



Transportation Policy Speech
City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn
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La Guardia Community College

What would you do with an extra 20 minutes a day?

It might not sound like a lot, but think about it.

Would you spend 20 more minutes reading to your kids? Spend 20 extra minutes studying for a test or doing inventory at your small business? Sit and have breakfast instead of grabbing a coffee to go? Maybe just catch a few extra minutes of sleep? 20 minutes doesn't sound like much, but it adds up to an extra three and a half days each year.

And every day, New Yorkers in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island spend an average of 20 more minutes commuting than those who live in Manhattan.

Why? Because we have a transportation system that was built to serve a different era and a different city.

Next October will be exactly 110 years since our first subway line opened.

It was called the Manhattan Main Line, and it's now part of the current 4-5-6 track.

When the subway started running in 1904, there were about 4 million people in New York City, and over half of them lived in Manhattan. Less than 200,000 people lived in Queens.

The majority of our current subway system was completed by the 1950s.

At that point, nearly 70% of the private sector jobs in New York City were located in Manhattan, and the subways helped move people accordingly.

Fast forward to today.

Manhattan accounts for less than 1/5 of the total population of the city. Nearly 2.3 million people live in Queens, and nearly 2.6 million live in Brooklyn.

And in the last two decades, we've seen a net loss of jobs in Manhattan, and continued job growth in every other borough.

Our city has changed over time. But our transit system hasn't kept pace.

It's a system that still operates as though the majority of New Yorkers live and work in Manhattan. And it assumes that wherever you live, you're always trying to get in or out of the central business district.

We still have one of the best transit systems in the world, but it simply doesn't serve every neighborhood or every New Yorker.

Let's look at two commuters with very different commutes and very similar problems.

Natalia is a home care worker living in Morris Park in the Bronx.

Every day she commutes to Co-op City, less than 4 miles away. In the morning she walks four blocks to catch a bus, then transfers to another bus. The whole trip takes about 45 minutes.

But in the evening, those same buses sit in bumper to bumper traffic. It takes Natalia an average of 90 minutes to get home.

She could walk home faster if I-95 and the Hutch weren't in the way.

And every day while Natalia is sitting on a bus, Judy is waiting for a subway.

Judy lives in Far Rockaway, and takes the A train to the G to get to her job at the Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center.

It takes her almost two hours on the subway to make the 21 mile trip.

To put that in perspective, it takes the same amount of time to travel the 90 miles from Poughkeepsie to Grand Central Station on Metro North.

Natalia and Judy are part of a group of New Yorkers that has been growing exponentially.

They both live and work in a borough outside of Manhattan. And they spend more than an hour commuting in at least one direction every day.

Some of the students here today have probably experienced the same thing traveling to class here at La Guardia.

This is a crisis disproportionately affects lower income New Yorkers. Of the 750,000 mega-commuters who travel more than an hour to get to work, 500,000 earn less than \$35 grand per year.

And it's starting to affect more and more middle class families, as rising rents encourage them to move to neighborhoods further away from Manhattan.

This isn't just affecting New Yorkers quality of life. This cuts to the very core of our economic future.

Neighborhoods that are cut off from transit are cut off from new development.

Long commute times mean businesses can't compete for the best talent from across the city.

Hours spent on buses and trains are hours of lost productivity.

This means we could continue to lose jobs to New Jersey and Connecticut, and see residents leave for the suburbs. It makes it harder for us to compete with Boston for new technology firms, and London for jobs in finance.

Now transportation is an incredibly complex issue, and in the coming months I'll continue to address areas like alternative forms of transportation, accessibility, and ways to use new technology to improve the riding experience.

But today I want to focus on one specific issue - one of the most fundamental challenges facing our system.

If we want to remain the economic capital of the world, and continue to grow new jobs – if we want to keep New York a place for middle and working class families – then we need to build a transportation system that serves the needs of the 21st century city.

So today I'm setting a clear goal: By the year 2023, not a single New Yorker should have to spend more than an hour commuting in either direction.

We should no longer be home to the most mega-commuters of any city in the country.

Instead, I believe we can build a city where a single parent can take a new job in a different borough, knowing they can still make it home in time to pick up their child from daycare.

A city where businesses are eager to locate in every neighborhood, knowing that long commutes won't scare off potential employees.

Where a family who has a second child and needs more space knows that the commute from Queens won't be longer than the commute from New Jersey or Connecticut.

We can unlock the next phase in our city's development, and stay competitive in an increasingly global economy.

A one hour commute cap won't happen overnight, but I believe it is within our reach.

And today I'm going to outline a 5 point strategy called Fair Ride NYC – a plan that will get us moving in the right direction, and ultimately give every New Yorker a fair ride.

Number one - if we're going to make good on the vision I just described, we need to be in charge of our own transit system. So today I'm proposing that New York City be given control of the MTA.

