 2015).
inexpensively converted into subway lines. The only outer borough subway plan currently proposed by city agencies or officials is Mayor Bill de Blasio’s surprise proposal for an extension of the IRT’s 3 and 4 services along Utica Avenue in Brooklyn. The Utica Avenue line is one of the most famous unbuilt subway lines (perhaps second to only the Second Avenue Subway), with the MTA budgeting money for preliminary engineering work in their 2015-2019 Capital Program. The cynic in me, however, sees this plan fading away from memory like the numerous other Utica lines over the past century.

---


A low-floor bus on the Q65 route in Queens, originally a streetcar line and later a privately-operated bus route until MTA takeover in 2005.

**Overview of Bus Service**

As is the case with Staten Island’s transit network, the gaps left in the rapid transit network are typically filled by MTA’s bus system, the descendent of the city’s once-expansive streetcar network. The MTA currently operates surface transit under a division called MTA Regional Bus Operations. The majority of the routes are labeled “New York City Bus,” which stands for the New York City Transit Authority (NYCTA or NYCT) division that also operates the subway. The NYCT brand consists of routes that have been city-operated since at least the mid-1960s; routes that either began under city operation or were absorbed into municipal operations after their private companies folded circa World War II. The routes includes many former streetcar lines in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn, operated by the BMT and the Third Avenue Railway; an entire subsidiary known as the MaBSTOA was created to absorb former streetcar lines turned bus routes including those of Third Avenue in the Bronx and
Manhattan, which still exists under the NYCT brand.\textsuperscript{50} Most NYCT routes in Queens, on the other hand, are the successor to the North Shore Bus Company which once operated nearly all the bus lines in Northeast and Southeast Queens, but in 1947 was the only private company in the borough to fall into the city’s hands.\textsuperscript{51}

The second brand is known as the “MTA Bus Company” or “MTA Bus”, created as a result of the most recent takeover of private operators in the mid-2000s. These companies – predominantly in Queens with two companies serving the Bronx and one based in Brooklyn – were those that survived the city-mandated fare limits and thus were not absorbed into municipal operations in the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century.\textsuperscript{52} In 1974, however, the companies began receiving subsidies from the state and the NYCDOT in order to stay afloat, which amounted to $150 million a year by the 2000s.\textsuperscript{53} The DOT also purchased buses for the companies, and constructed several depots used by private operators.\textsuperscript{54} Many of the companies meanwhile were chided by riders for poor equipment maintenance and breakdowns, and high wait times due to poor scheduling of buses or buses bypassing stops, with improvements contingent on the operators; in essence, the city and state wrote the companies a check while being left out of the management loop.\textsuperscript{55} For

\textsuperscript{50} From a Nickel to a Token; The Wheels That Drove New York, pg. 264-275; “B.M.T. LINES PASS TO CITY OWNERSHIP”; Kim Brown, “City To Pay $9.5 Million For Queens Surface Bus Lines,” (Queens Chronicle, 3 February 2005).
\textsuperscript{53} “Private Buses Pose Challenge For the M.T.A.”; “City To Pay $9.5 Million For Queens Surface Bus Lines”.
\textsuperscript{55} “Private Buses Pose Challenge For the M.T.A.”; “City To Pay $9.5 Million For Queens Surface Bus Lines”; “After delays MTA acquires private Jamaica Bus Lines”; Michael Finnegan, “City Wants to Extend Private Bus Contracts,” (Daily News, 3 January 2000);
comparison, similar problems are being seen on Nassau County’s Nassau Inter-County Express (NICE bus) system, which was transferred from the MTA to a private operator in 2012 after county executives refused to increase subsidies of the system. As opposed to companies bidding on routes as is done in other bus systems, the private operators in New York City had essentially become monopolies, holding the same franchises since the 1930s, or in some cases since the routes were streetcar lines in the late 19th Century. This was in spite of interest from outside companies, and state regulations necessitating regular bid periods. In one case, four companies – Green Lines, Triboro Coach, Jamaica Buses, and Command Bus – were all owned and managed by the Cooper family who operated Green Lines since the 1930s. Following MTA takeover, buses well-past retirement age (12 years old) were replaced, and several service improvements occurred. This included the addition of limited-stop service on busy corridors, such as Woodhaven and Cross Bay Boulevards in Central Queens, which previously did not have such service.

Operations

MTA bus routes consist of two types of service. The most predominant is local bus service, which operates “open-door” (allowing drop offs and pickups along the entire route) within a single borough or within two adjacent boroughs. Within the local bus umbrella are

58 “Private Buses Pose Challenge For the M.T.A.”; “City Wants to Extend Private Bus Contracts”;
services labeled “Limited” and “Select Bus Service” (SBS); these routes (except for crosstown SBS routes in Manhattan) make intermittent stops or limited stops primarily at major streets, important commercial and transportation hubs, and transfer points with other major bus routes. Limited-stop service is usually implemented on routes with high ridership, or routes that cover long distances or serve multiple boroughs. Most limited-stop routes have a local service that supplements it. The second classification of service is the premium-fare express bus service, which operates between Midtown and Lower Manhattan and isolated neighborhoods in the outer boroughs. Several express bus routes previously ran between Midtown and Downtown Manhattan, and from Upper Manhattan, but were discontinued due to predictably-low ridership. Express bus routes do not offer open-door service along entire routes, instead picking up passengers at the beginning of a trip and dropping off at the end of a trip, with small overlap areas for routes that loop to and from Manhattan. For example, a QM1 running from Queens to Manhattan will only pick up passengers in Queens, and drop off passengers once in Manhattan. \(^{60}\)

Many bus routes, particularly routes with limited-stop service or Select Bus Service, employ “short-turn” service, in which some buses will serve only a portion of the route (typically the busiest part of the route), while others run the entire portion of the route. \(^ {61}\) For example, on the Bx9 route in the Bronx (which is fully local), during rush hours some buses from the route’s southern terminal at West Farms Square will short-turn at Fordham Plaza, Marble Hill–225th Street station, or Van Courtlandt Park–242nd Street station instead of traveling all the way to Riverdale. An example of a limited-stop route with short-turn service is the Q46 on Union

---

\(^{60}\) “Northeast Queens Bus Study,” (MTA, September 2015); “Take To The Street: Get On The Bus,” (Queens Tribune, 28 January 2016).

\(^{61}\) “Northeast Queens Bus Study.”
Turnpike in Queens. When limited-stop service operates, local Q46 buses run approximately half the route from Kew Gardens east to Springfield Boulevard, with limited-stop service running local east of Springfield to Glen Oaks or LIJ Hospital.

Numerous local bus routes and express bus routes can be considered shuttle routes, “enclave” routes, or “niche” routes, which only serve a small contingent of riders. Shuttle routes are typically short connectors between small isolated neighborhoods and the nearest subway or bus hub. The Bx24 and Bx29 in the Northeast Bronx, for example, shuttle passengers from the transit-isolated and low-density neighborhoods of Country Club and City Island respectively into the Pelham Bay Park hub to connect with the 6 train and other bus routes. Both routes serve less than 1 million annual riders, with the Bx24 serving just over 700 weekday riders in 2014. 62 The Q100 Limited in Western Queens, on the other hand, serves a specific niche of riders traveling to the Rikers Island city jail complex. 63 Shuttle and niche routes were once prominent in the system, but many have been eliminated over the years due to high operating costs outweighing ridership, with no service to replace them. This includes several routes in the Southeast Queens study area. Many of these routes were also poorly operated, some running as few as two daily trips. 65 Those routes that have survived were combined with longer routes, or were expanded to serve a larger contingent of passengers. The Q100 for example was previously the non-stop

Q101R, but had its stop pattern expanded to serve local residents of Astoria and Long Island City in addition to Rikers-bound passengers.66

**Flaws in Bus Service**

As an alumnus of my high school eloquently pointed out, the city bus system has “always been the stepchild of New York City’s mass transit system,” with greater focus put of the subway and commuter systems while the bus network is largely ignored.67 One of the major issues is that changes and improvements to bus routes or route extensions are rarely instituted, and have not been made throughout the bus system’s history. In March 2016, Staten Island Borough President James Oddo pointed out that the bus lines in his borough were nearly the same as those on a bus map from the 1960s.68 Oddo may not realize that many bus routes in the city have not changed since they were streetcar routes in the early 20th Century, with the exact same terminals and routings that may have been logical a hundred years ago, but no longer serve their purpose today. One example is the Q44 which operates along Main Street between Jamaica and Flushing, Queens before continuing into the Bronx. When the bus route was created in 1938, Main Street stopped at the Grand Central Parkway at its south end, requiring buses to traverse the narrow 150th Street towards Downtown Jamaica. It was only in 1999, when limited-stop service was implemented on the route, that the routing was changed to place the bus on wider commercial streets, including the extension of Main Street south to Queens Boulevard that had

66 “Northeast Queens Bus Study,” pg. 57; “MTA Bus Service Changes; Q100 and Q69 CUSTOMERS; EFFECTIVE SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2009,” (*MTA Bus Company*, 2009).
opened in 1954. That means that for over half a century, the Transit Authority did not care to study the service pattern for one of its most important bus routes until it absolutely had to.\footnote{“Harvey Sees New Bus Route As Spur to Queens Shopping,” (Long Island Daily Press, 23 March 1938); “Main Street Extension is a ‘Hot Potato’,” (Long Island Daily Press, 6 September 1938); “Queens Throughfare Extended,” (The New York Times, 24 November 1954); Donald Bertrand, “Rout of Bus Troubles Transit: Changes Hurt Some in Briarwood,” (Daily News, 12 August 1999).}

With the issues regarding bus service, the biggest problem is that there is never one right answer; fixing one problem inevitably leads to another problem, while satisfying the needs of one subset of customers can ignore or go against the interests of others.\footnote{“TCRP SYNTHESIS 110: Commonsense Approaches for Improving Transit Bus Speeds,” (TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD, TRANSIT COOPERATIVE RESEARCH PROGRAM, FTA, 2013), pg. 43.} For instance, since the early 2000s, the MTA has ceased ordering high-floor buses (the last model was ordered in 2005) and instead began purchasing low-floor buses. High-floor buses require passengers to walk up or down several steps to enter or leave the bus, and necessitate wheelchair lifts for disabled passengers. This slows down loading and unloading times, and is of particular inconvenience to elderly and handicapped passengers, who make up a large portion of bus ridership as subway service is very inconvenient for these individuals. The new low-floor buses, which as the name suggests are lower to the ground near curb level, eliminate the need for wheelchair lifts, and immediately sped up boarding times once they began service. One of the unintended consequences of the new low-floor buses, however, was the elimination of significant standing room space. With the passenger area now at the level of the buses’ chassis, the seating and standing arrangement had to be altered to accommodate the wheels and the engine of the bus. Only seats could be placed on top of the wheels, necessitating inconvenient seating layouts that significantly narrowed the walking and standing isles at these areas, fitting only one person at best. The placement of the engine at the rear of the bus meanwhile requires an upper level
“hump” in this area. Thus passengers in the front and middle of the bus are squeezed tighter than ever before, while standing riders are discouraged from climbing the several steps to the rear of the bus, further packing-in riders in the front.\footnote{“TCRP SYNTHESIS 110”, pg. 40; Pete Donohue, “MTA moves to buy 120 ‘low-floor’ buses that make boarding easier, speed up service,” (\textit{Daily News}, 19 September 2014); Tom Wrobleski, “Who needs a bus study? Just ask the riders (commentary),” (\textit{Staten Island Advance}, 22 March 2016); Sirley Secunda and Terri Cude, “M.T.A. really missed the bus with split M5 route,” (\textit{The Villager}, 14 April 2016).}

Another issue with no right answer is bus stop spacing. Because local buses typically serve residential communities, routes are often designed with closely-spaced stops; there was a time when buses and trolleys in the city would stop every block. However, NYCDOT guidelines dictate that stops should be placed every 750 feet; instead, on many routes they are placed every one or two blocks, which can severely slow down travel times. One instance is a stop at 147th Street along the Q46 route on Union Turnpike, which is only used by one or two passengers a trip, and is a mere block away from one of the busiest stops on the route at Main Street. Because of nuances like this, since the year 2000 the DOT (which assigns and maintains bus stops) and the MTA have begun to remove closely-spaced stops and consolidate them with busier stops along several routes; at the time, the DOT estimated that over 60% of stops were too close together, particularly on the former private routes now part of MTA Bus. The process has drawn controversy from residents of low-density neighborhoods particularly in Queens, who argue that longer stop spacing is inconvenient during severe and inclement weather. The enforcement of the spacing guidelines especially hurt seniors and handicapped passengers.\footnote{“MTA New York City Transit and MTA Bus Company System-wide Service Standards,” (\textit{MTA}); “Woodhaven / Cross Bay Boulevards Q52/53 Select Bus Service: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), (\textit{MTA, NYCDOT}, December 2015); Jim O’Grady, “NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT: NEW YORK UP CLOSE; The Case of the Disappearing Bus Stops . . .,” (\textit{The New York Times}, 27 February 2000); Sam Goldman, “MTA Bus Co. VP Defends Q60 Changes: Claims Service, Reliability Will Improve,” (\textit{Times Newsweekly}, 18 December 2008); Zach Braziller, “Bus stop removal hardship for seniors,” (\textit{Queens Courier}, 19 October 2006).}
Dorante 33

An older, high-floor New Flyer articulated bus on the M14D in Manhattan. Source: Own work (Tdorante10), via Wikimedia Commons.

**Articulated Buses**

“I hate short buses.” That was the sentiment voiced by a passenger of a crowded Bx15 Limited bus while waiting at “the Hub” commercial district in the Bronx to load passengers. “Short buses” was his term for the standard 40-foot buses found on most routes in the city and across the country. The Bx15 is one of the ten busiest routes in the city, running on Third and Willis Avenues in the Bronx (the former Third Avenue El route) from Fordham Plaza south through the Hub, then west across the congested 125th Street Crosstown corridor in Harlem. Among the issues and nuances observed on this particular midday trip – slow loading times, fare evasion, the bus traveling at a snail’s pace – the bus this Bx15 Limited was using was a standard-length bus, and not one of the 60-foot articulated buses normally assigned to the route and other high-use routes in the borough. The local Bx15 behind us, which only runs between Fordham Plaza and the Hub and does not enter Manhattan, was an articulated bus, a major flaw in dispatching.

---

Articulated buses, also referred to as double-buses, “bendy buses”, “stretch buses”, “accordion buses”, or simply "artics", are a relatively-new addition to the MTA bus fleet, entering service in the late 1990s in the Bronx and Manhattan. As mentioned above, the buses are approximately 60 feet in length, or the length of a single car of most IND and BMT subway trains. With their increased capacity (up to double a standard-length bus), the buses provide a more comfortable ride for passengers, and are ideal for bus rapid transit services such as Select Bus Service. Newer artics in the system are low-floor, with three boarding/alighting doors instead of just two. The MTA uses a formula when replacing standard buses on routes with articulated buses: every four standard-length trips will be replaced with three articulated runs during peak hours, with four articulated buses for every five standard runs at most off-peak times, and equal service during overnight hours. This means a slight decrease in bus frequency, but is offset by the increased capacity, in addition to lower operating costs with fewer drivers and buses on the road. The net increase in capacity is currently estimated to be between 10 and 15 percent by the MTA; it was previously measured as a 17 percent increase in 2002.

Articulated buses continue to be most prevalent in their pilot boroughs of the Bronx and Manhattan, where at least half of the bus fleet is articulated. The assignment of these buses, however, is not always consistent and logical. Typically, heavy-use routes (like the Bx15, Bx9,
and the M15, Bx12 and Bx41 which have SBS service) are designated with artics, but in practice standard-length buses will end up on these routes either as additional rush-hour supplements, or due to poor dispatching or bus allotment. This is seen with the Bx15, which runs out of a depot (West Farms) that dispatches both standard and articulated buses. Meanwhile, routes with significantly-lower ridership and frequency (such as the Bx22, M101, and Manhattan crosstown routes like the M23) are just as likely to receive artics as more important routes.

Outside of the Bronx and Manhattan, only three bus routes utilize 60-foot buses on a regular basis. These are the B44 SBS in Brooklyn (but not its local counterpart), the Q44 SBS running from Queens into the Bronx, and the Q10 local and limited services between Kew Gardens and JFK Airport in Queens; all three routes received their articulated buses around 2012. The Q10 is the only route from the MTA Bus Company to currently use articulated buses. The implementation of artics on the Q10 was controversial, with many local residents along the route opposing it due to loss of parking (with bus stops expanded to facilitate longer buses), and potential traffic delays. There are several routes in Brooklyn and Queens that also could benefit from the use of articulated buses, but thus far have not received them. The B46 along Utica Avenue, with 15 million riders a year, will also not receive 60-foot buses even as it is being upgraded to Select Bus Service this year.

---

77 “CB 9 articulates ire on articulated buses”; “MTA Bus Operations Committee Meeting: July 2012,” pg. 15-17; Domenick Rafter, “CB 9 still does not like Q10 artic buses,” (Queens Courier, 20 February 2014).
78 “Annual Bus Ridership”, mta.info.
Dollar Vans

“Dollar vans” are the popular nickname for privately-operated commuter vans that traverse outer borough neighborhoods particularly in Brooklyn and Queens. Referred to as a “shadow transit” or “shadow bus” system, the van network is analogous to the conventional car service cabs and green “Boro Cabs” in these areas of the city, except that the vans are designed to carry dozens of passengers each along existing city bus routes. In addition, only a fractional portion of the thousands of dollar vans are licensed by the Taxi and Limousine Commission. The vans emerged in mass amounts during a transit strike in April 1980, and have since grown in popularity with the continued perception and reality of poor bus service in the city. Dollar vans can travel faster than city buses, making fewer stops and using alternate routes while buses must stick to the streets dictated by their DOT franchises. The vans are also said to be more reliable and frequent than some bus lines, particularly during early morning hours just before the AM rush hour period, when passenger levels outpace bus frequency. The city has recently warmed up to the existence of the shadow network, allowing commuter vans to takeover certain eliminated bus routes following the June 2010 system-wide service cuts, an experiment which quickly failed. The MTA and local divisions of the Transit Workers Union of America (TWU) and Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) have, however, been historically at odds with dollar vans, for competing and interfering with union-operated MTA buses, and projecting a bad image (perhaps deservedly bad) onto the transit authority for its gaps in service. In addition, commuters, politicians, and the city are concerned over the aggressive driving by the van
operators, who will often make dangerous and illegal U-turns and cut-off other vans to pick up passengers.

---

Select Bus Service

With the lack of rail-based solutions for outer borough transit needs, the MTA and NYCDOT have turned to Select Bus Service (SBS) to fill these gaps. Created as the city’s first attempt at a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, and often erroneously referred to as “express bus service”, SBS is more of an upgraded and refined version of the city’s existing limited-stop and crosstown bus service. SBS, like other BRT systems, attempts to integrate elements of subway and light rail service – particularly wide spacing between stops, off-board payment, all-door boarding, and separate right-of-ways for transit – into existing bus routes. SBS however, utilizes these features at a much smaller scale than other BRT systems, such as those in major cities in Latin America and Asia, the successful BRT system in the otherwise transit-confused city of Los Angeles, and systems in smaller cities and suburban areas of Europe and North America.

