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The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Transportation Committee
Wednesday May 1, 2024 6:30 PM
Conducted Remotely on Zoom

Minutes

Present: Michele Birnbaum, Lori Bores, Juno Chowla-Song, Paul Krikler, Craig Lader, Valerie Mason, John McClement, John Philips, Rita Popper, Judy Schneider

Absent (Excused): Charles Warren

Absent (Unexcused): Billy Freeland, Rebecca Lamorte, Stephanie Reckler (public member)

Number of Attendees from the Public: Approximately 35

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 PM.

Item 1: Post-Implementation Assessment of Lexington Avenue Bus Lanes (6:33PM)

Dustin Khuu, Assistant Director of bus priority from NYCDOT, presented a post-implementation assessment of the project to install bus lanes on Lexington Ave. between 96th Street and 60th Street, which is served by the M98, M101, M102 and M103 routes. The project was completed in August 2019, after this segment of roadway was identified as a bus priority corridor due to high bus ridership, slow bus speeds, unreliable travel times for bus passengers, and frequent occurrences of curbside parking blocking buses from moving efficiently. The project created an offset 24/7 bus lane to replace a curbside lane that served as a bus lane only during weekday AM peak hours. The project also instituted new parking regulations that included commercial parking, turn bays at selected intersections, and 8 stationary enforcement cameras.

The methodology used for the assessment was to compare data from before the bus lane was implemented in 2019 to the period following its introduction, but excluding data from 2020 and 2021 that was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the traffic pattern anomalies during this period. They looked at data regarding bus speeds, average weekday traffic speeds by hour, crash data for motor vehicles, and injuries to cyclists and pedestrians, with data being analyzed for the AM Peak, Midday and PM Peak Periods.

The findings were as follows:

- Between 2019 and 2023, overall average bus speeds increased by 11%; they increased by 5% in the AM peak, 10% in the midday period, and 19% in the PM peak.
- General traffic slowed by 6%. During non-overnight hours, the changes in speeds were minimal; it took about an average of 30 seconds longer to traverse the entire corridor in the PM Peak from 96th to 60th; the biggest changes in speed occurred in the overnight hours, slowing from about 25MPH to 20 MPH due to reduced capacity resulting in a natural traffic calming effect.
- The corridor was safer for all users, as significantly fewer crashes occurred. Total injuries decreased by 30%, with a 77% decline in people seriously killed or injured. Pedestrian injuries decreased 53%, while injuries to motor vehicle passengers decreased 44%. There were more bike injuries during this

timeframe, which was consistent with citywide trends and also at a time when a large increase in bicycling occurred.

Meeting participants generally expressed a positive view of the impacts that were described, though there were numerous data points that some members thought should have been included in the presentation, including a breakdown of the impacts to bus speeds on a route-by-route basis, and information on the amount of time saved by buses rather than just showing it as a percentage change. One member noted that the bus lane's abrupt ending at 60th Street limits the extent to which improvements impact those who are continuing into Midtown on the M101/M102/M103. There was an extended discussion of causality versus correlation, and whether the safety improvements were actually caused by the new bus lane rather than other external factors such as the introduction of OMNY. One member of the public expressed frustration that the new parking regulations eliminated street cleaning, which NYCDOT is in the process of reintroducing.

There was also discussion about the frequency in which buses operating along Lexington Avenue are not fully pulling over to the curbside, which makes boarding and alighting difficult – especially for those with mobility impairments. It was acknowledged that drivers are instructed to pull over fully, and that this issue would be passed along to NYCT.

Item 2: NYCT/NYCDOT Presentation - Proposed 96th Street Bus Lane (7:33PM)

Staff from NYCDOT and NYCT presented a proposal to introduce a bus lane along 96th Street where NYCT's M96 bus operates. 96th Street was identified for bus priority and safety improvements for a multitude of reasons:

- The M96 is the 3rd highest used crosstown bus route in Manhattan, and there are a total of 15,000 average weekday passengers combined on the M96 and M106 (which shares the routing on the West Side through Madison/5th Avenue), including 6,000 daily passengers who travel through Central Park;
- There is a high frequency of buses, with peak headways as frequent as every 3 minutes,
- Bus speeds are very low, averaging at times as low as 4 mph between 5th and 3rd Avenues; concurrently, general traffic speeds are also getting slower.
- 74% of households in the vicinity of 96th Street do not have free access to a vehicle;
- Safety is a major issue, as 96th Street is among the top 10 streets in the entire city in terms of people killed or severely injured per mile. In the past 5 years, there have been 391 injuries among vehicular passengers, pedestrians, cyclists and other motorized vehicle users, including 44 killed or severely injured.

The goals of this project are twofold:

1. Improve bus service, by prioritizing transit along the corridor, increase bus speeds and reliability, enhance east-west transit connections uptown;
2. Improve safety on the corridor, by incorporating pedestrian safety in the design and outreach process and working alongside the NYCDOT Bicycle Unit to coordinate the bus initiative with potential future east-west bus routes in close proximity to 96th Street. The proposed project follows other recent projects that have impacted 96th Street, including changes to the intersection at Madison Avenue. These projects have improved safety, but the proposed project would aim to yield further improvements.