Of the 1.8 billion people who ride the MTA system each year, more than 90% use New York City's subways and buses.

And the vast majority of the dollars that fund that system come from the five boroughs - through fares, tolls, and taxes.

But right now New Yorkers have little say in how that system is run. The MTA Chair is appointed by the Governor, and the Mayor has a minority of the appointments to the MTA Board, with the majority of members being appointed by the Governor and by county leaders outside the city.

This has resulted in an MTA that doesn't respond quickly enough to the needs of New Yorkers and the changing face of our city.

So I propose that the Mayor be given the authority to directly appoint the President of New York City Transit.

Under my plan, the Mayor would also directly appoint the majority of MTA board members.

This change will keep our trains and buses operating as a regional system, but will make sure that the majority stakeholders have a majority voice.

And having the buck stop with the mayor will bring much needed accountability, just as we've seen with mayoral control of our schools.

In addition, I propose that there be one voting representative of the riding public. Public representation on the MTA board is currently ceremonial. Having a full voting member on the board will finally give riders real input in their transit system. Giving New York City control of the MTA is not a new idea, but it's an idea whose time has come.

And I'm going to spend the next year, working in Albany with the Governor and the Legislature, to finally make it happen.

Local government by its very nature is the most directly responsive to the needs of individual citizens.

Having local control of our transit will allow us to focus like a laser on the gaps in the system, and commit more fully to getting commute times under control.

It will also allow us to dramatically reinvent the way the MTA plans for new transit routes.

Instead of being reactive once travel times get out of control, we need to be proactive in turning potential problems into new opportunities.

Right now the MTA focuses almost exclusively on existing demand – how many people are riding current bus routes, how long are wait times, where do people get on and off?

They don't spend nearly enough time looking forward.

What are the demographic shifts we're seeing in neighborhoods? Where is new housing or commercial space being built? What do industry leaders think will help them expand to new neighborhoods?

A couple years ago I announced plans to connect thriving tech hubs in DUMBO and the Brooklyn Navy Yard with underutilized office space in Downtown Brooklyn, to form a vibrant Brooklyn Tech Triangle.

The first thing we did was talk to industry leaders in the area, and ask what the obstacles were that would keep them from expanding downtown.

They said one of the biggest challenges was a complete lack of mass transit options connecting the three points of the triangle.

So we starting talking to the MTA, and to their credit they have been working to meet that need and help us bring a new bus route and new tech jobs to the area.

But the question remains, why did it take a request from elected officials to get them focused on this incredible potential?

It's not rocket science. It just requires ongoing dialogue with business leaders, communities, and developers.

We can turn our transit system into an even greater engine for economic growth.

And the good news is, we don't need to wait for the State to give us authority over the MTA before we can start reinvesting in our system. There are other concrete actions we can take today that will speed up commute times and open up new opportunities in the boroughs outside Manhattan.

One of the most effective ways that New York City can expand transit access is through Bus Rapid Transit – a system that combines some of the efficiency of rail with the flexibility and lower start up costs of buses.

As we've seen from the 2nd Avenue line, a new subway can take decades to complete.

A new Bus Rapid Transit route can be up and running in less than a year. Subways cost roughly \$1 billion per mile to construct. Bus rapid transit - just \$1 million a mile.

By collecting fares before riders board, providing dedicated bus lanes, and running more buses per hour, they've been able to reduce travel times by 20%.

That means riders going from 207th Street to Bay Plaza on the Fordham Road line save an average of more than 10 minutes on their commute in each direction.

The City also has more direct influence on Bus Rapid Transit. It goes like this.

The City Department of Transportation works with the MTA to plan and evaluate new routes. We pay for the related capital costs – new bus shelters, painting and maintaining the lanes, or extending the curb so buses don't have to waste time pulling in and out of traffic. Then the MTA covers the operating expenses.

The city and the MTA have already proven that this system can work in New York City, launching a new rapid transit system called select bus service.

It currently operates on four routes - Hylan Blvd in Staten Island, Fordham Rd in the Bronx, 34th Street, and 1st and 2nd Ave in Manhattan - and two more routes are set to launch this year.

They've cost the city between \$10 and \$20 million a piece, a much lower startup cost than most types of transit.

Now is the time to increase our commitment to Bus Rapid Transit.

So in the second part of Fair Ride NYC, I'm proposing that we commit to launching 10 new select bus service routes in the next four years.

These routes should be determined based on two main criteria: Where can we most dramatically reduce travel times for New Yorkers? And where do we have the greatest potential to stimulate new businesses and new jobs?

We'll need to engage with communities and business owners to make sure that our new routes are meeting their specific needs. But I've got a pretty good idea where we can start.

Let's bring select bus service to the North Shore of Staten Island.