The precursor to Select Bus Service was a city-wide Bus Rapid Transit study conducted by the city and state DOTs in 2004. The government study was in response to a private study conducted by Schaller Consulting for the Transportation Alternatives and Straphangers Campaign transit advocacy groups two years earlier. The private study declared New York City buses to be the slowest in the United States. The DOT study not only confirmed this fact, but

---

revealed that bus speeds had been declining since the mid-1990s, correlated with the plateauing of bus ridership while subway ridership continued to increase. Under the DOT study, 80 local and express bus corridors operated by the MTA and private operators were studied as potential BRT routes. By the end of 2004, five corridors (all NYCT operated, four of which featured limited-stop service) were isolated as pilot routes for what would later be called Select Bus Service: Fordham Road/Pelham Parkway (Bx12) in the Bronx and Upper Manhattan, First and Second Avenue (M15) in Manhattan, Merrick Boulevard (Q5) in Queens, Nostrand Avenue (B44) in Brooklyn, and Hylan Boulevard (S79) in Staten Island.  

The first SBS route, the Bx12, began service on June 29, 2008. All the remaining pilot corridors, with the exception of Merrick Boulevard, would become SBS routes by 2013, as would the M34 and M34A on 34th Street in Midtown Manhattan, and the Bx41 on Webster Avenue in the Bronx. These routes are considered to be the first phase of Select Bus Service. From 2008 to 2010, the MTA and DOT released a large list of potential corridors and target neighborhoods as part of Phase II of Select Bus Service, including the Bx41. Today nine corridors and ten individual bus routes operate Select Bus Service, with four additional corridors planned for implementation by 2017.

---


85 “Overlooked Boroughs: Technical Report,” pg. 39-42; “Introduction to BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II,” pg. ii, 2, 10, 12-13, 22-33; “Select Bus Service on the Bx12”; “BRT Makes its Overdue NYC Debut”; “Bus Rapid Transit and Development”; “+selectbusservice; Bx41 on Webster Avenue; Progress Report.”

86 “Introduction to BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II,” pg. ii, 2, 10, 12-13, 22-33; “BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II: Future Corridors,” (MTA, NYCDOT, 2010).

87 “B46 Select Bus Service Community Board 17 Public Hearing | April 4, 2016”.
**Route Selection**

Potential Select Bus Service routes under SBS Phase II are primarily divided into two categories: “Underserved Neighborhoods” located far from the nearest rail service, or “Difficult Trips” (trips that require numerous transfers between bus and subway service, and/or have slow and unpredictable travel times). Focus has also been placed on increasing and improving bus service to New York’s Airports, conducted under a supplemental study called “LaGuardia Airport Access Alternatives Analysis” in conjunction with the Port Authority. The LGA study spawned the M60 SBS, and a new connector route in Queens between Jackson Heights and LaGuardia called the Q70 Limited. The majority of SBS Phase II routes are located in underserved outer borough areas, acting as subway connectors, or providing intra-borough and inter-borough service along corridors once provisioned for subway service; these include the current Bx41 SBS along Webster Avenue in the portion of the South Bronx formerly served by the Third Avenue El, and the planned Woodhaven/Cross Bay Boulevards and Utica Avenue SBS routes. These routes either have limited-stop service or are prime candidates for limited-stop service, and thus can facilitate the subway-style stop spacing that Bus Rapid Transit brings.

Several SBS routes, however, are Manhattan crosstown routes such as the M34 and M34A SBS on 34th Street, the M60 SBS on 125th Street, and the M86 SBS on 86th Street. Two additional crosstown corridors (along 23rd Street and 14th Street) have been prioritized under SBS Phase II. Contrary to the spirit of BRT, the routes of the seventeen west-to-east bus corridors south of 145th Street have many frequent stops at every avenue (with the exception of the M60

---


89 “Introduction to BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II”; “BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II: Future Corridors”
SBS which operates limited-stop on 125th Street), acting as shuttles across the narrow island of Manhattan.\(^{90}\) In addition, crosstown buses have been known for notoriously-slow travel speeds, comically timed against pedestrians and rowboats; this is largely a product of Manhattan traffic and the frequent lights along Manhattan cross-streets.\(^{91}\) For this reason, the crosstown routes are categorized as “Difficult Trips”, or “trips on any transit mode or combination of transit modes that are longer than 30 minutes and slower than 8 miles per hour and circumferential and crosstown bus corridors with heavy ridership.”\(^{92}\) Under the original NYCBRT study, only one crosstown corridor (125th Street) was even included for evaluation, which indicates a change in BRT philosophy over the last decade.\(^{93}\)

In the spirit of Manhattan-centric transit planning, crosstown buses have jumped the que for conversion into SBS over more-ideal BRT corridors located in underserved areas with middle and/or working-class residents and sizable minority communities. One example is the implementation of SBS on the B46 in Southeast Brooklyn, and the M86 between the Upper West and Upper East Side. The B46 as mentioned above serves 15 million annual riders (or 46,000 daily riders), running along the Utica Avenue corridor that for over a century has been provisioned for a subway line yet to be built. The bus route serves as a major feeder from the isolated Southeast Brooklyn area into subway service, as well as a connector to the Kings Plaza Shopping Center.\(^{94}\) Yet in spite of this, the B46 SBS implementation was deferred from its

\(^{90}\) “Manhattan Bus Map,” (MTA, November 2015).


\(^{92}\) “Introduction to BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II,” pg. 16-17.


\(^{94}\) Raskin, The Routes Not Taken; “1929 IND Second System”; “1939 IND Second System”; “OUR GREAT SUBWAY NETWORK SPREADS WIDER”; “Mayor de Blasio Revives Plan for a Utica Avenue Subway Line”.
original starting date of fall 2015, to sometime this spring or early summer. Meanwhile the M86, with less than 7.5 million annual riders in areas within walking distance of subway stations, debuted as an SBS route in July 2015. The MTA and DOT have yet to address why the B46 conversion has been pushed back, with no definitive starting date announced as the end of the spring season nears. Granted, the M86 did have a genuine need for the improvements that come with SBS (see below), due to long lines at stops; the MTA and DOT describe the route as “the busiest route citywide per mile.” In addition, SBS projects are implemented in conjunction with DOT traffic flow and pedestrian safety improvement projects, such as the “Congested Corridors” and “Vision Zero” programs, which stress improvements along crosstown streets.

Still, it is no coincidence that the M14, M23, and M34 corridors happen to run through Midtown Manhattan, and the M86 between the Upper West and Upper East Sides, while important outer borough corridors continue to be ignored.

Outside of the MTA and DOT studies, the Brooklyn-based Pratt Center for Community Development has published its own proposals for new SBS corridors, most recently in 2013. Unlike the MTA/DOT corridors which are concurrent with existing bus routes, the Pratt Center routes are more-ambitious, resembling genuine rapid-transit corridors in terms of length and

---

96 “NYC DOT, NYC Transit, and Elected Officials Announce Launch of Select Bus Service on 86th Street,” (NYCDOT, 13 June 2015); “Select Bus Service on 86th Street: Manhattan Community Board 8 | February 4, 2014,” (MTA, NYCDOT, 4 February 2014); “NYC Department of Transportation, NYC Transit and Elected Officials Announce Launch of Select Bus Service on 86th Street,” (MTA, 13 June 2015).
98 “Express Bus Service Shows Promise in New York”; “Behind the Curb,” (Center for an Urban Future, February 2011); “NYC DOT, NYC Transit, and Elected Officials Announce Launch of Select Bus Service on 86th Street.”
scope of service. One example is a proposed corridor between Hunts Point, Bronx and Jamaica, Queens, which would combine the routes of the current Q44 Flushing-Jamaica SBS and portions of the Bx5 and Bx6 services. The Pratt Center corridors are designed to connect between outer borough areas instead of just feeding passengers from those areas into the subway. These routes also connect important trip generators such as hospitals, high schools, and CUNY colleges.99

Features of BRT and SBS

Critics of SBS – both pro and anti-BRT – cite that the system is not an ideal or genuine BRT service. But what exactly is a “true” BRT service? The Valley Transportation Authority of Santa Clara, California divides BRT into two categories: BRT 1 and BRT 2. BRT 1 can be seen as “BRT-Lite”, with slow 10-15 minute headways, medium passenger capacity, normal bus stops (i.e. curbside signs and standard bus shelters), and standard 40-foot buses. Buses in BRT 1 can run in mixed-traffic lanes, dedicated bus lanes within mixed-traffic roads, or HOV lanes on highways. BRT 2 on the other hand is a true form bus rapid transit as seen in many Latin American cities. These systems use physically-separated right-of-ways (ROWs) only accessible by buses, including busways built into the medians of streets and boulevards or on the sides of streets and highways, and entire two-lane highways dedicated exclusively to buses. BRT 2 systems are characterized by robustly-designed stops that are fare-controlled and similar in design and amenity to subway and rail stations. Some of these stations feature platforms raised off the ground in a similar manner to rail service. BRT 2 service, like rail services, employs

---

100 “Select Bus Service is no substitute for Bus Rapid Transit (editorial),” (Staten Island Advance, 5 July 2015); Colin O’Connor, “All Aboard the BRT Express?,” (Gotham Gazette, 17 November 2015).
off-board payment (either through subway-style turnstiles or proof-of-payment ticket machines) to speed boarding and alighting times. BRT 2 systems operate with articulated buses that are 60 feet or greater in length, with doors that open simultaneously to allow entry or exit from any door (all-door boarding). Some systems have buses with doors on both sides similar to subway cars, facilitating curbside stops and side-platform busway stops, as well as island platform (center platform) busway stops. In Curitiba, Brazil – the origin city of BRT – bi-articulated buses (three-section buses) are used measuring 80-feet in length, longer than any existing New York City Subway car. BRT 2 systems provide the capacity of a light rail (streetcar) system, but with the flexibility of bus routes that can be economically altered to accommodate new service needs, without removing and reinstalling expensive rails and power infrastructure. Both BRT 1 and BRT 2 systems feature specially-branded buses to identify the services, and Bus Signal Priority (BSP; also known as Transit Signal Priority or TSP). BSP/TSP, as it suggests, gives buses priority at traffic signals, holding lights green when a bus is nearing an intersection, or shortening a red-light period when a bus is stopped at a traffic signal.101

BSP/TSP, as it suggests, gives buses priority at traffic signals, holding lights green when a bus is nearing an intersection, or shortening a red-light period when a bus is stopped at a traffic signal.101

Based on these guidelines, New York City’s Select Bus Service is much closer to a BRT 1 system in terms of infrastructure. All SBS services run on mixed-traffic streets, with dedicated bus lanes installed only on certain portions of routes, and only active during peak hours; the M86 SBS on does not utilize any continuous bus lanes. The two types of bus lanes employed by SBS are curbside lanes, and offset lanes installed one lane away from the curb to retain parking

spaces; both are painted a maroon-red or bright red shade, as opposed to previous city bus lanes which retained the asphalt black color.\(^{102}\) While travel times on SBS routes have improved with the addition of bus lanes,\(^{103}\) buses must still stop at traffic lights, and deal with normal traffic delays as well as belligerent drivers running or double parking in bus lanes. SBS routes also utilize normal bus stops, often shared with standard local or limited-stop service, and with the same standard or substandard amenities. A few bus stops have been upgraded into bus bulbs, a relatively minor improvement that extends the sidewalk out towards a bus lane offset from the curb so that buses do not have to turn in towards the sidewalk.\(^{104}\)

The process of installing bus lanes, the no-build and low-cost alternative to actual busways, along potential SBS lines has been one of the most controversial issues in the service’s short history. Proposing only small sections of bus lanes for busy streets consistently leads to outcries by local businesses, some local residents, and car users along with their local elected officials; predominantly people who do not use buses or any form of public transportation.\(^{105}\) Business owners fear the loss of customer parking spaces and delivery areas, potentially leading to profit losses. This argument has some traction on roads like Merrick Boulevard in Southeast Queens or Main Street in Queensboro Hill and Kew Gardens Hills, where “mom-and-pop” style stores in low-density areas rely on parking spaces to facilitate customers. Local residents of these

---

\(^{102}\) “Overlooked Boroughs: Technical Report,” pg. 39-42; “Introduction to BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II”, pg. 32-45; William Carry et. al., “Red Bus Lane Treatment Evaluation,” (National Association of City Transportation Officials, February 2012); “M60 Select Bus Service on 125th Street; Community Board 10 Update; Wednesday, June 12, 2013,” (MTA, NYCDOt, 12 June 2013); “TCRP SYNTHESIS 110”, pg. 40-42.

\(^{103}\) “Introduction to BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II”, pg. 32-45; “Select Bus Service on the Bx12”; “B46 Select Bus Service Community Board 17 Public Hearing | April 4, 2016”.

\(^{104}\) “Introduction to BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II”, pg. 32-45; “Select Bus Service on the Bx12”; “B46 Select Bus Service Community Board 17 Public Hearing | April 4, 2016”.

\(^{105}\) “Select Bus Service is no substitute for Bus Rapid Transit (editorial)”; “Merrick Parking In Doubt As Rapid Transit Nears”; “BRT Makes its Overdue NYC Debut”; “Kew Gardens Hills residents enraged over city proposal to create new express bus service”.

neighborhoods have launched similar complaints against the loss of parking. Many of these complaints, however, have been from business districts located in major public transportation hubs, where most of the travel – and by extension the commerce – is done via public transportation. These misinformed BIDs include the 125th Street BID where the now-M60 SBS operates along with three other bus routes, the Flushing BID along Main Street in Downtown Flushing served by the Q44 SBS and over 20 other bus routes, and the Fordham Road BID in the Bronx served by the BX12 SBS along with the Bx41 SBS on Webster Avenue. In the case of the Fordham Road BID, SBS service became a scapegoat for business closures following the 2007 financial crisis, when in reality business increased 73 percent after implementation of the Bx12 SBS. Meanwhile, the once-strong political opposition on 125th Street in Harlem that nearly killed the M60 SBS project has since settled, with politicians largely in favor of maintaining and expanding bus lanes along the street. So while bus lanes have yet to be installed along the low-density Queens routes, I am happy to say that all SBS routes in the aforementioned major business districts have bright-red bus lanes running through them.

106 “Merrick Parking In Doubt As Rapid Transit Nears”; “Kew Gardens Hills residents enraged over city proposal to create new express bus service”; Madina Toure, “NE Queens leaders wary of Select Bus Service proposal,” (Times Ledger, 22 January 2015); Michael Sedon, “Staten Island merchants say new bus stops drive customers away,” (Staten Island Advance, 6 September 2012).
107 “Express Bus Service Shows Promise in New York”; “M60 Select Bus Service on 125th Street; Community Board 10 Update; Wednesday, June 12, 2013”; Kate Hinds, “NYC Kills Fast Bus to LGA,” (WNYC, 16 July 2013); Stephen Miller, “How One Merchant Group Went From Bus Lane Opponent to SBS Supporter,” (StreetsBlog NYC, 12 December 2013); Tanyanika Samuels, “Express service blamed for killing businesses on East Fordham Road,” (Daily News, 6 October 2008); Madina Toure, “Community leaders against Q44 Select Bus Service route,” (Times Ledger, 31 October 2015).
110 Stephen Miller, “Bus Lanes Coming to 125th Street in West Harlem This Summer,” (StreetsBlog NYC, 3 April 2015).
111 “How One Merchant Group Went From Bus Lane Opponent to SBS Supporter”; “Bus Lanes Coming to 125th Street in West Harlem This Summer.”
The second largest contingent of SBS-detectors consists of car users on the busy arterial streets where the city has or seeks to implement SBS routes. Some of the strongest opposition has come from drivers in Staten Island over the bus lanes used by the S79 SBS, which runs from the Staten Island Mall to the Fourth Avenue subway in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, via Hylan Boulevard and Richmond Avenue. These commuters and their elected officials complain over the loss of travel lanes on the streets leading to increased congestion, the lack of turning bays and drop-off zones, and the hefty $115 dollar fines for driving in the lanes enforced by cameras along the route, while ignoring or denouncing the improved service for mass transit users. Staten Island of course is a unique situation, where the historical lack of rapid transit led the borough to develop with the highest car usage rates in the city. On Hylan Boulevard, the primary street traversed by the S79, daily ridership on the S79 SBS (9,000) and all local bus routes on the corridor (20,000) is still dramatically outpaced by the number of vehicles on the road (over 40,000), even with the service improvements and increase in popularity brought by Select Bus Service. Similar complaints are being heard by automobile users along the busy Woodhaven and Cross Bay Boulevards corridor in Central Queens, on which the Q52 and Q53 are set to become SBS routes in 2017 between Elmhurst and the Rockaway Peninsula. The corridor, similar to but much wider than Merrick Boulevard in Southeast Queens, is a unique microcosm of the issues that surround Select Bus Service. The route represents the intersection of car users who refuse to take mass transit and scorn bus lanes, important commercial road traffic, along with a large contingent of bus riders that has grown dramatically since limited-stop service was

112 “Select Bus Service is no substitute for Bus Rapid Transit (editorial); “S79 on Hylan Boulevard: +selectbusservice Progress Report,” (MTA, NYCDOT, 2014); “The red bus lanes: Delayed study of Select Bus Service unimpressive (editorial),” (Staten Island Advance, 20 March 2014); Vincent Barone, “Bus lane camera program extended after Senate vote,” (Staten Island Advance, 27 June 2015); Judy L. Randall, “Select Bus Service lanes would be nixed under Lanza bill,” (Staten Island Advance, 7 May 2014).
added to the corridor in 2006. The corridor now has the fourth highest ridership in Queens, with over 9 million annual riders on its four bus routes (see Figure 1). In addition, the corridor features serves a combination of low-density residential areas, small-business districts, and large commercial districts such as the Elmhurst commercial district at its north end. The Elmhurst district features three shopping complexes (Queens Center Mall, the Rego Center, and Queens Place) as well as a major transfer hub to the IND Queens Boulevard Line.\footnote{“QPTC Urges Queensrail, Not Woodhaven Select Bus Svc.”; “MTA To Add Six Stops To Q53 Route”; “MTA Bus Operations Committee Meeting: March 2012,” pg. 45-52; “Consensus elusive over proposed Woodhaven SBS”; Domenick Rafter, “Select bus skepticism along Woodhaven Blvd.,” (Queens Chronicle, 3 July 2014).} In both cases, positive feedback towards SBS from bus riders along the corridors is less publicized than the backlash from car users.\footnote{Michael Sedon, “Staten Island's Select Bus Service is faster, but some wonder if it's fast enough,” (Staten Island Advance, 4 September 2012); “Consensus elusive over proposed Woodhaven SBS”.}

What the controversy over bus lanes does show is that Select Bus Service has limitations in how fast and effective it can be, because of how built-up New York City is, and the effects of increasing community input and NIMBYism involved in the modern transit-building process. Gone are the days when Robert Moses could commandeer entire neighborhoods via eminent domain to turn four-lane wide boulevards into ten-lane highways. No longer can busy streets that are much too narrow in general (Metropolitan Avenue in Central Queens), or simply not big enough for the traffic they support (125\textsuperscript{th} Street) be widened to add more capacity for both cars and surface transit. Many now-wide boulevards were constructed as such when surrounding areas were rural or uninhabited. Queens Boulevard for example was widened in the 1940s, before much of the existing commerce along it was established.\footnote{“Work on Queens Road Soon: Contractors to Get Order to Move Tracks on Boulevard”, (The New York Times, 9 March 1927); “Queens Boulevard to Get a Bus Line,” (The New York Times, 6 October 1935).} Today, however, housing and commerce has been established around these roads, as well as other institutions such as religious
centers and theatres, with some local institutions becoming immovable and invaluable landmarks (the Apollo theatre on 125th come to mind). Because of this, only two busway-type SBS corridors have been seriously considered for implementation in the city. One is one along Woodhaven and Cross Bay Boulevards, where the numerous existing traffic lanes and street medians would facilitate a nearly-uninterrupted bus lane. The other is along the North Shore of Staten Island, a plan to convert the abandoned North Shore Branch of the Staten Island Railway into a grade-separated busway.\footnote{“Bus Rapid Transit Service Design Guidelines”; “Select bus skepticism along Woodhaven Blvd.”; “Woodhaven / Cross Bay Boulevard Community Advisory Committee Meeting #2”, \textit{(MTA, NYCDOT, 22 October 2014)}; SYSTRA Engineering, Inc., “NYCT NORTH SHORE ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS: Alternatives Analysis Report,” \textit{(MTA New York City Transit, August 2012)}.}

Other aspects of Select Bus Service outside of bus lanes are in-line with BRT 2 standards. Nearly every SBS service primarily uses low-floor 60-foot articulated buses with three sets of doors; the exception is the S79 in Staten Island, which uses standard-length low-floor buses. The Q44 also utilizes standard-length low-floor buses as supplements during heavy rush hours, or as replacements for its normal articulated fleet during periods of low-expected ridership such as overnights, holidays, and days of inclement weather. SBS routes also run much more frequently than the 10-15 minutes allotted by the VTA guidelines for BRT 1, though many MTA services on major routes run just as frequently.\footnote{“Introduction to BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II”, pg. 32-45.}

Although separated busways are typically identified as the most effective advantage of BRT over normal bus operations, one of the most effective features of Select Bus Service has been the speeding of boarding and alighting times. In addition to traffic on city streets and a lack of synchronization between buses and traffic signals, the 2002 Schaller Consulting study identified passenger alighting and exiting times to be a major factor in travel speeds. Boarding on
non-SBS routes necessitates passengers to all feed into a single door at the front of a bus, and then feed their MetroCard or coins into the farebox machine next to the driver. Meanwhile, passengers exiting the bus either only use the back doors (a singular back door on standard-length buses and older articulated buses), or interrupt the flow of boarding passengers by leaving through the front door as well. On busy routes – such as the M15 studied by Schaller in 2002 – or at busy stops such as subway stations, the process of loading and unloading of passengers can take several minutes.\textsuperscript{118} Sometimes, boarding at busy stops can take so long that drivers and dispatchers will simply wave passengers into the bus without paying; I experienced this several times taking the Q46 from its western terminal at the Kew Gardens – Union Turnpike station, where long lines during rush hours stretching almost half a block are common place. Boarding times are further slowed by high-floor buses (which have been gradually phased out since the 2000s), because passengers having to climb up several steps to reach seating level.