The proposal includes painted bus lanes along the entire corridor, both on the East Side within Community Districts 8 and 11, and on the West Side within Community District 7. Bus stops would also be painted. The

presentation focused on the changes under the jurisdiction of Community District 8. The key elements of the proposal are as follows:

- Wherever possible, an offset bus lane is proposed in both directions, which would replace one of the 2 travel lanes in each direction. The curbside parking lane would thus be maintained for parking, truck loading and passenger pick-up and drop-off. By keeping the bus confined to the bus lane, it would reduce conflicts with other vehicles and promote the flow of general traffic and the bus concurrently. Offset bus lanes are in place along Lexington Avenue between 96th Street and 60th Street; offset bus lanes would be in effect 24 hours a day, 7 days per week.
- Left turn bays would be considered at various intersections, including at Park Avenue in both directions, Lexington Avenue and 3rd Avenue. At such locations, the bus lane would shift to the curb. This design would preserve turning movements and facilitate traffic flow, and improve safety by reducing “back pressure”. A hardened center line would be installed to serve as a calming tool.
- Queue jumps, which would provide a bus-only signal allowing it to get a head start at an intersection to bypass general traffic, would be installed at certain intersections including at 3rd Avenue in both directions. Paired with leading pedestrian intervals, this is also intended to make the intersections safer.
- Turn calming treatments, which are rubber speed bumps, would be installed. They serve as visual cues to slow down, and cars that go over them will naturally be slowed.

Block-by-block proposals are as follows:

- Between 1st and 2nd Avenues, no bus lanes would be introduced. This is because the M96 doesn't operate on 96th Street westbound (it starts on 97th Street and turns onto 96th Street from 2nd Avenue), and high traffic volumes approaching the FDR Drive aren't ideal for a bus lane in the eastbound direction.
- Between 2nd and 3rd Avenues, a standard offset bus lane design would be installed.
- Between 3rd Avenue and Lexington Avenue in the eastbound direction, the bus lane would be along the curbside, and be in effect between 6AM and 8PM 7 days per week. Parking regulations would remain in effect during other hours. A standard offset bus lane would be installed westbound, along with a left turn lane leading up to Lexington Avenue.
- Between Lexington and Park Avenues, there would be an offset bus lane in both directions, although the westbound bus lane would shift to the curbside approaching Park Ave. Turn bays would be installed at Park Ave.
- Between Park and Madison Avenues, there would be an eastbound offset bus lane, and a turn bay at Park Ave. Westbound, a curbside bus lane would be in effect 24/7; current curbside regulations are either no parking or no standing, so no removal of parking spaces would result from the bus lane. A double right turn lane would remain at Madison Ave.
- No proposal was presented for 96th Street between Madison and 5th Avenues. Buses don't travel along 96th Street in the eastbound direction.

The next steps for the project include further outreach to the other impacted Community Boards, along with analysis and enhancements to the design. The project is anticipated to be implemented during Summer 2024, and monitoring of the project would then be performed. In the latter portion of 2024, NYCDOT and NYCT will study additional potential improvements on the corridor.

The presentation was generally viewed in a positive light by the members of the public who spoke and appreciated the prospect of prioritizing buses and shaving even mere minutes off bus trips, and that NYCT and NYCDOT are encouraging the use of transit along 96th Street. Some speakers felt the proposal wasn't ambitious enough, pointing to the 14th Street Busway project as the type of bus priority that should be a

model for 96th Street. There was also gratitude expressed for the focus on safety improvements and the need to reduce the extent of pedestrian injuries, though one speaker expressed concerns that the project would worsen safety without further enforcement, and another lamented that NYCDOT was too heavily invested in promoting bus and bike infrastructure. There was interest expressed in additional curb extensions being installed to make it easier for bus drivers to be able to fully reach the bus stop.

Committee members had a mixed reaction to the proposal; some were very pleased with the proposal, while others expressed some skepticism along the same lines as the comments made in regards to the Lexington Avenue Bus Lane, including questions of how success will be measured and how it will be able to distinguish whether any changes to safety metrics were because of the bus lane, other infrastructure or external factors, and whether the proposal would significantly adversely impact general traffic on a corridor that already has congestion issues. One member expressed dismay that the presentation wasn't better noticed by NYCDOT and NYCT, as evidenced by the relatively meager attendance at the meeting. A member who supported the project wished to see a more aggressive approach to prioritizing buses, while multiple members suggested that additional bus bulbs be installed and that prohibition of left turn lanes at 3rd Avenue and Lexington Avenue should be considered.

Item 3: Discussion of Fall Open Streets for Schools Applications (9:13PM)

A. Dalton School: East 91st Street from Park Avenue to Madison Avenue

B. Buckley School: East 73rd Street from Lexington Avenue to Park Avenue

NYCDOT received application from the Dalton School and the Buckley School to continue to participate in their Open Streets program during the 2024 and 2025 school year. These applications were brought to the attention of the Committee to gauge whether more extensive discussions were needed in the coming months. It was noted that the CB8M District Office had not received any complaints regarding these applications. Although not formally invited to participate, a representative from the Buckley School did attend to answer any questions if needed. No objections were raised to the applications, though one member stated that they wanted to have all Open Street reapplications be voted on in the future.

Item 4: NYCDOT Updates (9:25PM)

Colleen Chattergoon, NYCDOT Senior Borough Planner and Liaison to Community Board 8, stated that she didn't have any formal updates. She noted that she will continue to forward any Open Streets applications to the District Office.

Item 5: Old and New Business

There was no old or new business discussed.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:27PM.

Respectfully submitted, Charles Warren & Craig Lader, Co-Chairs