I've been a strong supporter of the proposed light rail, but we need to be realistic.

Even if we started planning that project today, it would be years if not decades before it brings much needed relief to Staten Islanders.

We could have a new select bus service up and running by next summer.

As a first phase, we can connect Snug Harbor with the Saint George Ferry Terminal, speeding commute times and encouraging more tourism.

Then we can work with community members to explore running select bus service even farther up Richmond Terrace.

And let's not stop there. How about a new route in the South Bronx that helps people in Soundview get to food manufacturing jobs in Hunts Point? Or along Utica Avenue from Bed-Stuy to Marine Park?

We can bring residents in Jamaica to small businesses in Flushing, and help people in Flushing get to jobs at JFK airport.

Ultimately we should be using select bus routes as bridges to connect every major subway line further out in the boroughs.

So I'm also proposing that we begin building a ring of high speed select buses that run from the R in Bay Ridge all the way up to the L train. Then continue on to Queens, and meet up with the M the E or the 7. And up to the Bronx where you could pick up the 6, the B, and all the way to the 4 train.

We can run a bus between both ends of the M train - at Forest Hills and Middle Village - effectively turning it into a loop.

And why should you have to go all the way into Jackson Heights to connect from the 7 to the E train?

There's virtually no limit to how many communities we can connect with this select bus ring.

We can give many neighborhoods unprecedented access to other subway lines in their borough.

And most importantly, we can do it not in a few decades, but in just a few years.

Now buses aren't the only mode of transportation that provides almost immediate benefits.

The third part of my plan involves making better use of one of our greatest resources - our waterways.

New York City is a city of water, and for too long we both figuratively and literally turned our back on that waterfront.

I envision a city that once again connects and moves New Yorkers through our great blue highways.

Ferries are one of the greenest forms of mass transit. They're much cheaper and easier to start up than a subway line, and the per-rider subsidy is even lower than most bus lines.

Back in 2008 I first proposed bringing five borough ferry service to New York City.

Since then we worked with Mayor Bloomberg and EDC to launch the East River Ferry, connecting Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan.

The East River Ferry has been even more successful than we could have hoped. In just 18 months it's already served over 1.6 million riders. And not surprisingly, people aren't just using it to get to Manhattan and back.

Thousands of riders use it each day to get from Williamsburg or Long Island City to jobs in DUMBO, and vice versa.

I propose that we immediately begin working towards Phase Two of my five borough ferry plan.

This next phase would extend service beyond the current East River route, adding stops to the south at Atlantic Avenue and Red Hook, and to the north in Astoria, Roosevelt Island, 91st Street, and Ferry Point Park in the Bronx.

This expanded service will lower commute times for tens of thousands of New Yorkers, and help reduce crowding on both our roads and our subways.

It will also help spur additional economic development, just like we've seen at existing ferry stops.

Ask local business owners in DUMBO - they'll tell you they've seen a significant jump in customers since the ferry came to town.

We can bring that same kind of opportunity to the Bronx. Commuters in Throgs Neck often face 90 minute commutes that involve either driving or taking the bus to the subway.

You're actually better off living near a Metro North Station in Westchester.

By bringing ferry service to Ferry Point, we can cut that commute time in half for many folks going to Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan.

And it's not just about helping commuters leaving from Ferry Point. With a new golf course and an outlet mall set to open by the end of 2015, our ferry will help both tourists and New Yorkers get to the Bronx and stimulate the local economy.

Having access to a broader pool of workers could help fuel industrial expansion at the Zerega IBZ.

We can attract medical research labs looking for more affordable space.

In short, we can fuel a continued revitalization of Throgs Neck, and make sure it stays a vibrant middle class neighborhood – a place where young professionals have nearby job opportunities, so they can stay in the communities they grew up in.

Now ferries aren't just a key part of our transportation system - they're a critical tool for emergency response.

The East River Ferry was the first mass transit up and running after Hurricane Sandy.

And ferries are flexible. They can land anywhere there's a dock, and quickly move people in a crisis.

After Sandy, the City launched an emergency ferry service running from the Rockaways to Manhattan, financed with federal dollars.

It's been the only way for many Rockaway residents to get off the peninsula since the shuttle has been down, and it's scheduled to continue until the train comes back online.

I say we should start taking steps today to keep that Rockaway Ferry active even after the shuttle is up and running.

We can start working to secure a more permanent stream of federal funding, and we can begin planning for a "Park and Sail" facility that would allow even more residents to utilize the ferry.

And as the city and state continue to receive federal funds to rebuild post Sandy and strengthen our infrastructure, we should look for even more opportunities to invest in ferries.

It will make our city safer, and reduce commute times for people in all five boroughs.

Now so far I've talked about buses and ferries, which are both more flexible and easier to implement than rail transit. But there are still some good opportunities to extend train service to even more commuters.