Since its inception, all SBS routes except for the S79 have employed off-board payment, using ticket-dispensing machines based off of MetroCard ATM/Debit Card vending machines and Parkeon Muni Meters. In this process, passengers pay their fare at the ticket machines (MetroCards into the vending machines, coins into the Muni Meters), and receive a paper ticket (really a flimsy receipt with the route, time of issue, and direction of service printed on it) as proof-of-payment, all prior to bus arrival. They are then allowed to board the bus through any door, similar to subway boarding procedure; likewise, alighting passengers may leave the bus through any door, including the front door. The implementation of off-board payment, along

\textsuperscript{118} “Bus Rapid Transit For New York City,” pg. 1-2, 7, 10, 29; “BRT Makes its Overdue NYC Debut.”
with the addition of three-door low-floor articulated buses, has dramatically sped-up loading and unloading times at bus stops along SBS routes.\footnote{“Introduction to BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II”, pg. 32-45; “Select Bus Service on the Bx12”; “BRT Makes its Overdue NYC Debut”; “TCRP SYNTHESIS 110”; “Express Bus Service Shows Promise in New York”; “MTA NYC Transit Introduces New Articulated Bus into SBS service”}
Transit in Southeast Queens

A weekend Q5 (left) entering service at Bay A of the Jamaica Center Bus Terminal towards Green Acres Mall.
Overview

The Southeast Queens study area consists of the corner of Queens south of Jamaica Avenue and east of the Van Wyck Expressway and John F. Kennedy Airport, with Nassau County at its east and south ends. This area is the former colonial Town of Jamaica, one of the oldest outposts in today’s New York City. The area is now comprised of Queens Community Boards 12 and 13. Southeast Queens is more suburban and low-density in character than other areas of the city, consisting primarily of one and two family dwellings. The median income for the area as of December 2015 is over $70,000 with almost a third of working residents employed in service industry occupations. Unusual for Queens and the city in general, the region has high rates of both car ownership and usage of automobiles during the daily commute, with over 50% of travelers using cars to get to work. These suburban characteristics, however, are mainly true for those communities on the outer rim of the area, within CB 13. Neighborhoods on the perimeter which fit this demographic include Queens Village, Cambria Heights, Laurelton, Rosedale, Brookville, and Springfield Gardens. Communities within CB 12 at the “core” of Southeast Queens are more urbanized and working class in nature, including South Jamaica and its southern subsection Baisley Park, along with the Rochdale / Springfield Gardens North neighborhood that overlaps with South Jamaica and Springfield Gardens. The Rochdale Village housing development for example consists of apartment buildings, and is similar in nature to Co-op City in the Bronx and Starrett City in Brooklyn with middle-income residents. The South Jamaica and Baisley Park public housing projects, both in South Jamaica, are also high-density (though smaller than many other projects in the city), with low-income residents. Residents of

120 “District Profile: Queens Community District 12, (nyc.gov)”; “District Profile: Queens Community District 13, (nyc.gov)”. 
South Jamaica, Rochdale and Springfield Gardens are among those with the lowest median incomes in the area; the Rochdale area has a median income of approximately $50,000, with incomes as low as $16,000.¹²¹

Particular focus will be put on the Rosedale neighborhood, located at the very southeastern corner of Queens, with the Valley Stream neighborhood of Nassau County to the east, and the hamlet of Woodmere in Nassau County to the south. The neighborhood can be separated into three sections: the northernmost between Merrick Boulevard and Conduit Avenue, the middle section bounded by Conduit Avenue and 147th Avenue, and the southernmost located south of 147th Avenue ending at Hook Creek which separates Queens and Nassau County.¹²²

Rail service

Commerce and transportation in Southeast Queens revolves around the Downtown Jamaica or “Jamaica Center” business district on Jamaica and Archer Avenues, stretching from Sutphin Boulevard at its western end to around Merrick Boulevard at its eastern end. This is geographically the northwestern section of the area. At this location is the massive Jamaica railroad terminal for the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) and AirTrain JFK, and the Jamaica Center and Sutphin Boulevard stations for the bi-level Archer Avenue subway. The upper level of the Archer subway (E trains) feeds into the IND Queens Boulevard subway line to Midtown Manhattan, the busiest rapid transit line in Queens and one of the busiest in the city. The lower

level (J/Z trains) funnels into the old BMT Jamaica/Broadway elevated towards Williamsburg and Lower Manhattan. Just north on Hillside Avenue is the underused eastern end of the Queens Boulevard Line served solely by the F train; much of its passenger traffic was diverted to the Archer Avenue subway when the latter opened in 1988. Because of the location of its terminal, express service through Queens, and direct link to Midtown, the E route is the most heavily used out of the three services, and is severely overcrowded as a result.123

With so much of the rail service for the area, including all the subway service, concentrated in the aforementioned northwest corner of the sector, the rest of Southeast Queens is highly isolated from fast and adequate rail service. In fact, the region has some of the highest commute times in the city, 238% higher than other New York areas.124 Because of this, it has been referred to by local politicians as a “transportation desert”.125 Although two LIRR branches (the eastern legs of the Atlantic and Montauk Branches)126 run through the area, there are only four stops combined in the region: Locust Manor (Rochdale Village), Laurelton, St. Albans, and Rosedale. The LIRR is also typically too expensive for the residents of the area, currently priced at $10 one-way during peak weekday hours, and without a free transfer to the subway or bus in Manhattan or Brooklyn.127 The City Ticket discount program, instituted in January 2004 to create

126 The Atlantic and Montauk branches have portions that run west and east of Jamaica station. The Montauk branch is named for its Long Island service, with the western Queens portion known as “Lower Montauk”. The Atlantic Branch is named for its routing in Brooklyn along Atlantic Avenue.
affordable intra-city travel on the LIRR and MetroNorth, is only active on weekends.\textsuperscript{128} While riding the LIRR straight into Manhattan can take less than half an hour and is significantly more comfortable due to the abundance of available seats on these trains, many continue to avoid the LIRR due to high prices and lack of free transfers to subway or bus service.\textsuperscript{129}

The low LIRR ridership in the area may also be correlated to the dilapidated state of the stations, and the lack of available parking to facilitate park-and-ride service. Several stations in the area have poorly-maintained entrances and platforms, issues of vandalism and litter, and visual eyesores such as chain-link fencing and vacant lots nearby. The stations are also located on sites that are not easily accessed by local communities. The Laurelton station for example is several blocks away from the two major roads in the area – Springfield Boulevard and Conduit Avenue – requiring residents to walk through residential side streets to access it; because it is hidden away from major throughways, local residents may not even know the station exists. The Rosedale station, meanwhile, sits in the middle of the Conduit Avenue/Sunrise Highway throughway, requiring residents to cross the dangerous highway in order to access the station.\textsuperscript{130} Equally discouraging is the sporadic number of trains that actually serve the stations, in spite of the fact that these trains have the capacity to accommodate additional passengers. Most trains on the Atlantic Branch bypass its three Queens stations instead of stopping, with 10-20 minute headways at these stations during peak hours, and 1-hour headways at other times. Meanwhile, the St. Albans station – the sole Queens station on the Montauk Branch – does not have 24-hour

service, with a minimum of 30-minute headways in either service direction.\textsuperscript{131} As a solution to increase ridership, in December 2015 the “Freedom Ticket” was proposed by the \textit{New York City Transit Riders Council}, who also proposed the City Ticket program, as a solution to be tested at these LIRR stations. This proposal would price intra-city commuter rail travel at $6.50 (the same as an express bus trip), and add a MetroCard transfer.\textsuperscript{132}
Figure 1: Busiest Bus Routes in Queens: 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Routes</th>
<th>Corridors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Routes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Corridors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Q58*</td>
<td>1 Main Street (Flushing-Jamaica)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Q44*</td>
<td>2 Merrick Boulevard: Q4*, Q5*, Q84, Q85*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Q27*</td>
<td>3 Corona Avenue (Q58)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Q10*</td>
<td>4 Woodhaven/Cross Bay Boulevards*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Q46*</td>
<td>5 Parsons/Kissena Blvds (Flushing-Jamaica)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Q65*</td>
<td>6 46th Avenue (Flushing-Rosewood)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Q25*</td>
<td>7 Hillside Avenue*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Q17*</td>
<td>8 Brewer Bl-147th Av: Q111, Q113*, Q114*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Q53*</td>
<td>9 Lefferts Boulevard (Q10)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Q23</td>
<td>10 Union Turnpike (Q46)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Q111</td>
<td>15 Brewer Blvd/147th Av</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Q5*</td>
<td>16 Merrick Boulevard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Q85*</td>
<td>17 Merrick/Conduit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q113*</td>
<td>17 Merrick/Conduit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Brewer Blvd/ Far Rockaway</td>
<td>20 Sutphin Boulevard (Q6)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q114*</td>
<td>26 Farmers Boulevard (Q3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Q6*</td>
<td>21 Sutphin Boulevard (Q6)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Q3</td>
<td>22 Farmers Boulevard (Q3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Q4*</td>
<td>23 Farmers Boulevard (Q3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 Q84</td>
<td>23 Farmers Boulevard (Q3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bold** indicates case study route or corridor

* - indicates route with limited-stop or SBS service

Individual route ridership numbers from “Annual Bus Ridership” and “Annual MTA Bus Ridership”. *MTA.*

**Current Local Bus Service**

Due to the lack of direct rail service, the Southeast Queens area is heavily dependent on local bus service; all but two local bus routes in the area (the Q7 and Q27) terminate in Jamaica Center, and most public transit commuters in the area use local bus service to transfer to subway,
Among the ten busiest individual routes in the borough in terms of yearly ridership (see Figure 1), four of them (Q25, Q34, Q44, Q65) feed into the Downtown Jamaica bus hub, but only one of the top ten routes travels south into the study area. This route, the Q27, runs along Springfield Boulevard through Queens Village and Cambria Heights at the east end of the area. All five of these routes, along with the Q58 through central Queens, feed into the Flushing–Main Street terminal in northern Queens. However when analyzing ridership along major corridors, combining ridership among individual routes which share significant portions of a single street or routing, two corridors within the study area rank among the top ten in ridership. These are the Merrick Boulevard corridor, which ranks second busiest in Queens, and the Guy R. Brewer Boulevard/147th Avenue corridor, which ranks eighth. The two corridors travel relatively north to south and cut through the middle of Southeast Queens, serving the highly-isolated neighborhoods along the border with Nassau County (particularly the Rosedale neighborhood at the eastern end of both corridors), along with South Jamaica and the Rochdale Village development in the core of the area. Both corridors also have limited-stop service during peak hours, with the Brewer Boulevard corridor providing bidirectional limited-stop service seven days a week. Crowding and sporadic service on buses in the area has led many commuters to turn to private Dollar Vans traversing these bus routes to travel into Jamaica Center, which is the largest Dollar Van hub in the city. My case study will focus on

---

133 “Metrolink,” pg. 9; “A Long Day’s Journey into Work,” pg. ii-iv, 4-58; “Queens Bus Map”.
134 “Annual Bus Ridership”, mta.info; “Queens Bus Map.”
135 “Annual Bus Ridership”, mta.info.

the Merrick Boulevard and Brewer Boulevard corridors, due to their high ridership and limited-stop service, and the fact that they facilitate several routes which serve multiple outer areas of Southeast Queens. The two other major arterial corridors in the area – Sutphin Boulevard served by the Q6 and Q6 Limited along the west end of the area, and Farmers Boulevard served by the Q3 – will not be focuses of the study, but will be used as comparisons. Both these routes serve JFK Airport, with the Q6 serving the airport’s eastern cargo area, and the Q3 running to the passenger terminals.  

137 “Queens Bus Map”.
Merrick Boulevard Corridor

Merrick Boulevard is one of the primary arterial routes through Southeast Queens, as it has been since the 1800s. It stretches from downtown Jamaica diagonally through Southeast Queens to the Nassau County line. The road continues as Merrick Road through Nassau County into Amityville in Suffolk County. Within Queens, the road is considered a “Minor Arterial” route by the NYCDOT, with three lanes in either direction along its entire distance in the borough. The curbside lane, like in other streets in the city, is not a through lane, instead facilitating parking and bus stops.\footnote{2014 New York City Screenline Traffic Flow, (NYCDOT, June 2015); “Reports. From Standing Committees. Street System—Section 141 of the Final Maps of the Borough of Queens (Cal. No. 12),” (The City Record, 47.11, 24 September 1919); Ron Marzlock, “I Have Often Walked: Merrick Boulevard, South Jamaica, New York,” (Queens Chronicle, 23 November 2000).}

Four NYCT bus routes run along the Merrick Boulevard corridor: the Q4, Q5, Q84, and Q85. The n4 and n4x Express of the NICE bus system also run along the road into Nassau County, but do not provide “open-door” service within Queens, and are thus not part of the case study. The trunk routes of the corridor are the Q5 and Q85 which each serve nearly 4 million riders a year. The Q4 also serves over 3 million riders a year.\footnote{Annual Bus Ridership, mta.info.} The Q4 only serves the northernmost portion of the corridor to Linden Boulevard. It then turns east on Linden Boulevard through St. Albans to Cambria Heights at the county line. Because of this, the Q4 route can be considered a separate transit line. The Q5 runs along the entire length of Merrick Boulevard in Queens. The Q85, the result of the merger of two supplementary Q5 services in 1988,\footnote{1975 Queens Bus Map; Sarah Lyall, “All Aboard…Somewhere…for Subway Changes!,” (The New York Times, 12 December 1988).} runs along Merrick Boulevard to Baisley Boulevard, about half the length of the boulevard in Queens. This portion of the route between Jamaica and Baisley Boulevard, shared by the Q5, Q84, and
Q85, is the busiest portion of the route in terms of ridership.\textsuperscript{141} While the Q84 turns east at Baisley towards Laurelton, the Q85 turns southwest then southeast on a course parallel to both the Q5 and the LIRR Atlantic Branch. This route allows direct bus service to residential areas including Rochdale Village and Springfield Gardens, running on two local streets and portions of Farmers and Springfield Boulevards, before turning east along Conduit Avenue.\textsuperscript{142}

The Q5 and Q85 intersect again at Conduit Avenue and Francis Lewis Boulevard at the Rosedale LIRR station; this is the terminus for most Q5 runs on weekdays, which end service at entrances to the station. The Rosedale LIRR terminal, used by the Q5 route since its inception in 1921,\textsuperscript{143} is an ideal terminal in terms of maintaining traffic flow, but is inefficient for serving passengers due to the station’s isolation from nearby Rosedale and Laurelton, necessitating passengers to cross the busy Sunrise Highway and South Conduit Avenue. While the Q5 ends service at the station, the Q85 continues south along 243\textsuperscript{rd} Street to 147\textsuperscript{th} Avenue in the central and southern portions of Rosedale, just north of the county border.\textsuperscript{144}

Select runs of both the Q5 and Q85 continue a short distance east along Conduit Avenue (which becomes the Sunrise Highway) to the Green Acres Mall in Valley Stream, Nassau County. This service is frequent on weekends, when all Q5 buses terminate at the mall, while half of the Q85 trips begin or end at the mall. During weekday off-peak hours, buses on both routes are split between Rosedale and Green Acres. During rush hours in the peak direction,

\textsuperscript{141} “NYCBRT Study: ITS-NY Conference June 8, 2007.”
\textsuperscript{144} “A Long Day’s Journey into Work,” pg. ii-iv, 4-58; “Queens Bus Map”; “Bus Timetable: Q5”; “Bus Timetable: Q85”. 
however, service to the mall is sparse. During the AM rush hour period (from approximately 5:30 to 8:45) only six buses begin service from the mall, with at best one bus from Green Acres for every six trips. At these times, the Q5 is the primary bus to serve the mall, since Q85 service to Green Acres does not begin until later in the morning. While this sparse service makes sense, since few people would be traveling from the mall early in the morning, the afternoon peak service towards the mall is similarly infrequent, with only two-to-five Q5 or Q85 trips each ending at the mall during this period.  

The Q4, Q5, and Q85 all employ limited-stop service, but only during rush hours. The Q4 is the only route to provide bidirectional limited service, during the morning rush hour, while the Q5 and Q85 only provide peak direction service towards Jamaica at these times. Afternoons and evenings, all three routes provide limited-stop service exclusively in the peak direction from Jamaica to outer Queens. By comparison, among the ten busiest corridors in Queens (all of which provide limited-stop service), the Merrick Boulevard corridor along with the Hillside Avenue corridor (Q1, Q36, Q43) along the northern edge of Southeast Queens are the only corridors that don’t provide bidirectional limited-stop service at some point during the weekday period. Five of the top ten corridors – Main Street (Q44 SBS), Corona Avenue (Q58 LTD), Woodhaven Boulevard (Q52/Q53 LTD), Brewer Boulevard (Q113/Q114 LTD), Lefferts Boulevard (Q10 LTD) – provide limited-stop service seven days a week, while two of these routes (the Q44 SBS and Q53 LTD) provide 24-hour limited-stop service. Only the Main Street corridor has higher ridership than the Merrick Boulevard corridor. In addition, five other Queens bus routes (Q17, Q50, Q65, Q70, Q100) provide bidirectional limited-stop service; the Q50,

146 “Merrick Parking In Doubt As Rapid Transit Nears”; “Bus Timetable: Q5”; “Bus Timetable: Q85”.
Q70, and Q100, which are niche routes that are exclusively limited-stop, run seven days a week, with the Q100 running at all times.

