



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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April 6, 2011

Thomas F. Prendergrast
President
Metropolitan Transportation Authority New York City Transit
2 Broadway
New York, New York 10004

RE: Bus Rapid Transit - Off Board Fare Payment Machines

Dear Mr. Prendergrast:

Manhattan Community Board 4(CB4) thanks the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) for presenting the Proof-of-Payment Fare System with Fare Pre-Payment (Machines) that will be installed in connection with the 34th Transitway. We support – subject to the provisions below - the installation of such Machines on 34th Street and on 9th Avenue at 42nd Street and between 39th and 40th Streets. Our comments only relate to the proposed installations in CB4.

New York City's average bus speed is the lowest of the five largest cities in the USA - and it continues to slow down, 10% in last 10 years according to the MTA. Bus service along 34th Street is among the slowest in the city. Buses travel at an average of 4.5 mile per hour, only slightly faster than walking. Despite these slow speeds, 34th Street is a major east-west bus corridor, carrying over 33,000 bus riders a day on local and express routes.

For the M34, loading and unloading are the source of 38% of the delays, according to MTA data. To improve this situation as soon as possible, the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the MTA will deploy the Machines on the sidewalks as early as 2011, ahead of the completion of the street redesign.

The Proof-of-Payment Fare System with Fare Pre-Payment System improves bus travel speed by allowing loading and unloading through all doors of the bus, not just the front door. It consists of three Machines (one accepts coins) at each stop, similar to Metro-card machines plus a paper receipt to allow for on-board inspection. The Machines are installed facing the street for easier inspection by MTA personnel and are typically located a few feet outside the bus shelter in a predictable configuration, respecting ADA guidelines.

All bus stops on 34th Street will be equipped, except – in our district- for those stops west of 10th Avenue on the westbound route, as very few customers board at this location.

For the M16 route, which travels north on 8th Avenue, lays over at 43Rd Street and 9th Avenue and travel south on 9th Avenue, two stops only will be equipped: 42nd Street and 9th Avenue, and 9th Avenue between 39th and 40th Streets, both stops being shared with the M11.

CB4 recommend that the following design adjustment be made to improve transit riders comfort and minimize sidewalk obstructions:

Locate Rapid Transit and local buses at the same stops; this is particularly critical for the stops on Ninth Avenue.

We heard from a number of users how the physical separation of local and rapid transit bus stops make it impossible for passengers to “just take the next bus” and thus increase their waiting time, sometimes in extreme cold, heat or rainy conditions. In addition on 9th Avenue the sidewalk capacity is so scarce, that installing two stops at each location would occupy too much of a footprint considering the volume of customers at these stops.

We ask that on 9th Avenue, where the local bus M11 is so infrequent - each stop accommodate both local and Rapid Transit buses.

Wherever local and rapid transit stops are collocated, a sign above the Machines would indicate they are reserved for Bus Rapid Transit. Alternatively, the same proofs of payment could be accepted on all buses.

Install prepayment fare Machines facing the sidewalk;

Users have complained that paying their fare with their back to the curb feels unsafe. All other furniture (phone booth, parking meters) faces the sidewalk. We understand that the Machines face the street so that the MTA can inspect them from the bus or their cars.

We ask that the safety and comfort of riders be equally addressed and that all Machines be installed facing the sidewalk: the street facing side of the machine could be equipped with a signal to facilitate inspection. If not feasible in the short term, an installation perpendicular to the curb (facing the flow of traffic) would be acceptable.

Install a bus shelter at each stop:

Many seniors use the stop at 42nd Street and 9th Avenue. There, frequent and violent winds make it very unpleasant to wait for the bus. The stop between 39th and 40th is neither well lit nor visible.

We ask that all stops be equipped with a bus shelter, or relocated to accommodate such, in particular on 9th Avenue.

Relocate all bus furniture and machines on the bulb outs once the street is redesigned.

DOT touts the addition of 18,000 sq. ft. of pedestrian space, in the new design. However by installing the Machines ahead of the redesign, we fear pedestrian space will effectively be lost unless the Machines and shelters are relocated, once the bulb out have been built.

We ask that the Machines and shelters be relocated as part of the bulb out construction, even if this delays the implementation.

Launch a competition for an integrated furniture system at bus stops: We continue to deplore the visual and real clutter that conveys a poor integration of service and agencies at bus stops. The MTA pole should be integrated with the shelter and provide useful information to riders. A phone, and wastebasket on the inside, as well as newspaper boxes and the Machines on the outside could be integrated in a modular system.

We also have a few suggestions on communication and inspection/ proof of payment.

In cases where local and rapid transit bus stops are not co located, when a rider gets off a bus to make a connection with a local or a Rapid Transit Bus, the rider cannot guess if the connecting bus stop is ahead or behind on the same curb. MTA should install signs in the bus shelter to direct to adjacent stops, similar to those on subway platforms.

We were surprised to hear that the proposed system includes an on-board fare inspection process which consist of two inspectors boarding the bus and inspecting all tickets, while the bus waits for the completion of the inspection. This effectively eliminates most of the timesaving benefits of such a system.

We suggest that an alternate system be devised. The MTA might consider a “spot inspection” program used in other cities with a more substantial non-ticket fine or a system that enables inspections while the bus is moving.

Finally we suggest that except for the coins machines, the Metrocard do not need a proof of payment beyond the one recorded on their magnetic stripes. The inspectors could use a small portable reader to verify payment. Such readers do exist for smart phones. In addition, proof of payment could be transmitted wirelessly to phones or smartphones. This would save thousands in paper, maintenance and keep bus stops clean.

Again we appreciate the MTA's presentation and hope our suggestions will be given full consideration as we look forward to this important transit improvement: our community is highly reliant on buses and those routes are amongst the slowest in the city.

Sincerely yours,



John Weis
Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4



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