

Eric Muise. 11 June 2014

District 37 Bus Forum. 250 Colonial Ct., Teaneck, NJ 07666

Senator Loretta Weinberg, Assemblyman Gordon M. Johnson, Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttie

NJTransit:

Michael Kilcoyne, Deputy General Manager, Bus Ops (PABT) and Dennis Martin (?), Manager Bus Ops

Anthony Grieco, Senior Director, Customer Service & Transit Info Center (MyBus)

PANYNJ:

Diannae Ehler, Deputy Director Tunnels, Bridges & Terminals Dept.

Andrew Lynn, Director, Planning Dept.

Summary:

Approximately 200 NJTransit Bus riders who were visibly frustrated and angry at the bus commute out of the PABT were in attendance for this inaugural forum spearheaded by the local elected officials. The Electeds opened the session by saying there were many complaints and concerns brought up recently. NJTransit and PA officials then went over statistics and their future plans to alleviate problems. This was followed by heated questions from the audience. Below are summarized points that were discussed.

Statistics:

1. PABT built in 1950s and expanded in the 1970s.
2. It is currently operating at or above capacity and will not be able to handle any future increases in demand.
3. It currently handles ~1100 buses per evening commute; 4000 bus trips / day; 230,000 passenger trips / day (65 million passenger trips / year). This is the highest mode for commuters in/out of NYC.
4. Of 300 carriers, NJTransit is the biggest tenant, paying 5 million \$ in rent/year, and handles 70% of PABT commuters.
5. Buses are not allowed to idle in the terminal thus have to be diverted onto midtown streets and circle around until their gate is ready. This leads to major delays and missed departure times.
6. Dispatchers inside PABT decide which bus goes where but they are ineffective at properly addressing overcrowded routes (they can't tell how many people are standing in each line, as some lines are extremely long).
7. Lincoln Tunnel is at or above capacity. I asked why they couldn't reserve a second lane outbound during PM rush hour for buses. They said this would completely gridlock midtown Manhattan (but it is already gridlock and this would help transport much more people/hour!!).

8. PABT is operating at about 100 million \$ deficit per year (they get 15 million \$ from revenues, 10 million \$ from parking, debt payment is 40 million \$, etc)
9. PA has 26 BILLION \$ plan for the next 25 years but they can't even reserve 230 million \$ for bus garage!! All the \$ is going to WTC site (including PATH train)... They couldn't say what proportion of commuters were done by PATH vs Bus/PABT.

Bus garage:

1. A grant application was just filed with the Federal Government for 230 million \$. An answer is expected by late Sept 2014. If accepted, the bus garage could be operational by 2020. It would be situated on a platform on top of the North Tube.
2. It was noted that rail gets higher priority than bus infrastructure.
3. Bus garage would allow for better staging of buses so that dispatchers could more effectively allocate buses where there is the most need. It is not certain if a bus garage would even be able to eliminate buses circulating in streets of midtown west. So the effects in the local neighborhoods might not improve.
4. Currently because of a lack of bus staging/parking, empty buses come into NYC through the Lincoln Tunnel taking up precious space in the Tunnel.

Master Plan:

1. Everything is on the table!
2. Increase capacity and renovation, both short-term and long-term.
3. They are 6 months into drafting the Master Plan, they need another year.
4. Capacity recovery (real-estate).
5. Escalator improvements.
6. Remove disabled buses better.
7. Way-finders installed.
8. Information agents.

Short-term fixes:

1. 90 million \$ has been allocated to increase on-time performance.
2. Bus drivers are being trained for multiple routes so they could be re-assigned as needed (a comment from audience was why not just buy GPS units so that every bus driver could go on any route...)
3. Increase bus/ferry transfer efficiencies.
4. Combine the 2 apps (one for scheduled departures and one for real-time info) into one app.
5. Streamline telephone, text, and twitter communications

6. Addition of personnel throughout PABT to communicate delays etc to commuters.

Public complaints:

1. Unacceptable delays during PM rush hour.
2. Building is unsafe due to massive overcrowding, locked/blocked exit doors, and numerous water leaks.
3. Dispatchers are ineffective.
4. Total lack of communication.
5. Reserved bus lane in AM rush hour ends before getting to 42nd street so the cars get in and this produces huge backlog for buses. Need to extend the reserved bus lane all the way through 42nd street!
6. Stairs going down from where passengers exit buses should always be operational. Otherwise this creates huge backups and buses can't exit/move out.
7. Why can't NJTransit pick-up passengers on curb-side throughout midtown? This would greatly alleviate PABT traffic jams!!
8. Have NJTransit offer Secaucus stops so that passengers could switch to train (already there?!)
9. Offer wifi or cell coverage throughout PABT, especially in basement.
10. Provide ticket machines on all levels, not just basement.
11. Use roof car parking for bus staging/parking! (Apparently this floor and ramps are not built to handle buses but this could be fixed)
12. After 5:10pm, all bus routes are delayed and it is impossible to get home within 2 hours. A lot of people are considering leaving Bergen County because commute is becoming unbearable.
13. Use GWB instead of tunnels?
14. Customer service ends at 6pm but most issues occur at or after that time.
15. Offer ticket rebates for bus delays?

Topics/ideas not addressed or commented on:

1. Comprehensive regional transportation plan to offer one-ticket access on all routes and on all modes (rail, bus, ferry, etc).
2. Integrate different modes of transport to increase # of passengers/hour, not # cars/hour! NYC could become world leader in regional commuter transport but because of fragmented agencies and jurisdictions, we are far behind other cities.
3. Bus routes feeding into light rail, and NJTransit rail stations to alleviate funnel effect into PABT.
4. Light rail extension to Bergen County, and then into Manhattan through Lincoln Tunnel (Vision Zero 34th/42nd Street loop)?
5. Reserve more lanes in/out of Tunnel for high-capacity public transport
6. Extend 7 Subway line to Secaucus and move PABT to Secaucus?