When limited-stop service operates, local Q5s primarily short turn at 231st Street, and local Q85s at Farmers Boulevard in Rochdale at the Locust Manor LIRR station. Thus the eastern portions of both routes are primarily served by limited buses and the sporadic Green Acres local service at these times. In addition, no limited service operates to or from Green Acres. This means that during these times shoppers or employees must take a limited bus to the Rosedale station and transfer in Rosedale to one of the few Green Acres-bound local buses, or ride a local run all the way from Jamaica Center.  

Route characteristics, service structure and travel speeds

When comparing the Q5 and Q85’s routes and limited-stop service patterns, the Q5 is much more streamlined. The first two-thirds of the Q5 route from Jamaica accommodate limited service, with only six stops for Q5 Limiteds between Jamaica and Springfield Boulevard. The Q85’s limited-stop service meanwhile makes local stops along most of its route, south and east of Baisley Boulevard and Bedell Street in Rochdale. In other words, it only runs limited on its route via Merrick Boulevard, providing fast and convenient service for passengers to Rochdale Village and Springfield Gardens. Passengers at the east end of the Q85 route in Rosedale, however, must sit through the entire route from Jamaica, or make a two-bus trip by taking the Q5 to Rosedale station before taking a Q85 to the end of the line.

---

147 “Merrick Parking In Doubt As Rapid Transit Nears”; “Queens Bus Map”; “Bus Timetable: Q5”; “Bus Timetable: Q85”.
In addition to this, both the Q5 and Q85 routes have inefficient stop patterns, with many closely-spaced stops, sometimes as close as a block away, well below the DOT guidelines of 750 feet between local stops. In Rochdale just east the Locust Manor station, for example, the Q85 makes three stops in either direction at or along Farmers Boulevard in a span of less than 800 feet, five stops between the station and the intersection of Bedell Street and 140th Avenue one block away, and seven stops between the station and Springfield Boulevard. These stops, along with the winding route can make Q85 trips slow and inefficient. Local stops along Merrick Boulevard are similarly-closely-spaced as well.

In terms of scheduling, buses along the corridor enter service frequently during rush hours in the peak direction, and are reasonably-frequent during weekday middays and weekend periods. In practice, however, buses are much less reliable then schedules would indicate. The Q85 was deemed one of the most unreliable bus routes in the city by the Straphangers Campaign in 2015, in terms of consistent intervals and arrival times. It was found that nearly 22% of Q85 buses did not arrive as scheduled, but rather arrived in bunches or with large gaps between buses.

A major problem along the corridor is traffic congestion, with buses having to run in the two-mixed traffic lanes of Merrick Boulevard in either direction. Another major problem, particularly for the Q5, is delays caused by traffic signals. The 2004 NYCBRT study found that half of the time Q5 buses spent stopped was at traffic signals, accounting for 18.3% of time.

---

149 “MTA New York City Transit and MTA Bus Company System-wide Service Standards”; “Woodhaven / Cross Bay Boulevards Q52/53 Select Bus Service: FAQs.”
150 “Queens Bus Map”; “Bus Timetable: Q5”; “Bus Timetable: Q85”.
151 “Bus Timetable: Q5”; “Bus Timetable: Q85”.
during a Q5 trip. The other half of time spent idle was a product of loading and unloading of passengers (17.1%). Because of this, Q5 buses spent less than 63% of trips in motion.\textsuperscript{154}

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{154} “NYCBRT Study: ITS-NY Conference June 8, 2007”.
A Rosedale Station-bound Q5 local during the AM rush-hour, which would be filled to doors by the time it departed Jamaica Center.

*Riding the Q5 and Q85*

To observe the nuances and flaws in service on these routes, I rode both the Q5 and Q85 buses at two different periods. During the first of these instances, I traveled on both routes between Jamaica Center and Green Acres on a Sunday late in the morning when the routes run entirely local, the Q85 from Jamaica to the mall and the Q5 back to Jamaica. Initially, I expected the Q85 to be slower due to its winding route, having not read the 2004 Merrick Boulevard BRT study at this point. I observed however that the Q5 ended up being nearly 10 minutes slower. In spite of its straight-line route along Merrick Boulevard, the Q5 was constantly stopped at frequent and poorly-synched traffic lights, just as the BRT study stated. While passenger load was only moderate at these times, the Q5 was further slowed by passenger loading time, as it stopped more frequently for pickups than the Q85 which sped through Rochdale and Springfield Gardens.
My second trip along the corridor was more eye-opening, occurring on a Monday morning during the AM rush hour period. I arrived at Jamaica Center at around 7:40 AM, taking the Q5 in the reverse-peak direction towards Rosedale and Green Acres to observe passenger loads during this time. According MTA Bus Time, the MTA’s real-time bus information system, the next Q5 was scheduled to depart at 7:46. To my disappointment (but not my surprise), the first Q5 did not arrive until 7:55. In between my arrival at the terminal and the first Q5, I watched three Q85s pull-up and depart, taking several of the prospective Q5 riders, though no Q85s would arrive after about 7:50. I was pleased to see that numerous Q4s arrived and left the terminal at regular intervals, the Q4 the only route to operate limited-stop service in both directions. However, I was dismayed to see several buses from other less-important and less-reliable routes depart the terminal before the first Q5, including a Q42 shuttle to Addisleigh Park (which runs every 20 minutes), a Q84 (running every 15 minutes), and several n4 and n4Xs of the inferior NICE Bus system. I also noticed that numerous buses from the Jamaica Depot (where the Merrick Boulevard routes are dispatched from) were passing by the terminal.

Figure 2: Merrick Boulevard Bus Trip Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Start Stop</th>
<th>End Stop</th>
<th>Start Time</th>
<th>End Time</th>
<th>Total Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q85</td>
<td>Jamaica Center</td>
<td>Green Acres</td>
<td>9:56 AM</td>
<td>10:29 AM</td>
<td>33 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>Green Acres</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>11:10 AM</td>
<td>11:50 AM</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trip 2: Monday AM Rush/AM Off-peak

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Start Stop</th>
<th>End Stop</th>
<th>Start Time</th>
<th>End Time</th>
<th>Total Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q5 Total</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>Green Acres</td>
<td>8:05 AM</td>
<td>8:56 AM</td>
<td>51 minutes*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus 1</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>231st Street</td>
<td>8:05 AM</td>
<td>8:34 AM</td>
<td>29 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus 2</td>
<td>231st Street</td>
<td>Green Acres</td>
<td>8:39 AM</td>
<td>8:56 AM</td>
<td>17 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q85</td>
<td>Green Acres</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>9:13 AM</td>
<td>9:58 AM</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - including time waiting for second Q5 bus
out-of-service after finishing their Jamaica-bound run, instead of reentering service towards Southeast Queens. These buses were likely returning to the depot, or running light to the southern ends of their routes to begin another Jamaica-bound run. Meanwhile, several dollar vans (presumably unlicensed as they had no company branding) were parked in the bus-loading lane as opposed to the designated van areas, waiting to poach bus passengers.

When the 7:55 Q5 bound for the Rosedale LIRR station arrived, the line for the route now stretched across the entire two-bus length of Bay A. The bus, for whatever reason, pulled up to the middle of the bay instead of the front to receive passengers, with riders demolishing the once-orderly line and crowding at the front door of the bus. By the time the standard-length bus left the terminal, at 7:59 four minutes later, it was packed to the doors, with several passengers forced to stand in the restricted area between the driver and the front door. The passengers who could not get on this first Q5 bus, along with myself, would have to wait for the next one. The second Q5 bus, bound for the 231st Street short-turn terminus, arrived at 8:05 ten minutes after the first bus; no Q85s were to be seen during this time. During the trip on this bus, I noticed that the curbside parking along Merrick Boulevard was a hindrance to all traffic on the boulevard as well as bus service, obstructing bus stops and leaving only two-lanes for the moderate traffic along the street. I would end up riding this Q5 to its last stop at 231st Street, and taking the next bus which was bound for Green Acres. At both southern terminals (231st Street and Green Acres) dollar vans were found shadowing the buses, honking to attract potential patrons. The total bus trip time to Green Acres was 51 minutes: 29 minutes on the first bus from Jamaica, and 17 minutes on the second bus, plus the five minutes waiting at 231st Street for the second bus. Adding the time spent at the Jamaica terminal waiting for the bus and watching the first Q5 pull
away filled to the brink, the trip took around 1 hour and 20 minutes. Looking at the Q5
timetables, the buses had actually been running on schedule. Except for the 7:46 bus that never
came, the 7:55 and 8:05 buses were in-line with the MTA schedules, in spite of the passenger
load that would justify more-frequent service.  

_Merrick Boulevard SBS Pilot_

In order to speed up service along the corridor, Merrick Boulevard was among the five
priority corridors identified under the city’s first BRT/SBS study in 2004. At the time, Merrick
Boulevard was the busiest corridor in Queens; it has since been surpassed by the Main Street
corridor of the Q44 and Q20. The route to be converted within the corridor was Q5 Limited,
scheduled to operate as a pilot BRT route in 2007. Under the study, Merrick Boulevard was
ranked seventh among all city bus corridors in terms of compatibility with, and potential benefits
from BRT service. It ranked ahead of all the planned and implemented SBS crosstown lines, as
well as the now-SBS corridors along Hylan Boulevard, Main Street and Webster Avenue. The
proposed Merrick Boulevard BRT would have had stations at all current limited stops except for
109th Avenue in South Jamaica, with an additional two-stop limited section added between
Springfield Boulevard and 233rd Street just past Francis Lewis Boulevard. This is currently a
local section, where both Q5 locals and Q5 Limiteds make all stops. The SBS route would have
then made only two more stops in Queens – at the end of Merrick Boulevard, and at Conduit
Avenue near the Rosedale Station – before terminating at Green Acres Mall. Bus lanes would
have been installed along nearly the entire length of Merrick Boulevard, from Liberty Avenue all

155 “Bus Timetable: Q5.”
the way to 233rd Street near the Belt Parkway. The plans to implement SBS along the corridor were cancelled, however, after complaints over the loss of parking due to the conversion of the curbside lanes of Merrick Boulevard into bus lanes. These complaints originated largely from small business owners and were echoed by local politicians, as has been the case with many other SBS routes. As dictated in an MTA Q&A release in 2009, the route was “dropped at the request of Queens elected officials”. While Southeast Queens remains a priority neighborhood under current SBS plans, SBS along Merrick Boulevard has yet to be officially reconsidered for implementation. The Merrick Boulevard and Linden Boulevard (Q4) corridors are highlighted on the SBS Phase II Queens map, though not labeled or mentioned by name. The closest proposal to Select Bus Service since the death of the pilot route is a plan to implement transit signal priority for buses along Merrick Boulevard. This is a minor improvement, compared to full SBS service.

Bus Fleet

The Merrick Boulevard routes and several other NYCT bus routes in Southeast Queens operate out of the Jamaica Bus Depot located on Merrick Boulevard just south of Downtown Jamaica. The depot is one of the oldest in the city, opened in 1940 when the routes were still operated by the North Shore Bus Company. In addition to substandard facilities, the depot does

---


not have sufficient capacity to accommodate the major routes that operate from the depot. It was originally built to house just 150 buses, but is currently assigned around 200, with many buses parked on the streets outside the depot. The lack of capacity of the depot has led to the inconsistent service seen on routes such as the Q5 and Q85. The MTA plans to ultimately rebuild and expand the depot under its 2015-2019 Capital Program, using land adjacent to the site purchased in 2014. The expansion could also allow the implementation of articulated buses on busy routes such as the Q4, Q5, and Q85. However the project, which has been in planning stages since the 1980s, has not commenced due to lack of funding.158

---

Brewer Boulevard/147th Avenue Corridor

The buses along Guy R. Brewer Boulevard, unlike those on Merrick Boulevard, operate a simpler and more streamlined service pattern within the study area. The three routes (Q111, Q113, and Q114) all share the entire length of Brewer Boulevard from Jamaica Center to 147th Avenue in Springfield Gardens, directly serving the South Jamaica Houses and the western side of Rochdale Village. The Q113 and Q114 are limited-stop services, making select stops along Brewer Boulevard. South of 147th Avenue, the Q113 runs largely non-stop through Nassau County to Far Rockaway on the Rockaway peninsula. The Q111 and Q114 meanwhile turn east onto 147th Avenue into the neighborhood of Brookville, with the Q114 continuing to make intermittent stops. At Brookville Boulevard, the Q114 turns south towards Nassau County and Far Rockaway; the Q111 continues east to the small pocket of Rosedale also served by the Q85, terminating at the southeastern-most corner of Queens.¹⁵⁹

Originally privately operated by Jamaica Buses, the routes were taken over by the MTA Bus Company on January 30, 2006.¹⁶⁰ Since then, the corridor has been one of the success stories

---

of city operation. Prior to the takeover, the two Q113 services – the Q113 local and Q113 Limited – operated entirely local in “mainland Queens”. In March 2007, limited-stop service along Brewer Boulevard was added to the Q113 Limited.\footnote{Miriam Rosenberg, “New Routes For Old Bus Lines”, \textit{(The Wave of Long Island}, 16 March 2007).} In August 2014, the fully-local version of the Q113 was converted into a second limited-stop service, the Q114 Limited which runs local in Nassau County and the Rockaways.\footnote{“MTA Transit & Bus Committee Meeting: July 2014”.} Following these upgrades, limited service along Brewer Boulevard now operates seven days a week during daytime and early evening hours, with “frequent local service” (as dictated by the MTA) provided by the Q111. This service is in fact very frequent, with three minute headways during peak-direction rush hours, and weekday headways no larger than eight minutes from around 5:45 AM to around 6:30 PM. The same cannot be said for many other routes with heavy ridership and/or limited-stop service.\footnote{“Bus Timetable: Q111.”} During daytime hours, alternate Q111s short turn at Farmers Boulevard near the southern end of Brewer Boulevard in Springfield Gardens,\footnote{“Bus Timetable: Q111.”} indicating that the majority of the service is concentrated along the boulevard or towards Far Rockaway, but not in Rosedale. The Q111’s service pattern is only major flaw along the corridor. Because the Q113 and Q114 run limited-stop in order to funnel passengers to and from the isolated Rockaway Peninsula, the similarly-isolated southern Rosedale area is left with only with the Q111 local and the crowded Q85. Passengers from Rosedale desiring a speedy trip into Jamaica would have to transfer to a limited bus at Brewer Boulevard and 147th Avenue, buses which would be crowded with

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Miriam Rosenberg, “New Routes For Old Bus Lines”, \textit{(The Wave of Long Island}, 16 March 2007).}
\item \footnote{“MTA Transit & Bus Committee Meeting: July 2014”.}
\item \footnote{“MTA Transit & Bus Committee Meeting: July 2014”; “Bus Timetable Effective Fall 2015: Q111,” \textit{(MTA Bus Company}}, September 2015).}
\item \footnote{“Bus Timetable: Q111.”}
\end{itemize}
passengers from the Rockaways and Nassau County at the transfer point. This was pointed out by local residents when the Q114 was implemented.\(^{165}\)

South of 147th Avenue

All three buses of the Brewer Boulevard corridor run in some capacity south of the case study area into Nassau County. The Far Rockaway-bound Q113 and Q114 Limiteds operate in Nassau County during all trips, crossing the Idlewild/Hook Creek wetlands that form the county border. The current Q113 no longer makes stops south of mainland Queens except for two stops at the Five Towns Shopping Center (technically located in the Queens neighborhood of Meadowmere). It instead crosses the marsh via the wide and well-maintained Rockaway Boulevard before turning onto the Nassau Expressway towards Far Rockaway. The Q114, meanwhile, operates on Brookville Boulevard, which south of Rosedale resembles roads found in rural America and third-world nations. The bus route was moved onto the road from Rockaway Boulevard when it was the Q113 local sometime after 1975. Nicknamed “Snake Road” at this location, the road consists of two narrow lanes winding back and forth through the marsh with surprisingly-heavy traffic and no side barriers to prevent the inevitable spillover of vehicles into the waters. It acts as a “shortcut” for travel between mainland New York City and the Rockaways, to avoid the traffic on Rockaway Boulevard, Cross Bay Boulevard, and Flatbush Avenue (the other three vehicular routes, the latter from Brooklyn), and the required toll to cross the bridges via Cross Bay and Flatbush. In addition to frequent flooding, numerous accidents – including motorists driving off the road into the wetlands, and cars crossing the double yellow line into head-on collisions – have sparked calls to elevate the road onto a highway trestle and add additional wider lanes, or at least add guardrails on the edges of the route. Because of the area’s status as a nature preserve, however, alterations to the route require a special permit from

166 “1975 Queens Bus Map”.
the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), a permit which has yet to be awarded. Even major cleanup projects for the wetlands, frequent dumping sites for trash and abandoned automobiles, require this special permit. A crash on the road involving a Q114 bus could be a devastating loss of lives.

_Potential Select Bus Service_

While the Merrick Boulevard corridor and the less-used Sutphin Boulevard corridor of the Q6 are mapped as potential Southeast Queens Select Bus Service routes, the Brewer Boulevard corridor is not shown as part of SBS Phase II. The Pratt Center, however, included the corridor between Jamaica and Far Rockaway as one of its eight priority corridors in its 2013 report, ranking fifth in priority as a “Second Tier Corridor”. The Pratt Center views the corridor as an important and affordable connector between the Jamaica hub and the Rockaways, with BRT service having the potential to cut travel times between the two neighborhoods on the Q113 and Q114 from over an hour to around 55 minutes.  


168 “Introduction to BUS RAPID TRANSIT PHASE II,” pg. 28-29; “Mobility and Equity for New York’s Transit-Starved Neighborhoods”, pg. 25.
Jamaica Center Bus Terminal

Within the Downtown Jamaica transit hub there are three focal points that bus service revolves around. At the western end of the district along Sutphin Boulevard is the Jamaica LIRR and AirTrain JFK terminal along with the Sutphin Boulevard station of the Archer Avenue subway. Several routes run through this area along Sutphin Boulevard, Jamaica Avenue, or Archer Avenue. At Parsons Boulevard between Jamaica and Archer Avenues is the Jamaica Center hub, where the Archer Avenue subway terminates. This is one of the major commercial hot beds in the area. This has also historically been the center of transportation and commerce in Downtown Jamaica, when trolley lines from northern and southern Queens intersected at 160th Street one block east of Parsons, while LIRR service and several bus lines revolved around the now-closed Union Hall Street station two blocks east. A few bus lines also terminate at Hillside Avenue and Parsons Boulevard near the F train station, including the Brewer Boulevard routes. The third focal point stretches from 165th Street to about 170th Street at the eastern end of the Jamaica business district. Originally hosting the 168th Street elevated terminal of the BMT Jamaica Line (which was replaced by the Archer Avenue subway), this hub now revolves around the 165th Street Bus Terminal and 169th Street station of the F line, as well as the 165th Street Pedestrian Mall and Jamaica Colosseum Mall (the latter formerly a large Macy’s location).

The busiest of the three hubs is Jamaica Center, where all four Merrick Boulevard routes currently terminate. The routes use a dedicated terminal area located on the south side of Archer

---

171 “After a Long Slide, Hope for Jamaica”
Avenue along the LIRR trestle. The two-block-long terminal features five loading bays lettered A through H, along with a layover area for out-of-service buses. The easternmost block at Parsons Boulevard contains Bays A-E, where the Q4, Q5 and Q85 Merrick routes, the Q83 operating along Liberty Avenue, and the Q25, Q34 and Q65 buses (former Queens Surface routes) to Flushing and northern Queens stop. A bus stop adjacent to Bay E facilitates outbound Q30 and Q31 buses to Bayside and Little Neck, along with Q20, Q24, and Q44 SBS buses which alight passengers here before terminating around 168th Street and Merrick Boulevard. The second block, separated from the main terminal by 153rd Street, has three small bays facilitating the Q84 along Merrick Boulevard, the Q42 (a weekday-only shuttle route serving the isolated Addisleigh Park area of St. Albans), and the n4 and n4x towards Freeport in Nassau County. This is the location of the bus layover area, also referred to as the “Teardrop Canopy”. In addition to bus stops, there are three designated dollar van areas: two at Parsons Boulevard and Archer Avenue, and one on 153rd Street at Archer Avenue.  

