



BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT VANESSA L. GIBSON

Hon. Ydanis Rodriguez
Commissioner
New York City Department of Transportation
55 Water Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10041

March 30, 2023

Dear Commissioner Rodriguez:

I am writing to express my concerns with the Department of Transportation's (DOT) proposal for alterations to the traffic patterns on Fordham Road. While I fully support efforts by DOT and MTA to improve traffic speeds on the corridor, any changes must be made in full cooperation with local stakeholders so as not to negatively impact the surrounding communities.

Fordham Road is one of The Bronx's main business corridors, home to numerous businesses and other organizations that provide employment in our communities and retail shopping opportunities for our residents. It serves as the gateway to several of The Bronx's major attractions and institutions, including Arthur Avenue/Little Italy, the Bronx Zoo, the New York Botanical Gardens, and Fordham University.

In addition to Fordham Road being a major thoroughfare for residents travelling by car, bus, subway, and rail, the Fordham Road corridor has a significant public transportation presence, as it is served by two subway lines: the B/D trains on Grand Concourse and the 4 train on Jerome Avenue, the Metro-North Fordham station, as well as the Bx12 SBS, the first SBS in the city, which provides important east-west service from Inwood in the west to Bay Plaza in the East Bronx. This line is one of the most essential parts of the bus system in The Bronx, having more riders annually than any other bus route in the borough and the second-most of any route in the city. Fordham Plaza is a major transportation hub with multiple other bus lines connecting service.

Because this route is so heavily travelled, the DOT has found that bus speeds on the corridor are quite slow and have been trending worse, averaging approximately 9.2 mph in 2012 to approximately 7.5 mph in 2019, with some segments below 4 mph. These slow speeds are particularly troubling in the core of the business district, between Webster Avenue and University Avenue. With the rollout of the Better Buses action plan, Fordham Road was identified as a corridor for implementing some bus improvement changes and DOT began in January 2021 with the first Community Advisory Board meeting.



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On November 16, 2022, I was pleased to accompany you, NYCT President Richard Davey, Council Members Pierina Sanchez, Oswald Feliz, and other DOT and MTA officials, on a walkthrough of Fordham Road. This walkthrough gave us the opportunity to see firsthand how the DOT's proposals would directly affect the Fordham Road corridor.

The DOT is currently considering three proposals to alter traffic patterns on Fordham Road in order to improve bus speeds. The alternatives currently under consideration include: a) converting the existing bus lanes into offset lanes; b) a one-way busway affecting only eastbound traffic; and, c) a busway in both directions. While these proposals are only in a draft phase and require more study before any recommendation can be made, I am concerned about the potential effects that restricting traffic on this major roadway will have on the surrounding streets and neighborhoods. Unlike with the 14th Street busway in Manhattan, redirected traffic from Fordham Road would spill onto local streets in the community, potentially affecting the quality of life of the people who live there. While Fordham Road itself is primarily commercial and benefits from car traffic, the surrounding areas are primarily residential and would not benefit from the diversion of traffic. Additionally, I am concerned about how changes to the traffic pattern will affect access to the major attractions in the area such as Arthur Avenue, the Bronx Zoo, and the Botanical Gardens, as well as nearby institutions such as St. Barnabas Hospital, Fordham University, Bronx Community College, and Lehman College.

In addition to the concerns for the community at large, I have concerns about customers accessing the businesses along the proposed busways, which would not permit private vehicles. I have spoken extensively with representatives of the local community, including the Fordham Road and Belmont Business Improvement Districts. These representatives of our local business community must be fully involved in the ongoing process and have their concerns respectfully heard. It is my mission as Borough President to improve the local economy here in The Bronx. That cannot be done if businesses are negatively affected by even well-intentioned changes.

Before any changes are made to the traffic patterns, we should wait to see whether ongoing traffic mitigation measures are effective. The MTA is rolling out onboard cameras on buses along the corridor to automatically ticket cars that are obstructing the bus lanes and bus stops. This will help speed up traffic on the corridor by preventing these cars from blocking traffic flows. We should wait on the results of this ongoing pilot before considering more extensive changes.

Additionally, we should address other issues in the corridor that could have meaningful impacts on bus speeds. I have heard feedback that unlicensed vendors along the corridor are obstructing the boarding and disembarking of buses on Fordham Road, in addition to their obstruction of loading zones and negative effect on legal vendors and brick-and-mortar stores. Increasing



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enforcement of these vendors is one of many small changes that can be made to improve bus speeds without drastically changing traffic patterns.

I am requesting the implementation of the onboard enforcement cameras be fully rolled out first, in addition to any additional street level enforcement. After some time has passed, a new analysis should be conducted, with data that reflects the new street conditions. If the DOT still believes one of the bus lane proposals should be considered, then it should not be advanced until after providing a detailed report on how businesses and the local community would be affected by the proposed changes. While the DOT may have a primary focus on improving bus speeds, I am focused on all aspects of the community, and the current proposals are proposing solutions when we don't know what the need will be until after the enforcement measures are rolled out.

I started my remarks with noting any changes should be coordinated with the local stakeholders and want to ensure this point is not lost. The Fordham Road and Belmont BIDs, as well as Community Board 6, have expressed strong concerns about how a busway would affect the businesses they represent. I am including their corresponding letters and I hope that you will treat their concerns with the utmost seriousness.

Thank you for your efforts on these issues, and I look forward to working with you to improve the bus speed situation on Fordham Road in a way that works for the whole community and for The Bronx as a whole.

Sincerely,

Vanessa L. Gibson
Bronx Borough President

Enclosure:

- Fordham BID letter to Ydanis Rodriguez dated June 28, 2022
- Belmont BID letter to Ydanis Rodriguez dated September 6, 2022
- Community Board 6 letter to Ydanis Rodriguez dated December 28, 2022
- Fordham BID and Belmont BID joint letter to Borough President Gibson and Councilmember Feliz dated February 24, 2023