

Tri-State Transportation Campaign | Straphangers' Campaign/NYPIRG | Transportation Alternatives

NYC Council Oversight Hearing

February 12, 2013

Oversight: Emergency Planning and Management During and After the Storm: MTA's Response and the Long-term Impact on the City's Public Transportation System

My name is Veronica Vanterpool and I am the executive director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. I am reading today's testimony on behalf of Tri-State Transportation Campaign, Straphangers' Campaign/NYPIRG, and Transportation Alternatives.

Today's hearing was planned before this weekend's blizzard but now there is one more example of how the MTA's responses during and after the storm should be applauded. The agency's outreach to the public via traditional media (such as radio and news releases) and new media (Twitter) and technology (real time information displays) continues to prepare its ridership for schedule changes and service disruptions.

However, Superstorm Sandy demonstrated that the frequency of severe rain and wind storms require different preparation and responses than snowstorms. The aftermath of Sandy exposed the strengths and weaknesses of the existing transit network and transportation system in the region. This is what was learned:

- 1) Transit investment to keep buses, subways, and rails along with storage yards and other equipment in a state of good repair is essential to weathering any storm.
- 2) Priority bus lanes and corridors that provide seamless connectivity between the five boroughs must be established. In fact, bus rapid transit is a key recommendation of Governor Cuomo's NYS 2100 Commission report released in February 2013. Select Bus Service, the joint project of NYCDOT and MTA to upgrade and expedite bus service throughout the five boroughs, is already providing the dedicated lane infrastructure that can be employed during emergencies. Elected officials, including the next mayor, should be champions of the next generation of SBS projects. They should work with both agencies to ensure funding is available to expand SBS and enhance the service with measures such as physically separated bus lanes and more camera and information technology. New projects should be assessed with existing projects to better coordinate travel connectivity throughout the city.
- 3) Investment in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is worthwhile. Bike infrastructure supported the 150% increase in cycling over the East River Bridges days after Superstorm Sandy when transit was not running and traffic congestion locked down streets. Because of the 314 bike lane miles implemented all over the city and new pedestrian plazas and infrastructure, those working and living in New York City had other mobility options when transit was down and the streets were choked with cars. Mobility options, such as biking and walking, are essential to getting people back to work and to essential services more quickly.
- 4) High occupancy vehicle lanes (HOV) should be restricted to three persons and should be implemented immediately. The HOV restriction was put into effect October 31st, three days after the storm.

These lessons show that the MTA's ability to respond, and the city's public transportation system, is contingent on continued investment in transit, strong coordination with other agency partners, such as NYCDOT, and solid support for new transit initiatives such as Select Bus Service. Thank you.