Currently, each individual bus route stops at its own designated bus-loading bay. The Q5, Q85, and Q4 utilize the first three bays (A, B, and C) respectively, which are all double-length bays accommodating two buses. These three bays are split to divide passengers of local and limited service. At Bay A for example, Q5 local buses to 231st Street or Green Acres are signed to stop at the front of the bay, while limited buses and off-peak local buses bound for Rosedale station are designated to stop in the middle of the bay (though as seen above, buses may park at either stop regardless of their destination). Bay D is used by the Q83 and Q83 Limited, while Bay E is used by the three former Queens Surface routes. This setup can create problems for

---

172 “Jamaica Bus Improvement Study,” (NYCDOT, 17 May 2011); Ivan Peralta, “Jamaica’s dollar vans alter routes to avoid jams,” (Times Ledger, 23 December 2011).
Merrick Boulevard passengers on the shared northern portion of the corridor – the busiest portion of the corridor – or for Q5 and Q85 passengers towards Green Acres. Passengers on these portions of the corridor should be able to take any of the four Merrick bus routes to their destination, but are instead forced to select one bay to wait at, risking missing the next arriving bus to take them to their destination. For example, if a passenger is waiting at Bay A at the east end of the block and a Q4 pulls up to Bay C at the middle of the block, the passenger may not see the bus with their view obstructed by other passengers or buses, or may not be able to board due to long lines for that route. Meanwhile, the fourth Merrick Boulevard route – the Q84 – does not even stop on this block, but rather at Bay F at the westernmost block. Thus, instead of supplementing the other three routes, the Q84 only serves passengers traveling along 120th Avenue to Laurelton at the east end of its route.

A bay that could be used by the Q84 – Bay E – is instead designated for the Q25, Q34, and Q65 buses. While these are major routes connecting Jamaica and Flushing, very few passengers board these buses at Bay E. Instead, most riders take these buses at Jamaica Avenue and Parsons Boulevard one block north, closer to commercial activity in the area. Many other passengers board from the Sutphin Boulevard subway and LIRR station where the routes begin service. The Bay E buses also tend to stop in the middle of the dedicated bus-through lane, as opposed to the curbside loading lane. There are several reasons for this. For one, the buses after leaving the terminal must cut across all three lanes of traffic on Archer Avenue in order to turn left onto Parsons Boulevard towards northern Queens. In addition, MTA dispatcher vehicles are often parked in Bay E’s loading lane, preventing buses from turning in anyway. This, along with
the adjacent bus stop for outbound Q30 and Q31 buses which is also in the bus lane, has the potential to create bottlenecks for all bus service on Archer Avenue.
Current Express Bus Service

Considering that Southeast Queens is such a large and transit-isolated area, it is shocking that a total of four express bus services serve the entire sector.\(^{173}\) By comparison, a total of ten express bus services run in the similarly sized Northeast Queens area.\(^{174}\) The primary routes in Southeast Queens are the X63 and X64 of the New York City Transit brand, and the QM21 (a former Jamaica Bus route) under MTA Bus. The X63 begins in the pocket of Rosedale served by the Q85 and Q111, running along the routing of a former Q5 shuttle service (the Q5S or Q86). It proceeds along the Q5 route on Merrick Boulevard to Linden Boulevard, then west on Linden Boulevard (along the former Q9A/Q89 route which was discontinued in 2010), before running along the Van Wyck Expressway and Queens Boulevard towards Midtown Manhattan. The route makes a total of 21 stops in Queens.\(^ {175}\) The QM21 begins in Rochdale Village, looping around the entire development. It then runs along Brewer Boulevard north to Linden Boulevard, before joining the X63’s route to Manhattan. The QM21 is very much an enclave express route, primarily serving Rochdale Village residents.\(^ {176}\) The X64 begins at the Q4’s terminal in Cambria Heights, paralleling it to Farmers Boulevard. It then follows the routes of the Q83 and Q112 buses before joining the other two express routes at the Van Wyck.\(^ {177}\) The fourth route, the NYCT-operated X68, runs along Hillside Avenue, only serving the northern portion of the area.

\(^{174}\) “Queens Bus Map”; “Northeast Queens Bus Study.”
\(^{177}\) “Queens Bus Map”; “Bus Timetable Effective as of September 6, 2015: X64,” (MTA New York City Transit, January 2015).
The routes make only two stops along the Van Wyck and Queens Boulevard, at Main Street at the Briarwood – Van Wyck subway station, and at the Kew Gardens – Union Turnpike station (the QM21 does not serve this stop). The X68 meanwhile makes no stops on Hillside Avenue west of 165th Street, also stopping at the Briarwood and Union Turnpike stations. This, however, is not indicated well on the Queens Bus Map, which implies that numerous stops are made along these sections.179

Unlike the express buses in Northeast Queens, which provide frequent and bidirectional service at many times of the weekday and weekend, the four Southeast Queens routes operate only a single peak direction (towards Manhattan AM; towards Queens PM) during the busiest weekday rush hour periods. At best, each route operates at 10-20 minute intervals during each period. This amounts to eleven morning trips for the X63 and eight for the X64. The QM21 operates even more sporadically at this time, with seven morning trips on thirty-minute headways. The afternoon service from Manhattan on the X64 and QM21 route is also infrequent and at a premium; nine trips for the QM21 on thirty-minute headways, and six for the X64 at 25-to-33-minute intervals.180 In addition, while the express buses are more affordable than the LIRR and less crowded than the bus-subway combo trip, the express bus trip can be the slowest of the three options. A 2007 study on transit options in Southeast Queens by The Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA called express buses in the area “the worst of all of the commute mode choices” based on cost and travel time.181

180 “A Little Land That the Subway Forgot”; “Bus Timetable: QM21.”
Southeast Queens Transit Expansion History

The first two modes of public transportation in Southeast Queens were the Long Island Rail Road, and several streetcar lines, which all began service by the late 1800s. At that time, the primary LIRR line was the Atlantic Branch to Brooklyn, and the railroad’s operation was more akin to a rapid transit service (in fact called the “Atlantic Avenue Rapid Transit System”) with closely-spaced stations. Many of these stations were later closed due to grade-elimination projects or low ridership, including several in Southeast Queens. Among the several streetcar lines in the area was the Far Rockaway Line along New York Avenue (today’s Brewer Boulevard), which primarily served the Jamaica Racetrack; the site is now Rochdale Village. The first bus services in the area, predecessor to the Q4 and Q5 routes, began around 1920. The BMT Jamaica elevated (then the BMT Broadway El) was extended from Richmond Hill to 168th Street under the Dual Contracts in 1918. The Far Rockaway streetcar would be motorized with buses in late-1933, the predecessor to the Q111 and Q113 buses.

Southeast Queens was the last frontier during the pre-WWII subway expansion plans. Under the IND Second System, in addition to the extension of the IND Queens Boulevard Line east to the end of Hillside Avenue, two other extensions of original IND lines were planned in

---

182 “Brooklyn’s Fatal Rapid Transit,” (The New York Times, 2 October 1878); “RAPID TRANSIT AFFAIRS; Opinion to be Had on Extent of Commission’s Jurisdiction; The Board May Take Up the Atlantic Avenue Project-Plans for Breaking Ground for the Tunnel,” (The New York Times, 8 March 1900); “25 Years Ago in Queens, As reported in the columns of The Daily Star in 1901,” (Long Island Daily Star, 27 January 1926).
184 The Story of the Long Island Electric Railway and the Jamaica Central Railways, 1894-1933.
187 The Story of the Long Island Electric Railway and the Jamaica Central Railways, pg. 46, 51; “Jamaica Buses To Inaugurate New Service: Ceremony Will Be Held Tomorrow in Opening Routes to Southeast,” (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 10 November 1933).
the area. The first would have been a spur of the Queens Boulevard line along Van Wyck Boulevard (now the Van Wyck Expressway) south to Rockaway Boulevard (the northern boundary of the yet-to-be-built JFK Airport). This would have only served the western edge of “Greater Jamaica”, along with South Ozone Park. The trunk line of the region would have been an east-west extension of the IND Fulton Street Line stretching from Brooklyn through Ozone Park and Southeast Queens to the Nassau County line. The 1929 proposal sought to recapture the eastern portion of the BMT’s Fulton Street El (which the subway was replacing in stages) along Liberty Avenue in Queens, and extend it along Liberty and Hollis Avenues to Springfield Boulevard in Queens Village. The 1939 plans, meanwhile, sought to construct an entirely new subway east of the Euclid Avenue terminal in East New York, Brooklyn. It would run under Pitkin Avenue and Linden Boulevard to Cambria Heights. Both proposals would facilitate a spur along the LIRR’s Rockaway Beach Branch, leading to the Rockaway peninsula. The Fulton Street extension would have been one of the longest, and likely one of the most expensive extensions of an existing line under the Second System. By 1939, the Fulton Street subway had only been constructed and opened up to Rockaway Avenue in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The next stage of the line, between Broadway Junction and Euclid Avenue, only consisted of station shells which remained dormant during World War II. The new line to Queens would have to be built across the Brooklyn-Queens border and through to the Nassau County line, requiring at least three phases of construction.

188 Raskin, The Routes Not Taken; Alfred Jaffe, “Borough Subway Relief Still 2 or 3 Years Off,” (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 6 December 1946), pg. 1, 5.
189 Raskin, The Routes Not Taken; “Borough Subway Relief Still 2 or 3 Years Off,” pg. 1, 5; Paul Blauvelt, “Shortages Snarl $50,000,000 Tube Links: Deprive Culver, Fulton St. Lines Of Fast Service,” (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 9 June 1946); “Trains Roll on $47,000,000 Fulton St. Subway Extension,” (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 29 November 1948).
Several provisions for the Queens extension were included in the original construction of the Fulton Street subway, the most notorious being an alleged phantom station at 76th Street under Pitkin Avenue in Ozone Park. World War II and the supplies shortage following the war, however, killed any chance to build the massive extension. The eastern Fulton El would be recaptured and opened for subway service on April 29, 1956, only extending service to the existing Lefferts Boulevard terminal adjoining Ozone Park and Richmond Hill. The two Fulton El extensions would be revived in the 1960s, with a routing change sending the proposed line south down Merrick Boulevard to Springfield Boulevard instead of east to Cambria Heights and Queens Village. The extensions, however, would not make it into the Program for Action. Except for the ongoing search by transit buffs for the phantom station at 76th Street, the Fulton Street subway extension would never be heard of again.

Under the 1968 Program for Action, much of the focus was put on providing rapid transit to isolated pockets of Queens. The crown jewel of the Queens extensions was the “63rd Street-Southeast Queens Line”, a combination of the 63rd Street and Archer Avenue Lines (the only two lines two be completed under the plan), a “super express” bypass of the Queens Boulevard subway, and a Southeast Queens line emerging from the upper Archer Avenue level. The Southeast Queens line would be built along the LIRR’s Atlantic Branch east and south of Jamaica Center, parallel to Brewer Boulevard and Merrick Boulevard, ending at a new station.

---

190 Raskin, The Routes Not Taken; “Complete Text of TA’s Queens Subway Plan”; “TUNNEL VISION; Next Stop, ‘Twilight Zone’ (a k a 76th St. Station).”
193 Raskin, The Routes Not Taken”; “TUNNEL VISION; Next Stop, ‘Twilight Zone’ (a k a 76th St. Station).”
above Springfield Boulevard adjacent to the current Laurelton station. Because it would use an existing right-of-way (ROW), adding two tracks outside those of the current Atlantic Branch and upgrading present stations, it would have been quick and relatively inexpensive to construct as opposed to an all-new subway line. The cost of the Archer and Atlantic Branch projects was estimated at $100 million. The Archer Avenue and Southeast Queens lines, along with the removal of the BMT Jamaica El, were part of major renewal movements in Downtown Jamaica, South Jamaica, and the rest of Southeast Queens. The initial, and arguably the most expensive portions of the line were constructed along with the Archer Avenue subway in the 1970s and 1980s. This consisted of a tunnel extending from the end of the Jamaica Center upper level and underneath the LIRR Main Line, ending around South Road across from the South Jamaica Houses. Preliminary engineering studies were also undertaken along the LIRR Atlantic ROW. The only steps left were the construction of a ramp or portal between the subway and the LIRR, and the inexpensive installation of new track and station infrastructure for subway service.

The Southeast Queens line never saw the light of day, nor did the planned extension of the lower level Archer subway along Jamaica Avenue to Hollis. The Archer Avenue subway finally opened on December 11, 1988; the eastern BMT El along Jamaica Avenue had been closed and demolished a decade earlier, eliminating subway service east of Parsons Boulevard.

---


195 “Program for Action”, pg. 4-9, 19-21, 25; “Complete Text of TA’s Queens Subway Plan”; “A Sentimental Journey on the BMT…”; “No. 7 Subway Extension: Chapter 1: Project Purpose and Need,” pg. 18-19; “After a Long Slide, Hope for Jamaica”.


197 Raskin, *The Routes Not Taken*.

198 “Work Begun on Queens Subway Extension.”


As part of the subway opening, the Merrick Boulevard bus routes were moved from Hillside Avenue to the new bus terminal at Jamaica Center in order to feed into the new subway.\[201\]

Southeast Queens Proposed Changes
Atlantic Branch Subway

The most effective and ambitious plan to improve transit in Southeast Queens is to extend rapid transit service through the area. While lack of funding and the current transit climate would normally make this an unlikely option, and though local associations would oppose new rail construction, current LIRR projects provide a unique opportunity to expand subway service into the area. The East Side Access project, set to open in December 2022, will create a second Manhattan entry point for the LIRR via the Main Line and the lower level of the 63rd Street tunnel. With two Manhattan terminals at Penn Station and Grand Central, service on the LIRR’s western Atlantic Branch – used by some commuters to transfer to subway service at Atlantic Avenue/Barclays Center in Downtown Brooklyn – will see decreased ridership. Thus, the LIRR plans to divert most trains to the Manhattan terminals, and turn the western Atlantic Branch into a shuttle service or “Scoot” service between Jamaica and the Atlantic terminal, primarily serving the Barclays Center. The only plan to bring Atlantic Branch commuter service into Manhattan – i.e. the only impediment in conversion of the line into subway service – is the Lower Manhattan Rail Link, the successor to a proposal from the 1968 Program for Action, which would feed LIRR and AirTrain JFK service into a new or existing tunnel towards Lower Manhattan, but has made little progress.

---

202 “Eastern Queens Alliance White Paper.”
As opposed to instituting a Brooklyn-Jamaica shuttle, which will see low ridership, the entire Atlantic Branch between Atlantic Terminal and Rosedale should be transferred to the New York City Transit Authority and converted into a genuine subway line. Several proposals for an Atlantic Branch Rapid Transit line have been published by the *Regional Planning Association*, including their 1999 “MetroLink” plan and their 2015 “Overlooked Boroughs” report. The RPA ultimately envisions linking the line with a completed Second Avenue Subway in Lower Manhattan, via a new river tunnel between Lower Manhattan and Downtown Brooklyn. The 2015 report suggests transforming both sections of the Atlantic Branch (west of Jamaica station along Atlantic Avenue, and south/east of Jamaica in Southeast Queens) into a subway line, extending from Atlantic Terminal to the Rosedale station, the last station on the branch within Queens. The *RPA* recommends triple-tracking the line, either creating a peak-direction express track similar to that on the IRT Flushing Line (7 train) and other subway lines, or facilitating unidirectional LIRR service separated from the bi-directional subway service.\(^{205}\)

The new line would act as a supplement to the parallel IND Fulton Street and BMT Jamaica Lines, providing express service through Brooklyn. It would also provide a direct subway link from Jamaica to Downtown Brooklyn and the Barclays Center, which currently does not exist. Subway riders continuing into Manhattan would have a free transfer to the massive Atlantic Avenue/Pacific Street subway complex, with access to both IRT Manhattan Lines, the BMT Broadway Line, and the IND Sixth Avenue Line, along with various BMT routes to Coney Island.

New Atlantic Subway Stops

Should the Atlantic Branch be converted into rapid transit in its current state, the new service would make a total of seven stops: Atlantic Terminal, Nostrand Avenue, East New York, Jamaica, Locust Manor, Laurelton, and Rosedale. With the line now operating as an intra-city subway and not a long-distance commuter railroad, however, resources would have to be invested to serve local Queens and Brooklyn residents by adding new stations. Because the much of the Atlantic Branch west of Jamaica is located in a shallow tunnel underneath Atlantic Avenue, adding stations to this portion of the route would be expensive while generating major disturbances for local communities and traffic on the heavily-used Atlantic Avenue. Thus, stops should only be added at major junctions and where economically feasible. Under my plan, only one stop at Utica Avenue would be considered. This portion of the line rests on a steel elevated trestle similar to elevated subway lines, which would allow speedy construction of the new stop. Local service would be provided by the Fulton Line (C train) and the Jamaica Line (J/Z), which lie two blocks or less north of the Atlantic Branch.

Between East New York and Jamaica, a dormant LIRR station on the border of the Woodhaven and Richmond Hill neighborhoods in Queens would be reopened for subway
service. This station, Woodhaven Junction, was closed in 1976 due to low patronage. It previously served as a major transfer point (hence the name “Junction”) to the Rockaway Beach Branch, which was once the most popular LIRR route serving the beaches of the Rockaway peninsula, but declined following the Rockaway branch’s closure in 1962.\(^{206}\) The recommissioned station would provide access to Woodhaven Boulevard, and could once again serve as a junction should the northern Rockaway Branch be connected to the Queens Boulevard Line and reactivated for subway service, a plan which dates back to the IND Second System.\(^{207}\)

New stops east of Jamaica station within the Southeast Queens area, on the other hand, would be quick and inexpensive to install, with significant open space located on the sides of the Atlantic ROW. These would consist of side platforms bracketing the current rail tracks. The stops would be more frequent and much closer spaced on this portion of the route, to provide convenient service in a region currently without subway service. The new station sites would be between 108\(^{th}\) and 109\(^{th}\) Avenues (adjacent to the South Jamaica Housing Complex), between Linden and Brewer Boulevards, and at Baisley Boulevard at the north end of Rochdale Village. In addition, the Laurelton station would be relocated a short distance west to Springfield Boulevard to better serve residents on both sides of the boulevard, as well as the high schools of the nearby Springfield Gardens Educational Complex. The Rosedale station, the eastern/southern terminal for the line, would also be reconfigured, adding switches to turn-around trains. A new LIRR station along the adjacent Montauk Branch would be constructed to replace the Atlantic Branch station, creating a subway-LIRR transfer point. The Locust Manor station at the south

---

\(^{206}\) Gregory Bresiger, “The Trains Stopped Running Here 50 Years Ago,” (Queens Gazette, 18 July 2012).

end of Rochdale Village would be the only existing station in Queens to remain largely untouched.

Below is new stop pattern on the Atlantic Branch Subway, with new stops listed in bold:

- Atlantic Terminal (renamed “Atlantic Avenue – Barclays Center”)
- Nostrand Avenue
- **Utica Avenue**
- East New York (renamed “East New York – Atlantic Avenue” or “Broadway Junction”)
- **Woodhaven Junction**
- Jamaica (renamed “Jamaica – Sutphin Boulevard” or “Sutphin Boulevard – JFK”)
- **109th Avenue – South Jamaica**
- **Linden Boulevard – Brewer Boulevard**
- **Baisley Boulevard**
- Locust Manor (renamed “Locust Manor – Farmers Boulevard”)
- **Springfield Boulevard** (replacing the Laurelton station)
- Rosedale (renamed “Rosedale – Francis Lewis Boulevard”)


The Jamaica LIRR terminal; platform C and tracks 4 and 5 are located to the left; Atlantic Branch trains to Brooklyn stop at track 3 to the right.
Author: D. Robert Wolcheck, via Wikimedia Commons.

