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BRT Coming to the East Side

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As the implications of peak oil starts to come closer to home, reducing NYC's dependence on single occupancy vehicle automobile traffic (low value) and allowing higher volume (more valuable) traffic through is critical.

That's why I was glad to see that State Senator Liz Krueger's office is holding a forum on the proposed Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) next Tuesday, April 18th at 7pm at 8th Floor Meeting Room at Marymount Manhattan College, 221 East 71st Street (between Second and Third Avenues). The proposed route would run the full length of First and Second Avenues and then across 125th Street in Harlem. They expect 65,000 passengers to take this everyday.

The problems with current bus service were outlined in a study by Bruce Schaller sponsored by Transportation Alternatives and the Straphanger's Campaign (who will also be at the forum next week):

1. Buses spend as much as 30% of their time waiting for passengers to board and exit.
2. Increased crowding on buses due to ridership growth has lengthened delays from boarding and exiting.
3. Traffic signals are not synchronized with bus speeds, so buses are delayed by red lights between bus stops.
4. Drivers often have to slow down to stay on schedule even when traffic is light.
5. Bus field supervisors lack the tools to prevent bus bunching.

So how does BRT fix these problems?

Well, there are two different schemes that could be done with differing impacts on service:

1. One alternative, using dual bus lanes, low floor buses, raised lane dividers and pre-boarding fare payment during rush hour at six locations, would reduce bus travel times by 21-27% compared to the current limited stop service and reduce the variability of travel time by 38%. Bus riders would save 9-17 minutes for a trip from 125 Street to Houston.
2. A more far-reaching set of BRT features that includes an exclusive bus lane would reduce travel times by 37-53% compared to the current limited stop service and

> improve reliability by 86%. Bus riders would save 16-34 minutes for a trip from 125 Street to Houston.

The other major positive to the dedicated bus lanes would be that these avenues would be less friendly to dangerous/polluting/noisy automobile traffic, thus causing traffic to move over to the FDR or they'll get so frustrated watching the bus zoom by that they'll just take the bus instead. Eventually, these dedicated bus lanes could be electrified and support either a electric bus or a tram/streetcar/trolley system, which would reduce our dependence on diesel powered buses.

But this proposal might only partially relieve traffic congestion and move people faster to their destinations. This plan needs to be integrated with reducing the amount of free government parking permits, implementing auto congestion pricing, building a solid biking infrastructure and a safer pedestrian environment. A comprehensive long term transportation plan for all modes is needed and priorities/goals need to be established to most efficiently move people around the city and wean ourselves of liquid fuels.