That's why the fourth part of my plan uses an expansion of Metro North service to bring faster commutes to tens of thousands of people in the Bronx.

I propose that the MTA extend Metro North rail all the way to Penn Station, including four new station stops at Co-Op City, Parkchester, Morris Park, and Hunts Point, with additional stops along the West Side of Manhattan.

Remember Natalia, our home care worker with the 90 minute commute? Well instead of taking two buses, she'll have the option of a one stop train ride from Co-Op City home to Morris Park, cutting her travel time down to less than 20 minutes.

That may be an extreme case. But thousands of other Bronx residents will see significant time savings.

If we start work soon, we could see expanded Metro North access before the end of the decade, and the average commute time for riders cut in half.

We'll take cars off the road, and potentially reduce neighborhoods reliance on more expensive express buses – saving subsidy dollars and relieving congestion.

And we'll be able to turn these new stations into hubs for new retail and service jobs.

Which brings me to the fifth and final point of Fair Ride NYC. We need to bring targeted economic development strategies to the communities with the longest commute times in the city.

Because it's not just about getting people to their jobs. It's also about bringing jobs to where people live, so they don't have to travel as far to earn a paycheck.

I recently announced a neighborhood focused job creation strategy called Keeping Opportunities Close to Home - KOCH. It's all about looking at existing industries with room for growth, and identifying new industries that can build on neighborhood strengths.

The East Bronx is currently experiencing one of the biggest development booms the Bronx has seen in decades.

There's major growth happening in the healthcare industry around Calvary Hospital, Albert Einstein College and Montefiore Medical Center.

The City is currently building a state of the art, back up 911 call center that will employ 500 people.

Once we open a new Metro North Stop, we'll see more New Yorkers able to access these jobs, and even more potential for growth in the area.

So what's another untapped resource we see in the East Bronx?

The Hutch Metro Center has plenty of office space available to rent, and its proximity to the medical cluster makes it primed for potential med tech jobs.

And we don't need to wait for a new train station to start attracting new companies. We can start by helping property owners retrofit their space to be more conducive to med tech firms.

And we can create matching grants that help leverage state and federal dollars, to build a new med tech cluster.

We can do this kind of neighborhood focused economic planning in every borough, so more people can get to a job without even having a commute.

We can bring new manufacturing jobs to Sunset Park by making better use of city owned spaces like the Army Terminal.

We can create exporting jobs along the Staten Island waterfront by launching a Regional Export Council, and in the process we'll take more cars off the Expressway.

We can start to outfit office space right here in Long Island City for the 3D printing and other high tech manufacturing firms that will soon be spinning out of the new campus on Roosevelt Island.

And when we do, we'll also help reduce crowding on the 7 train.

It all needs to be connected. We can't afford to look at transportation and economic development as distinct policy goals, but as two sides of the same coin.

Look, there are no simple solutions when it comes to transportation. But there are clear and concrete steps we can take today.

To bring Bus Rapid Transit to Staten Island, and ferry service to the Bronx. To use our transit system as fuel for new development. To make every New Yorker's commute just a little bit easier.

Think about this. There are 750,000 mega commuters in New York City.

If we save each of them one hour in travel every week, that's 39 million hours a year we're giving back to New Yorkers.

39 million more chances to help rebuild our economy, pursue an education, or volunteer in your community. We can't afford to let this opportunity pass us by. We need to stop thinking about transportation as out of our control, or the challenges as insurmountable.

The solutions are in our hands, if we're willing to take action.

If we're willing to embrace our waterways, rethink the way we look at bus service, invest in our infrastructure, and engage in smart economic planning.

New York City is home to some of the top experts in public transit – many of whom are in this room. And we're home to eight and a half million people who are always willing to roll up their sleeves and help get things done.

Our transit system has always been among the best in the nation. It's part of what's kept us a global leader over the last hundred years.

Working together we can make it even better.

This won't be cheap.

Building new metro north stations could cost approximately 600 M.

New Select Bus Service routes could be 150M in capital, and expanding ferries another 3-6 M more in operating subsidies.

But remember – Every \$1 billion in transportation funding generates \$3.6 billion in economic activity and supports 36,000 jobs.

Some people said we'd never find a way to finance the 7 line extension, but Mayor Bloomberg and I worked with developers and the community and found a creative new funding structure.

People said we'd never see ferry service succeed in the five boroughs, and now our east river ferry is thriving beyond anyone's imagination.

We can't afford to just talk about solutions. Just as I've always done, we need to come together and make things happen for New Yorkers.

We can be a city where people spend less time commuting and more time doing the things they love – a city where there is opportunity for middle class jobs in every neighborhood – and a city that looks always more boldly to the future.

So thank you for listening today, and I look forward to working with all of you to make this plan a reality.