Reconfiguration of the Jamaica Station for Rapid Transit

If the Atlantic Branch is converted into a subway line, its operations would have to be separated from LIRR commuter service as much as possible. This includes eliminating most switches between the Atlantic Branch and other LIRR tracks, and designating a platform at the Jamaica terminal exclusively for subway service. There are currently five passenger platforms at the station (labeled north-to-south, A through E), serving eight tracks (labeled 1 through 9). There are also several tracks on each side of the station which bypass the station and merge with the Main Line tracks east and west of the station. To the very north and south of the station are layup or yard tracks (through-tracks on the north side, and dead-end tracks to the south) used for storage of trains. The southernmost of these yard tracks constitute the Johnson Avenue rail yard. An additional large storage and interlocking (switching) complex (the Morris Park Shops, Jamaica Storage Yard, and MET Interlocking) is located west of the Van Wyck Expressway,
where the LIRR tracks diverge into the four-track Main Line and two-track Montauk and Atlantic Branches. East of the station, only the Atlantic Branch diverges south while the remaining eight tracks continue on as the Main Line. As such, the track work in and around Jamaica is extremely complex, with various switches between the numerous tracks, and crossover switches allowing trains to reverse direction.208

Currently, the two tracks of the eastern Atlantic Branch from Southeast Queens feed directly into tracks 4 and 5 at Jamaica, which are accessed at platform C. In between the two Atlantic East tracks are two dead-end layup tracks, which merge into tracks 4 and 5 just before the station. However, with the configuration of the switches, Atlantic Branch trains from Nassau County can feed into nearly every track that platforms at Jamaica. Trains to Brooklyn in the current configuration begin at track 3 of Platform B. West of the station, trains from both platform B and C can feed into the Main Line, Montauk, or Atlantic Branches, crossing over various tracks in the process. Passing the Morris Park Shops, where there is an employee-only station (Boland’s Landing), the Atlantic Branch enters the portal to the tunnel underneath Atlantic Avenue at 121st Street and continues towards Brooklyn.209

As part of the East Side Access Project, the tracks around Jamaica are being reconfigured by the MTA in order to separate the planned Brooklyn–Jamaica service of the Atlantic Branch from the remaining tracks which will now feed mainly into the Main Line. Under this plan, the MTA plans to create a new platform (Platform F) south of the existing platforms, using the bypass tracks adjacent to the Johnson Avenue Yard. The new two-track island platform would be

---

208 “MTA Capital Program Oversight Committee Meeting: June 2014; East Side Access Readiness Projects,” (MTA, June 2014), pg. 49-54.
fed into from the west by the Brooklyn Atlantic Branch and the Lower Montauk Branch (freight only) from western and central Queens. East of the station, however, trains from platform F would only be able to access the Main Line and eastern Montauk Branch, while the eastern Atlantic Branch would not be accessible from the platform.\(^{210}\)

There are two possibilities to create a new platform for the Atlantic Branch subway line. The first would be to reserve platform C and tracks 4 and 5 for exclusive subway service, with no new tracks or support trestles to be constructed, but nearly all switches between other LIRR tracks eliminated. East of the station, only two switches would be eliminated, with the middle layup tracks maintained for subway service. West of the station, several switches would be eliminated and two distinct Atlantic Branch tracks would be created between the station and the tunnel portal. Two connecting switches between the subway and the LIRR would be maintained at the Morris Park Shops; one to the north connecting with the northern three tracks of Jamaica terminal, and one to the south feeding into the southern bypass tracks. These connections would be used for equipment transfers, including the transfer of subway cars into the Atlantic Branch. Platform-level fare control areas (i.e. turnstiles on the platform) would be installed onto platform C. The drawbacks to this plan are the elimination of LIRR capacity and connections at Jamaica, and any possibility of continued LIRR service along the eastern Atlantic Branch.

The second option is to continue with the construction of the new Platform F between the current LIRR terminal and the AirTrain JFK station. As opposed to the current Jamaica reconfiguration project, which maintains many of the complicated track crossings that currently exist,\(^{211}\) the subway plan would create a separated right-of-way between the Morris Park facility

\(^{210}\) “East Side Access Readiness Projects,” pg. 49-54.
\(^{211}\) “East Side Access Readiness Projects,” pg. 49-54.
and Platform F, with the southern bypass tracks and Johnson Avenue Yard now exclusively serving subway trains. West of the station, at least one new bridge would have to be constructed to cross the Van Wyck Expressway. East of the station, a new connection would also have to be built to connect to the eastern Atlantic trestle. This opens the possibility of maintaining the current LIRR connection, and adding tracks in Southeast Queens for joint LIRR and subway service along the line. Under this plan, the Atlantic subway would make all stops within Queens, while at least one track would be added for LIRR trains to and from Long Island which would run non-stop between Jamaica and Rosedale.
E Train Connection / Southeast Queens Subway

The potential capture of the Atlantic Branch for rapid transit would be the logical precursor to finally completing the E train extension from the Archer Avenue upper level through Southeast Queens. But in spite of the fact that only two blocks of new track would have to be built, several issues still impede the progress of the line. Aside from the fund raising and bureaucracy involved in the process, the main issue is how to go about connecting the two lines with minimal disturbances to the local South Jamaica community remains. When the Southeast Queens line was proposed in 1968, the area in which the line would be connected with the LIRR was a slum earmarked for clearance. In 1970, however, the city revealed plans to construct a new campus for the historically-orphaned CUNY York College. The new campus would be constructed on a six-block span between the LIRR Main Line to the north, South Road at its
south end, 165th Street to the east, and 157th Street to the west, with 160th Street (the road under which the E train tail tracks would be laid) running through the middle of the new campus. At the time, this would have been the ideal situation; two major construction projects working in conjunction with each other, as opposed to one new project disturbing a completed project. The 1970 New York Times article announcing the York College plan stated the campus was “Designed in conjunction with a planned IND subway station for the area”. This implied that the campus would be built around the rail connection, without disturbing any existing structures. But while the Southeast Queens subway was killed by the city’s fiscal crisis, the York College project – while deferred by the crisis and declining enrollment – began construction in 1980 and was completed eight years later.

No matter what the mode of construction – ramp to the surface, or tunnel underground – is used to join the E line’s tail tracks with the LIRR, the connection will have to be built through occupied property. Which property would be disturbed depends largely on where the tunnel ends. The Program for Action plans stated to build the line to South Road or just past South Road, but ventilation grates for the tunnel end one block north at Liberty Avenue. Should the tunnel end at Liberty Avenue, the connection could cut across the York College athletic complex, disturbing few local residences but running the risk of uprooting a cemetery on that

---

block opened in the early 1900s. Otherwise, the connection would have to slice through part of the South Jamaica Houses.

Now, before contemplating the morality of demolishing housing to promote transit for local residents, here is some backstory. The South Jamaica Houses or “40 Projects”, themselves a product of slum clearance in the 1940s and 1950s, were once considered a success as one of the New York City Housing Authority’s first public housing projects. The first tenants of the buildings were people who previously lived without basic sanitation and plumbing, or in structures with substandard and unsafe construction. From the 1970s through the 1990s, however, the South Jamaica area including the complex was ravaged by the 1970s fiscal crisis and ensuing heroin and crack cocaine epidemics, leading to poverty and high rates of violent crime in the neighborhood. The 40 Projects were the headquarters of the Corley gang, a major distributor of crack in the area. Drug raids of the projects have occurred as recently as 2012, in which gang-namesake James Corley was among the suspects. Today, the complex like other NYCHA sites suffers from maintenance and safety issues, including the seepage of sewage into residential units within the complex. As opposed to building around the housing complex, the

---

E train connection could facilitate the construction of new modern and attractive housing to replace the outdated South Jamaica Houses.

The new housing facilities could be mid-to-high density apartments similar in capacity to the current 40 Projects. Potential designs of the new structures are an afterthought at this point; personally I prefer steel-framed glass buildings, while brick facades would blend better with the surrounding community. Alternately, the replacement housing could consists of private and/or low-density housing, such as the rowhouses and townhouses built by the Nehemiah/East Brooklyn Congregations (EBC) group in the eastern Brooklyn neighborhoods of Brownsville, East New York, Spring Creek. The original Nehemiah houses built in the 1980s consist of classic brick structures. The newer 21st Century houses in Spring Creek, on the other hand, are prefabricated and modular, quick and inexpensive to build.220 The Spring Creek neighborhood features several

potential new housing models to be applied in other neighborhoods, including the Nehemiah homes and the Gateway Elton Street apartments.\textsuperscript{221} The most important feature of the Nehemiah houses, and any new housing initiative for South Jamaica, is providing an inviting exterior facade and a high-quality interior living space, something the 40 Projects currently do not provide.\textsuperscript{222}

The subway ramp and associated housing-replacement project, however, will necessitate the displacement the current residents of the northern portion of the complex, and possibly several key institutions of the South Jamaica community. These institutions include the Jamaica Day Nursery and the South Jamaica Community Center, which are located in the southern half of the complex but would be relocated if the entire complex were to be replaced by new development.\textsuperscript{223}

\textsuperscript{222} “Affordable Houses Infused With Color”; “Spring Creek Nehemiah is an affordable housing success story in East New York.”
\textsuperscript{223} “MTA Neighborhoods Maps: Jamaica”.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corridor</th>
<th>Routes</th>
<th>Yearly Ridership (2014)</th>
<th>Select Bus Service Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study Routes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merrick Boulevard</td>
<td>Q4, Q4 LTD, Q5, Q5 LTD, Q84, Q85, Q85 LTD</td>
<td>12,173,237</td>
<td>Cancelled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brewer Boulevard/147th Avenue</td>
<td>Q111, Q113 LTD, Q114 LTD</td>
<td>7,549,635</td>
<td>Not part of MTA/DOT plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current SBS Corridors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125th Street-LaGuardia Airport*</td>
<td>M60 SBS, M100, M101, M101 LTD, Bx15, Bx15 LTD</td>
<td>29,675,701 (all)</td>
<td>Yes (M60 SBS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34th Street Crosstown</td>
<td>M34 SBS, M34A SBS</td>
<td>4,695,446</td>
<td>Yes (all routes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86th Street Crosstown</td>
<td>M86 SBS, M15, M15 SBS</td>
<td>7,441,506</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86th Street Crosstown</td>
<td>M86 SBS, M15, M15 SBS</td>
<td>15,604,594</td>
<td>Yes (M15 SBS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fordham Road/Pelham Parkway</td>
<td>Bx12, Bx12 SBS</td>
<td>15,812,906</td>
<td>Yes (Bx12 SBS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hylan Boulevard/Statem Island-Bay Ridge**</td>
<td>S59, S78, S79 SBS</td>
<td>6,727,011 (all)</td>
<td>Yes (S79 SBS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,467,887 (S79 only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nostrand Avenue</td>
<td>B44, B44 SBS</td>
<td>11,581,754</td>
<td>Yes (B44 SBS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Street/Flushing-Jamaica-Bronx</td>
<td>Q20A/B, Q44 SBS</td>
<td>13,462,174</td>
<td>Yes (Q44 SBS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webster Avenue</td>
<td>Bx41, Bx41 SBS</td>
<td>8,040,613</td>
<td>Yes (Bx41 SBS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planned SBS Corridors under SBS Phase II</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23rd Street Crosstown</td>
<td>M23</td>
<td>4,195,268</td>
<td>Proposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Bronx Crosstown</td>
<td>Bx6</td>
<td>7,556,781</td>
<td>Proposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Brooklyn Crosstown</td>
<td>B6, B6 LTD</td>
<td>13,396,076 (B6)</td>
<td>Proposed (B82 prioritized)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crosstown</td>
<td>B82, B82 LTD</td>
<td>8,749,097 (B82)</td>
<td>Planned (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utica Avenue</td>
<td>B46, B46 LTD</td>
<td>15,122,138</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodhaven-Cross Bay/Elmhurst-Rockaways</td>
<td>Q11, Q21, Q52 LTD, Q53 LTD</td>
<td>9,189,950</td>
<td>Planned (2017; Q52/Q53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsons-Kissena Blvds/Flushing-Jamaica 2 Woodside-Jackson Hts-LaGuardia Connector</td>
<td>Q25, Q25 LTD, Q34</td>
<td>8,101,138</td>
<td>Planned (2016; Q25 LTD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q70 LTD</td>
<td>6,267,728 (Q25 only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant portions of these routes operate on other major corridors. Only the M60 SBS travels to LaGuardia Airport.
**The S59 serves Hylan Boulevard rush hours only. Only the S79 SBS enters Brooklyn.

Ridership numbers from “Annual Bus Ridership” and “Annual MTA Bus Ridership”, *MTA*
Merrick Boulevard Select Bus Service

In order to improve bus service along Southeast Queens’ busiest surface corridor, the city should resurrect the Select Bus Service plans for Merrick Boulevard. The corridor has comparable ridership to current and planned SBS corridors (see Figure 3), and serve a passenger base highly-isolated from rail service and the rest of the city. Under the plan, the Q5 Limited would be upgraded into an SBS service, with the possibility of converting the other two limited-stop services (Q4 and Q85) into SBS routes. Converting both the Q5 and Q85 Limited services would allow riders north of Baisley Boulevard and from Rosedale to use either bus, as opposed to choosing between the Q5 SBS and the Q85. It would also provide riders north of Baisley Boulevard – the peak ridership section – with two SBS services. In the event of a lack of funding for multiple SBS routes, the Q5 would be prioritized, due to the fact that it runs down the entire length of Merrick Boulevard, as opposed the winding route of the Q85. Converting the Q4 Limited as an additional SBS route would upgrade all limited-stop service along the corridor north of Baisley Boulevard into SBS. In addition, it would allow riders of the Q4 in Cambria Heights and St. Albans to take advantage of SBS service.

The most ideal of these plans is to upgrade all three limited services in Select Bus Service. Because this option essentially creates two SBS corridors (along both Merrick and Linden Boulevards), the Q4 could be converted at a later date. The now-SBS service would be expanded from rush hours to all-times except late nights, and would run in both directions. During late nights, the Q5 local would replace the Q5 SBS, running between Jamaica and Rosedale station.
As laid out in the original Q5 SBS pilot proposal, an additional limited-stop section would be added to the route, extending to around Francis Lewis Boulevard and 231st Street. Two new limited stops would be added – at 225th Street and Francis Lewis/231st Street – with Q5 local buses making all stops in this section of the route.\textsuperscript{224} The new Q5 SBS, however, would deviate from the original plan in the neighborhood of Rosedale. The pilot routing, which terminated at Green Acres, had only two stops in the neighborhood of Rosedale. Presumably, the Q5 local would have provided local service in this area. While this would have emulated a true BRT service pattern, it would also force riders at non-SBS stops to transfer between buses at some point, or walk long distances to the closest SBS stop.\textsuperscript{225} Under the new plan, the Q5 local would terminate at 231st Street on weekdays. The Q5 SBS, meanwhile, would operate local in Rosedale east of 231st Street, providing passengers from the most isolated portion of the corridor service that is both convenient and speedy. In order to improve travel times, however, closely-spaced or redundant stops less than a block apart would be consolidated. The number of stops between 231st Street and Green Acres would be decreased from nine to six – more than the original BRT pilot, but less than the current routing.

In addition to the implementation of SBS service, several other service changes would be instituted, which are outlined below.

\textit{New Q5 service in Rosedale}

As currently set up, the Q85 is designed to better serve riders in the middle section of its route – in Rochdale Village and Springfield Gardens between Baisley and Springfield

\textsuperscript{224} \textit{“NYCBRT Study: ITS-NY Conference June 8, 2007”}.  
\textsuperscript{225} \textit{“NYCBRT Study: ITS-NY Conference June 8, 2007”}.  
b Boulevards – but not at the end of its route in Rosedale. Commuters taking the Q85 to/from southern Rosedale along 243rd Street have to choose between one of two imperfect travel options: take the Q85 from Rosedale and transfer to a Q5 Limited at Rosedale station, or ride the Q85 all the way through Springfield Gardens and Rochdale, with no limited-stop service until (toward Jamaica) or after (from Jamaica) Baisley Boulevard. In addition, no local bus service operates on the eastern end of southern Rosedale, or south of 147th Avenue; both these areas are only served by the peak-direction X63 express bus service.

Meanwhile, most weekday Q5 service runs in only one direction on either Hook Creek Boulevard (south) or Brookville Boulevard (north), which are at opposite ends of the northern Rosedale neighborhood. On weekdays, only the occasional Q5 Green Acres trips operate northbound on Hook Creek Boulevard, while there is no southbound service on Brookville Boulevard. Meanwhile on weekends, all service operates on Hook Creek Boulevard to Green Acres with no Brookville service. None of these Q5 patterns service the southern portion of Rosedale, dependent of the Q85 and X63.

As part of the implementation of Select Bus Service, full-time bidirectional service should be provided along Hook Creek Boulevard, better serving local residents. In addition to this, a new Q5 branch should be instituted in both directions along Brookville Boulevard (the northbound leg of the Rosedale station loop), improving service for residents on the western side of Rosedale. To avoid confusion, Hook Creek service could be labeled Q5H, while Brookville service would be labeled Q5B. To alleviate the lack of service south of Conduit Avenue, the two new Q5 SBS branches should be extended south at least to 147th Avenue. The newly implemented Brookfield Boulevard branch (Q5B) should be extended south along Brookville
Boulevard (southbound) and 243rd Street (northbound) to replace the Q85, providing a speedier ride for these commuters. The Hook Creek branch (Q5H), meanwhile, would continue south along Francis Lewis Boulevard to 147th Drive/148th Avenue where the Q111 terminates; this is the current X63 route, and the former Q5S/Q86 shuttle route that was eliminated pre-2000. Q85 service to southern Rosedale would be eliminated during daytime hours; the new Q85 SBS, would now provide frequent and speedy service to Green Acres on both weekdays and weekends (see below), with short runs ending at the Rosedale station. During overnight hours, when neither Q5 branch is running and Green Acres is closed, the Q85 SBS would run to its current Rosedale terminal at 147th Avenue via Brookville and 243rd Street. Thus, the Q85 SBS would become a 24-hour route, the only SBS on the corridor to run at all times.

It should also be evaluated to extend the two Q5 branches a short distance south of 147th Avenue, where only the X63 terminates. The routes would share a terminal in this area at 253rd Street and 149th Avenue, the current X63 terminus. This is similar to the setup of the Q20A and Q20B service, which run on separate local streets in the College Point neighborhood of northern Queens to a shared-terminus at College Point Boulevard. College Point is similarly-isolated geographically to Rosedale, and has a smaller population.

*Green Acres service*

Currently, the only service from the Merrick Boulevard corridor to Green Acres mall operates local, with sparse service during peak weekday hours. On weekends, nearly all service along the corridor goes towards Green Acres, but leaves residents in southern Rosedale with minimal service to or from Jamaica via occasional Q85s. Extending full-time Select Bus Service
to the complex would provide faster and more attractive service to the mall, as very few riders would logically ride the Q5 or Q85 local all the way from Jamaica to Green Acres, especially during high-traffic periods. It would be relatively low cost since Green Acres is only a short distance away from Rosedale. The new pattern would be similar to the Bx12 SBS’s service to Bay Plaza Shopping Center, in which all service terminates at the mall in spite of the fact that most riders alight at the nearby Pelham Bay Park station. Although ridership may not be high at first, the faster and more-frequent service could increase ridership along that portion of the route, and conversely increase business at Green Acres.

Under the SBS plan, the Q85 and not the Q5 would be the full-time Green Acres route. This setup would allow the new Q5 SBS branches to provide faster service to Rosedale than currently offered by the Q85. In addition, Green Acres is the secondary eastern terminal of the corridors during weekday hours. Green Acres riders would have to traverse the winding Q85 routing, but would receive limited-stop service that is much more frequent than the current pattern. Occasional Q5 local service would also continue into Green Acres on weekdays to serve riders along Merrick Boulevard, as is done under the current setup. On weekends, Green Acres would be the priority terminal for the corridor, with all Q5 local and Q85 SBS service terminating at the mall, along with the Q5H Hook Creek branch. The Q5B would continue to travel to southern Rosedale via Brookville/243rd Street on weekends.

226 “Select Bus Service on the Bx12”.
A Q85 terminating at Green Acres Mall in Valley Stream. All Q85s would serve Green Acres under SBS service.
Source: Own work (Tdorante10), via Wikimedia Commons.

**Q85 Select Bus Service**

Currently the Q85 route runs on Merrick Boulevard along with the Q5 and Q84 from Jamaica to Baisley Boulevard, before running its own parallel route through Rochdale Village, Laurelton, and Rosedale. As part of the SBS program, all Q85 service would become limited-stop under the Q85 SBS, improving service for riders in the middle and ends of the route by speeding service through South Jamaica. The Q85 local would be entirely eliminated, as it only benefits riders north of Baisley Boulevard who could take any of the four local services along that portion of the corridor. These trips would be replaced by Q5 locals along Merrick Boulevard only, with increased Q84 service to supplement the Q5 local. As mentioned above, the Q85 SBS would be a 24-hour service.

Many of the stops south of Baisley Boulevard on the Q85 are extremely closely spaced, within less than a minute of each other. Under the new SBS program, every duo or trio of stops would be combined into a single SBS station, particularly if the stops are closely spaced or underused. The new combined stations would be placed in locations where alighting and
boarding is most frequent, or where SBS infrastructure such as ticket machines can be easily installed. This would require passengers to walk farther to the nearest bus stop, but would speed travel times for the Q85 and create a service pattern more in-line with BRT standards. For instance, the nearby stops at Baisley Boulevard/Bedell Street and 127th Avenue (East Loop 1) in Rochdale Village would be combined into a single intermediate stop, placed in the middle of the block in front of the adjacent public school facility. The new “skip-stop” pattern would be similar to the changes implemented on the Q44 route in the Bronx when it was converted into an SBS route in November 2015, in which several local stops along the Cross Bronx Expressway were eliminated to streamline service.²²⁷ The only area where close stops would be maintained is in Rochdale Village along Bedell Street (with the exception of the Baisley Boulevard stop), due to the fact that residents of the complex must walk a block from their apartments to reach Bedell Street, the side-effect of the ingenious “Tower in the Park” design of the complex. At least ten stops in either direction between Baisley Boulevard and the Rosedale station would be consolidated into other stops, or eliminated altogether.

In addition to eliminating stops, the new Q85 should be rerouted in several areas on the route with narrow roads and tight turns, to speed service and accommodate articulated buses. The first alteration would be on the route in Springfield Gardens between Farmers Boulevard and Springfield Boulevard. Currently, the route operates on 140th Avenue east of Rochdale Village and Farmers Boulevard before turning south onto Springfield Boulevard and east onto Conduit Avenue. A narrow street situated in an entirely residential area, 140th Avenue can barely facilitate one-way traffic and cannot handle articulated buses; nor can the articulated buses make

²²⁷ “Q44 Select Bus Service Bronx Community Board 9: April 02, 2015,” (MTA, NYCDOT, 2015).
the tight turns required on this portion of the route. Instead, the Q85 should be sent down Farmers Boulevard, then directly onto Conduit Avenue, with the route on Springfield Boulevard eliminated. This would take away direct service from passengers along 140th Avenue and Springfield Boulevard, including students at the large Springfield Gardens High School Campus. Travel times and passenger comfort, however, would be greatly improved with the route change and the addition of articulated buses. Students from the high school would only have to walk a short distance south to Conduit Avenue to take the bus. Passengers from the eliminated route would have to walk a short distance to Farmers Boulevard, or take the Q3 or Q77 and transfer to the Q5 SBS at Merrick Boulevard.

The second routing change would be near the Rosedale station for Jamaica-bound Q85s. In this area, westbound buses must make a sharp right-hand turn and another sharp left-hand turn in order to turn from the Sunrise Highway onto North Conduit Avenue and serve a bus stop at 230th Place in Laurelton. Articulated buses may not be able to handle these turns, especially if traffic is high on Brookville Boulevard (the intermediate street between Sunrise and North Conduit) which has only two narrow lanes in either direction. Buses should instead travel on Francis Lewis Boulevard one block east, in front of the Laurelton LIRR station. While Francis Lewis is equally narrow, the turns from the Sunrise Highway and onto North Conduit Avenue are much smoother. This however would add two bus routes (the Q5B and the Q85) onto this portion of Francis Lewis, and the turning Q85 could delay the Q5B and other traffic. An alternate proposal would be to keep the Q85 SBS on Sunrise Highway until it naturally merges with North Conduit Avenue. Under this plan, the 230th Place stop would be eliminated, and would have to be consolidated with the next closest stop at 225th Street; passengers would have to walk through a
shady and overgrown area along North Conduit, underneath the LIRR trestle and past an
industrial complex where sidewalk is not present for the entire length of the street.
**List of new routes along Merrick Boulevard**

Of these possibilities, I recommend upgrading the Q4, Q5, and Q85 limited services to Select Bus Service, creating the Q5H and Q5B and extending them to southern Rosedale, and streamlining the 24-hour Q85 SBS service now running to Green Acres. The Q85 local would be eliminated, replaced with increased Q5 and Q84 local service. Weekend Q5 service to Green Acres would be maintained by the Q5 local and the new Q5H, with the Q5B continuing to serve Rosedale at this time. Under these plans, the service routes along the corridor would be:

- **Q4 Merrick/Linden Boulevards Local**: Jamaica – Cambria Heights (all times)
- **Q4 Select Bus Service**: Jamaica – Cambria Heights SBS (all times except late nights)
- **Q5 Merrick Boulevard Local**: Jamaica – 231st Street weekdays; Jamaica – Green Acres weekends; Jamaica – Rosedale Station late nights
- **Q5 Select Bus Service via Hook Creek / Francis Lewis (Q5H SBS)**: Jamaica – 253rd street/149th Avenue via Francis Lewis weekdays; Jamaica – Green Acres weekends; no late-night service
- **Q5 Select Bus Service via Brookfield / 243rd Street (Q5B SBS)**: Jamaica – 253rd street/149th Avenue via 243rd Street (all times except late nights)
- **Q84 Merrick Bl/120th Avenue Local**: Jamaica – Laurelton
- **Q85 Merrick Bl/Rochdale/Conduit Av Select Bus Service**: Jamaica – Green Acres (full route) or Rosedale Station (early mornings & short runs); Jamaica – Rosedale–147th Avenue/243rd Street SBS late nights (replaces Q5 SBS)
A 60-foot Nova Bus LFS model, the standard bus used on SBS routes. 
Author: Own work (Tdorante10), via Wikimedia Commons.

Features of Merrick Boulevard SBS

The Merrick Boulevard Select Bus Service would receive the standard SBS upgrades: off-board fare payment, specially-branded blue low-floor buses, and transit signal priority along Merrick Boulevard. TSP would be a key addition for all service along the corridor, compensating for the numerous and poorly-timed traffic lights on the boulevard. Under the plan, new low-floor buses would be purchased or otherwise allocated to the corridor to expand and improve service. Ideally the Q4, Q5 and Q85 SBS services would receive new three-door articulated buses to increase capacity and maintain BRT standards, though the routes could use standard-length buses on a temporary basis as was done with the M34 SBS. Adding new and larger buses to the corridor would require expediting the construction of the new Jamaica Bus Depot to accommodate the additional vehicles.

With the prior controversy over bus lanes on Merrick Boulevard, the initial Merrick Boulevard SBS would not feature dedicated lanes, relying on faster boarding and signal priority to speed up service. However, should the service be successful and political opposition wane,

---

bus-only lanes would be a dramatic improvement for all traffic along the boulevard. Buses would no longer have to precariously stop behind cars parked at the edge of bus stops or double-park due to stopping pads blocked by parked cars. Meanwhile, buses would no long obstruct other traffic by taking up one or both mixed-traffic lanes during peak hours. Like most other SBS bus lanes, the Merrick Boulevard lanes would be active only during peak hours. Depending on the traffic needs of the boulevard, they could be offset (maintaining parking spaces), or curbside (maintaining two lanes of traffic in either direction). In addition, bus stop pads should be lengthened and “buffer” zones added between bus stops and parking spaces to prevent the obstruction of bus operations by parked cars. Alternately, should offset bus lanes be installed, stops along Merrick Boulevard could be converted into bus bulbs, extending the sidewalk out to meet the bus lane. This would eliminate the need for buses to turn into the curbside lane and risk getting wedged behind a parked car.
**Jamaica Center BRT Terminal**

To better serve the corridor, as part of the implementation of Select Bus Service the old, dilapidated, and open-aired Jamaica Center Bus Terminal constructed along with the Archer Avenue subway would be replaced with a railway-style bus rapid transit station serving all the Merrick Boulevard routes, along with the Q83 and Q83 limited routes (currently using Bay D) which also have significant ridership. The new terminal would be enclosed and fare-controlled, with turnstiles installed at each end of the block (Parsons Boulevard to the east; 153rd Street to the west) for passengers to pay their fare. This would be the second fare-controlled bus stop in the city. The only other stop of this kind is located within the Rockaway Parkway subway station in Canarsie, Brooklyn, used by the B42 between the station and Canarsie Pier at the Jamaica Bay shoreline. Bus passengers at this station – either entering the station via the subway turnstiles or exiting from the L train – simply board the bus, having already paid their fare.\(^{229}\)

At Jamaica Center, the current bus bays would be replaced with seven “gates” approximately 65-feet in length. Each gate would have three sets of platform screen doors that open when a bus is stopped in front of it. The doors would allow the terminal to remain enclosed and temperature controlled during winter and summer months, while preventing fare evasion by forcing passengers to enter via the turnstiles. This would also remove the incentive for dollar vans to stop in the bus loading area.

As opposed to the current setup, in which each separate service has its own bus bay, in the new setup buses would pull up to the front most (easternmost) gate available, with the next bus stopping behind it. This eliminates the need for passengers in the route overlap areas to

choose one bus bay and hope that bus arrives first. In addition, because the majority of transit
and commercial activity is concentrated at Parsons Boulevard, this would better serve the bulk of
passengers. The 153rd Street entrance at the west end of the terminal would be used primarily by
passengers transferring from services such as the Q44 Select Bus Service from northern Queens
and the Bronx or the Q24 from Brooklyn, and by travelers coming from the Queens Family
Court building. Ideally schedules should be shifted to allow

multiple buses to begin service simultaneously, giving passengers the option to enter any of the
arriving buses and not cluster at the front (eastern end) of the terminal. The new setup would do
away with the long lines to enter the bus via a single door, and allowing passengers to transfer to
an emptier bus when it pulls up, eliminating uneven loading. In a hypothetical scenario, two SBS
buses (one Q5 and one Q85) and one local bus (a Q5) could arrive first. Two minutes later, a Q4
SBS, a Q4 local and another Q5 local arrive, and so on. The Q84 would be moved from Bay F in
the Teardrop Canopy into the new terminal area, stopping in the same que as the other Merrick
Boulevard routes. The Q83 could continue to stop in an isolated gate at the west end of the terminal area, in order to avoid confusion with the Merrick Boulevard routes. The Q25, Q34 and Q65, meanwhile, could share the Q30/Q31 stop at the end of the block, though it would be best to eliminate the stop and allow these buses to run in the left lane along Archer Avenue to ease traffic flow.

Proof of Payment System

The Jamaica Center BRT station would be the only fare-controlled stop along the new Merrick Boulevard SBS routes; the remaining stops along the Q4, Q5, and Q85 SBS would still utilize the standard SBS ticket machines. Because of this, passengers entering the Jamaica Center station would need to receive proof-of-payment in the event of regular fare inspection by NYCT officials. To do this, the turnstiles at the BRT station would be designed to print and dispense tickets to passengers. This could be done by retrofitting current turnstiles, or by designing entirely new entry devices.

The proof-of-payment tickets used at Jamaica Center would be an improvement upon the current flimsy design, using thicker card stock instead of receipt paper. Because the tickets would be used for multiple routes (currently, no SBS corridor features more than two services), the bottom of the ticket would feature a list of all the routes at the terminal. Upon inspection, NYCT officials would hole-punch or mark the correct route on the ticket, as conductors do on commuter trains. A mockup of the design is shown in Appendix C.
Brewer Boulevard Corridor Improvements

New Q115 Jamaica – Rosedale Limited

Currently, residents along the Q111 route in eastern Rosedale do not have the benefit of limited-stop service through South Jamaica towards Jamaica Center. While service is frequent, this pattern forces these bus riders to either take the entirely-local Q111 through the corridor, or transfer to the Q113 or Q114 which are already full of passengers from Far Rockaway and Nassau County. To provide better service to these passengers, a new limited-stop service to Rosedale via 147th Avenue should be created, labeled “Q115”. Under this plan, the Q115 would replace the Q111 along 147th Avenue in Springfield Gardens, Brookville and Rosedale, providing speedier service to the isolated commuters in this area. The Q111 meanwhile would only operate on Brewer Boulevard between Jamaica and Farmers Boulevard, continuing to provide frequent local service to passengers in South Jamaica, Rochdale Village, and Springfield Gardens. As opposed to calling the new service “Q111 Limited”, the two services would be given different designations to avoid confusion, as was done with the Q114.

With this change, all service in the corridor operating on 147th Avenue would run limited-stop along Brewer Boulevard towards Jamaica, giving optimal service to the most isolated passengers along the corridor. On the portion of 147th Avenue shared between the Q114 and the Q115, the Q114 would retain its limited-stop service; the Q115 would run local through the entire length of 147th Avenue. In addition, during evenings and overnights when the Q113 is not running, the Q114 would continue to operate limited along Brewer Boulevard to maintain speedy service to Nassau County and Far Rockaway. To maintain local service on Brewer
Boulevard, the Q115 would run entirely local at these times along with the Q111; this would be a service increase during this period, with three routes available on the corridor.

Depending on the ridership towards the outer terminals of the corridor (Rosedale for the Q115; Nassau County and Far Rockaway for the Q114), the new Q115 service could be implemented in two ways. In the first option, the Q115 would replace alternating Q114 runs. A cost neutral option, this would be done if ridership proves to be low on the routes east/south of Brewer Boulevard, or if funds are not available to increase the number of daily trips along the corridor. The frequency of the Q113 would not be changed to maintain speedy service between Far Rockaway and Jamaica. In this pattern, for every four limited buses, two would be Q113s, with one Q114 and one Q115 (Q113, Q114, Q113, Q115, Q113, etc….). During peak morning rush hours for example, when a limited bus enters service every five minutes, the Q113 would continue operate on ten-minute headways. The Q114 and Q115, however, would now arrive every twenty minutes, creating a major reduction in service for passengers in Rosedale for the Q115, and Nassau County for the Q114; as currently constituted, the Q111 runs every three minutes during the morning rush period, with two out of every three trips running all the way to Rosedale. 230

The second option would implement the Q115 as additional trips along the corridor. In the peak rush hour situation, for example, limited-stop service frequency would be increased from two buses every ten minutes to three buses every ten minutes, or one limited bus every three-to-four minutes. This would create a less drastic service reduction for Rosedale passengers during this period – from two Q111 buses every nine minutes to one Q115 bus every ten minutes

– which would be offset by the advantages of the new limited-stop service. Unlike the conversion of the Q114, this second proposal Q115 would be a service increase, adding more buses along the line. This would lead to an increase in operation costs, and may require additional buses to be allotted to the Baisley Park Depot (the former Jamaica Buses garage) to facilitate the service.

Modified versions of this proposal include:

- **Convert alternate Q114 buses into Q115 buses; continue to split Q111 trips between Farmers Boulevard and Rosedale.** The Q115 Limited would now be a supplement to Q111 service, and limited stops could be instituted along 147th Avenue east of Brookville Boulevard. With the Q115 only running every 20 minutes during peak service, however, many passengers would still need to transfer at Brewer Boulevard to a limited service, or ride the Q111 local all the way to their destination.

- **Implement Q115 as additional limited-stop trips; maintain current Q111 service.**

  This is the most ideal plan in terms of improving service, adding frequent limited-stop service to complement to local service. This would also be the costliest option, however, and service in this area may not be high enough to justify the expenditure necessary.

Out of these possibilities, I recommend truncating the Q111 to Farmers Boulevard and instituting the Q115 Limited to serve Rosedale. At least on a temporary basis, the Q115 would be implemented as a service expansion, adding limited-stop runs along the corridor. The Q114
Limited would be expanded to operate all-times, with the Q111 and Q115 providing local service evenings and overnights. Under these plans, the service routes along the corridor would be:

- **Q111 Brewer Boulevard Local**: Jamaica – Farmers Blvd (all times)
- **Q113 Brewer Bl/Nassau Expy Limited**: Jamaica – Far Rockaway (no night service)
- **Q114 Brewer Bl/147th Av Limited, Nassau Local**: Jamaica – Far Rockaway (all times)
- **Q115 Brewer Blvd Limited, 147th Av Local**: Jamaica – Rosedale (local evenings and overnights)

In addition to the changes in Southeast Queens, several other changes outside the study area could improve service along the corridor for passengers from Nassau County and Far Rockaway.

**Widen Brookville Boulevard**

Brookville Boulevard is a dangerous and inferior street crossing the wetlands between Queens and Nassau County. The road has sizable traffic, and the Q114 must traverse the road in order to serve Rosedale and Brookville. To improve safety for all motorists and commuters, the city and state must go ahead with the plan to elevate the road onto a trestle and widen it to accommodate additional Queens-Rockaway traffic. While this would necessitate construction on the protected wetlands, the new side-walled and grade-separated road would have the added effect of preventing future dumping along the road. The road trestle could also be built in conjunction with a major cleanup program for the area.
New Q114 and Q115 service in Cedarhurst and Valley Stream, Nassau County

Currently, there are four Q111 trips which terminate at Rockaway Turnpike and Peninsula Boulevard in Cedarhurst. This service dates back to the route’s operation under Jamaica Buses. Exactly who these trips serve is unclear, though based on gossip found in transit forums and the scheduled departure times of the afternoon trips from Cedarhurst, they seem to be designed to serve students of Lawrence High School at the Cedarhurst end of the route. These trips run a highly illogical route in terms of serving passengers from Jamaica, continuing east and south of Rosedale into Valley Stream, but then turning west along Peninsula Boulevard back towards Rockaway Turnpike, intersecting with the Q113 and Q114. The distance traveled along Peninsula Boulevard is just as long if not longer the distance traveled on 147th Avenue between Brewer Boulevard and Rosedale. On the other hand, the pattern logically serves riders from Cedarhurst to Valley Stream, connecting two neighborhoods geographically separated by Hook Creek. Thus the Q111 Cedarhurst trips are essentially two routes (Jamaica-Rosedale and Valley Stream-Cedarhurst) combined into a single trip.

If ridership is high enough, the runs could be reworked into two branches. The first would run down either the Q113 (Rockaway Turnpike) or Q114 (Brookville Boulevard) routings to Cedarhurst, then continue east along Peninsula Boulevard to either Mill Road and Peninsula, or the Gibson LIRR station in Valley Stream, Long Island. This service would be labeled as Q111 or Q114 depending on whether it runs local or limited-stop from Queens; under my proposal, the runs would be Q114 Limiteds via Brookville. The second branch would be an extension of the now-Q115 past Rosedale to the same terminal in Valley Stream. Both the

231 “Bus Timetable: Q111”, “NYCDOT Bus Ridership Survey and Route Analysis: Chapter 4”. 
Cedarhurst and Valley Stream junctions of the route would serve shopping centers. The connection to the Gibson station also provides improved access to the LIRR for commuters in the area without access to automobiles. Although the changes would take away one-stop service between Cedarhurst and Valley Stream, the new setup would expand ridership during the entire day.

The extensions would serve an area currently without direct service from the Nassau Inter-County Express (NICE Bus). The closest routes are the n31 and n32 buses between Hempstead and Far Rockaway, which run farther south along West Broadway and Broadway/Central Avenue respectively, parallel to the LIRR Far Rockaway Branch. Those routes run individually on half-hour headways (collectively on 15-minute headways). The new MTA Bus routes would run on 15-30 minute headways on weekdays, with schedules coordinated at the Valley Stream terminal so that arriving Q114s line up with departing Q115s, or vice versa. Potential weekend service would operate hourly. The major flaw in this proposal is expending city money to expand service in areas not within the city’s jurisdiction. The two new routes would be:

- **Q114 Brewer Bl/147th Av Limited, Peninsula Bl Local:** Jamaica – Cedarhurst – Valley Stream
- **Q115 Brewer Blvd Limited, 147th Av Local:** Jamaica – Rosedale – Valley Stream

*Improve bus stop signage along the Q111, Q113 and Q114 routes in Nassau County.*

---

232 “Bus Timetable Effective as of January 17, 2016: n31/n32,” (*Nassau Inter-County Express*, January 2015); “System Map”, (*Nassau Inter-County Express*, 8 April 2012).
While the Q111 only provides select service in Nassau County, the Q114 provides 24-hour local service in Nassau County between mainland Queens and Far Rockaway. Both routes, however, share the same characteristic of poorly-identified bus stops or stops that are not signed at all. For example, MTA Bus Time lists a stop for the Q111 at the northwest and southeast corners of Peninsula Boulevard and Woodmere Boulevard, but there is no signage to signify that buses stop at either corner. Potential passengers (those who know that the service and stop exists) would theoretically have to flag down the bus, and hope that the driver acknowledges them. The stops that are signed do not use either form of MTA signage, nor do they use the smaller but still viable Long Island Bus/NICE Bus signs. Instead, these stops either read “NO STOPPING BUS STOP” or “NO STOPPING ANY TIME”; the later form of signage gives no indication that the no-standing zone is for bus service. It is safe to assume that due to the lack of branding, many local residents may not know the bus routes exist or where they travel to, leading to low ridership in these areas and making the Q114 a rolling waste of money.

It is wise to improve these bus stops, adding MTA-style signage which uses a bold shade of blue (therefore easily visible) and features the route number and schedules for bus service; neither is currently provided. Preferably, the modern European-style bus signs should be used. These signs, which feature destinations in addition to route numbers (for example, ”Q114 LTD – Jamaica”), are better suited to attract new riders, in addition to the fact that they last longer than the old metal bus stops. While it would require the MTA and the NYCDOT to spend money outside the city limits, it would ultimately justify the money spent on operating bus service in those areas.

---

Other Local Bus Improvements

Farmers Boulevard Corridor

The Farmers Boulevard corridor, served by the Q3 bus route, is the fourth-busiest corridor in Southeast Queens serving over 3 million riders annually. Like the Merrick Boulevard corridor, it cuts through the center of the study area, though running more southwesterly from Jamaica to Springfield Gardens, connecting with nearly every major bus corridor in the area. The Q3 also serves John F. Kennedy Airport, running south of Springfield Gardens into the Airport proper, and terminating at Terminal 5; it formerly served all JFK passenger terminals directly until April 2004 after the opening of AirTrain JFK. The Q3 is one of three bus routes to directly serve the passenger area of JFK, along with the Q10 from Kew Gardens and Ozone Park, and the B15 from Brooklyn.\(^{234}\)

While the Q3 has the potential to serve just as many riders as the Merrick Boulevard corridor, it is inherently restricted by its route alignment. The Q3 begins at 165\(^{th}\) Street Bus Terminal, not directly served by any subway route, and only connects with the underused IND Queens Boulevard Line along Hillside Avenue, while the Merrick routes are fed by both Archer Avenue Lines. In addition, despite its high ridership and status as an airport connector, the Q3 does not feature any limited-stop service. Furthermore, most riders from Jamaica traveling to JFK Airport would rather take the AirTrain directly to their terminal then the Q3. Thus, the only contingencies of passengers that would take the Q3 to JFK are those within Southeast Queens, and those coming from other eastern Queens areas via the Hillside Avenue bus corridor (the Q1, Q36, and Q43 routes). For the later group of riders, however, this necessitates a long two-stop

\(^{234}\) “Transit Committee Meeting: June 2012,”  (*MTA New York City Transit*, June 2012).
bus ride, traveling along the entirely-local Q3, and making an additional transfer to the AirTrain to reach their terminal.

To realize the potential of the Farmers Boulevard corridor, several service upgrades should be made. First, limited-stop service should be added to the corridor, speeding service for both local residents and JFK-bound commuters. The new Q3 Limited when it operates would be bidirectional, due to the line’s status as an airport connector. In addition, a new service should be created combining the Hillside Avenue and Farmers Boulevard corridors. This service, labeled “Q93”, would run from one of the three Hillside Avenue corridor terminals around Queens Village and Floral Park west to Farmers Boulevard, then south along Farmers to JFK. This would create a one-seat route for passengers from far-eastern Queens to JFK, and for local residents commuting between neighborhoods along the corridors. Due to the length of the new route, the Q93 should ideally operate as limited-stop. It should also be evaluated to restore direct service to the JFK terminals, similar to that executed by the buses serving LaGuardia Airport.

Changes to the Q6 and Q7 routes

The Q6 and Q7 routes are both former services of the Green Bus Lines company, now under the MTA Bus umbrella. As mentioned above, the Q6 is the third busiest corridor in Southeast Queens, employing peak-direction limited-stop service along Sutphin Boulevard on the western end of the study area, running through South Jamaica and Springfield Gardens. Limited-stop service was added to the route in 2010. The Q7, meanwhile, runs from the Euclid Avenue subway station in East New York, Brooklyn along Rockaway Boulevard through South

---

Ozone Park. It currently only operates in a small portion of the study area between the Van Wyck Expressway and 150th Street, intersecting with the Q6 at 150th Street and Rockaway/Sutphin Boulevards adjacent to Baisley Pond Park. South of this junction, both routes serve separate cargo areas of John F. Kennedy Airport; the Q7 terminates at the end of 150th Street at South Cargo Road near the passenger terminals, while the Q6 runs to the AMB Cargo Center (JFK Building 77) at the northeastern end of the airport property near the Idlewild/Hook Creek wetlands. The Q7 has the potential to serve a greater residential portion of Southeast Queens, providing a connection to Aqueduct Racetrack and the Aqueduct Resorts World Casino, Cross Bay Boulevard, and the IND Fulton Street subway at Cross Bay Boulevard and in East New York.

To better utilize the Q7, the line should be rerouted away from the JFK cargo area. Under my proposal, the Q7 would be extended past Baisley Pond Park along Baisley Boulevard, which currently has no significant bus service except for a short segment of the Q85 route. The Q7 would be extended as far as Farmers Boulevard and Linden Boulevard at the St. Albans VA Hospital and LIRR station. The new service would add a crosstown route serving St. Albans, Rochdale, and South Jamaica. It would also provide direct access to August Martin High School in Baisley Park for students coming from other areas of Southeast Queens; currently, the school is only served by the north-south Sutphin and Brewer Boulevard corridors running from Jamaica Center. Should the LIRR Atlantic Branch be converted into a subway line, the new Q7 route would become a feeder route from local residences, the VA Hospital, and the High School into the subway station Baisley Boulevard and Bedell Street. To replace the Q7 at JFK, a new branch

236 “NYCDOT Bus Ridership Survey: Chapter 4,” pg. 5-8, 10-11.
of the Q6 would be created called the “Q6A”, running south of Rockaway Boulevard to South Cargo Road. This new branch would replace short-run Q6s which terminate at Sutphin/Rockaway Boulevards during peak-direction service, and alternating Q6s during other times.\footnote{237}

Similar modifications to the Q6 and Q7 routes were originally proposed by Urbitran Associates in 2004 for the NYCDOT, when the bus routes were still privately operated under DOT subsidies. The Urbitran proposal suggested creating the Q6A to replace the Q7 at JFK, and creating two new services from Euclid Avenue: an extended Q7 between Brooklyn and Green Acres via Rockaway Boulevard and Conduit Avenue, and a new “Q96” between Brooklyn and Cambria Heights via Linden Boulevard. The Q96 would have upgraded the Q9A/Q89 route (another former Green Lines route), which was eliminated due to 2010 and was a poor performing route under both Green Lines and MTA operation.\footnote{238}

\textit{Extension of the Q60}

When the Q89 (renamed from the Q9A under MTA operations) was discontinued in 2010 under the MTA’s system-wide budget cuts, it eliminated all local bus service on Linden Boulevard west of Merrick Boulevard. The Q89 had experienced low ridership, due to the fact that it only ran on weekdays between 10 AM and 5 PM with one bus per hour. Much of its route paralleled its sister route the Q9 to South Ozone Park, itself an extremely low ridership route.

\footnote{237} “NYCDOT Bus Ridership Survey: Chapter 4,” pg. 5-8, 10-11.
\footnote{238} “NYCDOT Bus Ridership Survey: Chapter 4,” pg. 5-8, 10-11.
with about 1.6 million yearly riders in 2014. Because of this, the Q89 was setup to be a failure, although its absence leave a viable bus corridor unserved.\textsuperscript{239}

To restore and improve service along this portion of Linden Boulevard, I propose extending the Q60 bus route a short distance from its current terminus at the South Jamaica Houses south and east to Merrick Boulevard via Linden. The Q60, another former Green Lines route, runs along Queens Boulevard to East Midtown Manhattan via the Queensboro Bridge, connecting the Downtown Jamaica hub, several commercial districts on Queens Boulevard including Queens Center Mall, and Manhattan. Although entirely local and parallel to two major subway lines, the Q60 is among the busiest routes in Queens (11\textsuperscript{th} in 2004), increasing the viability of the extension. Additionally, the Q60 could be extended farther east along Murdock Avenue to serve isolated areas of St. Albans, particularly the Addisleigh Park district only served by the Q42 shuttle route. The Q60 would terminate either at 180\textsuperscript{th} Street near the current Q42 terminus, or at Farmers Boulevard to connect with the Q3 and Q83. The new extensions would provide residents along Linden Boulevard and Murdock Avenue with direct access to the Q3 to JFK, the subway, LIRR and AirTrain in Jamaica, and the commercial districts along Queens Boulevard.

Outside of the study area, it should be evaluated to add limited-stop service for the Q60 along Queens Boulevard and other sections of the route. This would be similar to the Bx1 Limited along Grand Concourse in the Bronx, which has high ridership in spite of paralleling the IND Concourse subway for most of its length.

\textsuperscript{239} “NYCDOT Bus Ridership Survey: Chapter 4,” pg. 5-8, 10-11.
Express Bus Service Improvements

Express bus service in Southeast Queens is substandard in terms of both frequency and scope of service, with only four routes sporadically operating during rush hours in the peak direction. Aside from the necessary increase in trips during rush hours, several changes and service expansions should be implemented to create better and more attractive service.

New QM21 routing and new QM91 service

Currently, the QM21 almost exclusively serves residents of the Rochdale Village development, with the remainder of its short route running concurrent with the X63. Meanwhile, nearby portions of Baisley Park, Rochdale, Springfield Gardens, and Brookville are without express bus service. The QM21 should be reworked and split into several branches to better serve local residents, with additional runs to improve service frequency.

The first change would be to shift the QM21 route outside of Rochdale Village onto new streets to serve the western areas of Baisley Park, moving it off of Guy R. Brewer Boulevard. West of its loop around the development, it would run along Baisley Boulevard to Rockaway Boulevard. It would then split into two branches, one along Sutphin Boulevard (the current Q6 route), and a second branch (labeled “QM21A”) continuing along Rockaway Boulevard, then turning north on 142nd Street (the current Q40 route). At Linden Boulevard, the routes would turn west and join the X63 towards Manhattan. Only one QM21 stop would be discontinued, at Brewer and Foch Boulevards serving the Baisley Park Houses and Cedar Manor Co-op. Passengers from these areas would have to walk a short distance north to Linden Boulevard for
the X63, or south to Baisley Boulevard for the QM21, or simply take one of the local Brewer Boulevard buses into Jamaica Center.

In addition, a new service would be implemented to serve Springfield Gardens and Brookville. The route would begin at 232nd Street at the west end of Brookville Park. It would then run west along 147th Avenue (the Q111/Q114/Q115 route), then northwest on Rockaway Boulevard (the Q6 route) to join the new QM21 in Baisley Park. The new route would be labeled “QM91”, and operate out of the Baisley Park Depot along with the QM21.

Beyond this, the three routes (QM21, QM21A, and QM91) would receive additional stops along the Van Wyck Expressway service road and Queens Boulevard to provide service to residents of South Jamaica, South Ozone Park, Richmond Hill, Briarwood, and Kew Gardens which have minimal or no express bus service. Four-to-six stops would be added along the Van Wyck, primarily at major roads. A stop on Queens Boulevard would be added in front of Queens County Criminal Court (currently only served by the QM18). In addition, the three routes would stop at the Briarwood and Union Turnpike stations, replacing the X63, X64, and X68 which would now bypass these stops (see below).

Super express service and additional non-stop service

Passengers at the east ends of the X63, X64, and X68 routes in Rosedale, Cambria Heights, and Queens Village respectively have extremely long commutes, with their bus routes continuing to make stops throughout Southeast Queens before non-stop service begins on Queens Boulevard. This is not unique to the area; routes in Northeast Queens have similarly-long pick-up sections before beginning non-stop service towards Manhattan. Several of these services,
however, have a solution to better accommodate passengers at the far ends of the routes called “Super Express” service. This service – particularly that seen on the QM8 which runs along Union Turnpike, 188th Street, 73rd Avenue, the LIE service road, and 260th Street to Glen Oaks – makes all stops at stops only served by that particular route, then runs non-stop on streets shared with other routes. In the case of the QM8 super express, it makes stops along 260th Street, the LIE, and 73rd Avenue, then runs non-stop on the 188th Street and Union Turnpike (shared with the QM1, QM5, QM6, QM7, and non-super express QM8s). Super Express service dates back to when the routes in Northeast Queens were all operated by Queens Surface Corporation. All but one route (the QM4) employs some form of Super Express service, though only the QM8 employs the type of service described above.\textsuperscript{240} The Super Express concept was also employed on the X21 in Staten Island, which began service in September 2014.\textsuperscript{241}

Super express service should be implemented along the long X63, X64, and X68 routes to speed up the slow and unappealing service on these routes, to make the $6.50 premium fare truly worth the money. For the X63 and X64, every second trip would be a super express run, picking-up passengers at the eastern end of its route, then running non-stop through the rest of Southeast Queens. The X63 super express would make stops in Rosedale and in Laurelton, then run express along the rest of its route on Merrick Boulevard. The X64 super express would make all stops along its Linden Boulevard route from its terminal in Cambria Heights to Farmers Boulevard at the St. Albans LIRR station. It would then continue west on Linden Boulevard running non-stop, instead of traveling the circuitous route along Farmers Boulevard and Liberty

\textsuperscript{241} Nicholas Rizzi, “Super Express Bus' Would Whisk Staten Island Commuters to 42nd St.,” (\textit{DNAinfo}, 28 March 2014);
Avenue. Similar service would be created on the X68 route along Hillside Avenue. Passengers on the skipped sections of the routes would still receive service from the X63, X64, QM21, and QM91, which would be more frequent than current schedules. Commuters in these areas however, particularly those on the X64 route in St. Albans and South Jamaica, may be better off taking local bus routes into Downtown Jamaica and transferring to rail service. In addition to this, all X63, X64, and X68 buses would run non-stop on the Van Wyck Expressway and Queens Boulevard, due to the long distances the buses must travel.

New X67 route to Queens Village

A new branch of the X64 route would be created to serve the neighborhood of Queens Village. This service, labeled “X67”, would split from the X64 route at Farmers Boulevard and Murdock Avenue, running east on Murdock (the Q83 route), then north along or parallel to Springfield Boulevard at least to Hempstead Avenue/Hempstead Turnpike near Belmont Park. The route could extend as far north as the Queens Village LIRR station at Jamaica Avenue.

List of new express bus routes

The new express bus routes in the region would be:

- **X63 Rosedale/Merrick Boulevard Express**: Rosedale – East Midtown
- **X63 Super Express (X63 SX or X63X)**: Rosedale – East Midtown
- **X64 Linden Blvd/Liberty Av Express**: Cambria Heights – East Midtown
- **X64 Super Express (X64 SX or X64X)**: Cambria Heights – East Midtown
- **X67 Murdock Av/Liberty Av Express**: Queens Village – East Midtown
- **X68 Hillside Avenue Express**: Floral Park – East Midtown
- **QM21 Rochdale/Sutphin Bl Express**: Rochdale Village – East Midtown
- **QM21A Rochdale/142nd Street Express**: Rochdale Village – East Midtown
- **QM91 147th Av/Sutphin/Rockaway Bl Express**: Brookville/Springfield – Manhattan
New intermediate stops on the express routes would serve the Elmhurst-Rego Park commercial district before heading towards Manhattan.

**New intra-borough express bus service**

Express bus services in New York City serve the sole purpose of feeding passengers into Midtown and Downtown Manhattan. Isolated areas such as Southeast Queens, however, have long trips not only to Manhattan but to all parts of the city, including commercial and job centers within the same borough. Because of this, express bus routes from outer borough areas could be expanded to add stops at major trip generators on their way towards Manhattan. In the case of the Southeast Queens routes, a new drop-off zone would be created in Elmhurst and Rego Park just before the routes enter the Long Island Expressway on their way towards Manhattan. This new zone would give riders an additional transit option towards the Rego Center and Queens Center Mall. Trips from the region to these shopping centers normally require one of two transit options: taking buses into Downtown Jamaica, transferring to the E or F express services in Jamaica, then transferring to the local M or R trains; or taking local buses to access the Q60 traveling along Queens Boulevard, or the four buses along Woodhaven and Cross Bay Boulevards. The new setup would create one-stop service between Southeast Queens and the Elmhurst business
district, particularly convenient for elderly and disabled passengers who would struggle with multiple transfers and accessing the subway.

Under the new setup, Manhattan-bound express buses would run non-stop on the Queens Boulevard main (center) roadway until 63rd Road, where the buses would merge into the service road and stop at the Rego Center. They would then stop at the foot of Queens Center Mall just past Woodhaven Boulevard. The buses would U-turn onto Hoffman Drive (a dedicated bus stop area), following the QM10 and QM11 routing onto the LIE; buses could make a pick-up stop at the QM10/QM11 stop, or bypass it. Coming from Manhattan, the routes would make pickups at the foot of Queens Center, U-turn onto the eastbound Queens Boulevard service road, and make pickups across from the Rego Center before proceeding to Southeast Queens. The new service option would justify expanding service on the routes into midday hours. On weekends, the routes could run primarily between the business district and Queens, with occasional trips into Manhattan; currently there is no weekend express bus service to or from the region.