

# Speeding Up Slowly: A Review of Initiatives to Improve Bus Speeds in New York City

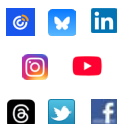
New York City  
Independent  
Budget Office



New York City  
Independent Budget Office  
Louisa Chafee, Director

110 William Street 14<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, New York 10038

Tel. 212-442-0632  
[www.ibo.nyc.gov](http://www.ibo.nyc.gov)  
[press@ibo.nyc.gov](mailto:press@ibo.nyc.gov)





This report was prepared by Jan Luis Mendez and Emily Pramik, with assistance from Arden Armbruster and My Nguyen, and supervised by Brian Cain and Sarah Parker. Report production was done by Tara V. Swanson.

Please direct any inquiries on this report to [press@ibo.nyc.gov](mailto:press@ibo.nyc.gov).

Photo by [Diogo Fagundes](#) on [Unsplash](#)

# Executive Summary

New York City buses are an integral part of the City's public transportation system. Alongside the subway, buses move millions of people every day across the five boroughs, sometimes serving as the only mode of transportation available in certain neighborhoods. Despite their importance, City buses continue to be plagued by slow speeds.

Transit officials have multiple theories for slow bus speeds, such as congested roadways and a lack of dedicated infrastructure. Both City and State agencies have implemented initiatives to address these concerns, such as protected bus lanes and bus network redesigns, but progress on these initiatives has been minimal. Congestion pricing in Central and Lower Manhattan, which commenced on January 5, 2025, is another attempt to address these concerns, but is outside the scope of this study because bus speeds are a concern across the entire City.

The Independent Budget Office (IBO) conducted an analysis of Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) bus speed data and City administrative data. IBO sought to better understand the current state of the City's bus network, analyze past and ongoing trends of bus speeds, and highlight the City's progress towards meeting bus infrastructure goals aimed at increasing bus efficiency.

Key findings include:

- The New York City bus system is among the slowest bus systems in the United States, however it moves significantly more riders and has a larger fleet of buses than other cities in the country.
- Local Law 195 of 2019, also known as the *New York City Streets Plan*, mandated that the Department of Transportation (DOT) construct 150 miles of protected bus lanes in a 5-year period, with the stated intention to increase bus speeds. This would require DOT to roughly double the total miles of bus lanes in 5 years; the City's existing bus lanes were constructed over a period of 50 years. DOT is not on track to meet the mandate.
- Despite several initiatives aimed at increasing bus speeds, bus speeds citywide in December 2024 stayed largely consistent with those in January 2019. It is unclear why these efforts have not had a more noticeable impact. Possible reasons include traffic congestion, a lack of dedicated bus lanes, and insufficient traffic enforcement.
- Monthly violations issued related to bus enforcement have increased since January 2019. The increase has been led by camera-based enforcement and not officer-issued violations.

Slow bus speeds are not only a matter of metrics, but have real-life economic, social, and environmental implications for New York City. When buses are slow it means that service is unreliable, so people wait longer for the bus to arrive, spend more time traveling to their destination, and deal with inconsistent commutes. These negative outcomes disproportionately harm bus riders who have few alternative transportation options available to them. Increases in bus speeds would increase the perception of reliability and encourage people to use buses as a substitute for cars, as well as provide environmental benefits such as improved air quality.

# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<a href="#">1</a>
<b>Introduction</b>	<a href="#">1</a>
<b>Bus Service and Ridership in New York City</b>	<a href="#">1</a>
<b>City Efforts to Enhance Bus Service</b>	<a href="#">2</a>
<b>Buses in New York City Are Still at 2019 Speeds</b>	<a href="#">3</a>
<b>Traffic and Enforcement Are Common Explanations for Slow Buses</b>	<a href="#">5</a>
<b>The City's Progress on the <i>Streets Plan</i> and Local Law 195</b>	<a href="#">6</a>
<b>City Council and DOT at Odds Over LL195 Compliance</b>	<a href="#">7</a>
<b>Most Bus Lanes Built Since 2022 Are Concentrated in Manhattan and the Bronx</b>	<a href="#">10</a>
<b>The Economic and Environmental Costs of Slow Buses</b>	<a href="#">10</a>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<a href="#">12</a>
<b>Endnotes</b>	<a href="#">12</a>

## Introduction

One of the unique characteristics about New York City is how many people rely on public transportation every day and how integral it is to the City's communities and economy. The City's public transit features many different modes of transportation available in the five boroughs, including the subway, commuter rail system, buses, water taxis and ferries, bicycles, and more.

One of the most important modes of transportation in New York City is bus transit. Buses serve almost every community and neighborhood in the City and are the second largest mode of transportation by ridership in the City after the subway.<sup>1</sup> City buses link residential neighborhoods to commercial corridors and connect to major transit hubs from areas with limited alternative modes of public transit. They also provide an accessible transportation option for older adults and riders with limited mobility.

However, bus riders have experienced a downturn in bus speeds and efficiency. Average bus speeds and ridership have both decreased since the early 2010s and improved only slightly when comparing current data to pre-pandemic levels. In recent years, the City's Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) boosted efforts to address issues thought to underly the slow bus problem. In this report, the Independent Budget Office (IBO) examines DOT's progress toward its stated goals to improve bus speeds. IBO also provides additional context for the community impacts associated with the lack of timely and reliable public buses.

## Bus Service and Ridership in New York City

MTA [ridership data](#) estimates the City's public bus network serves approximately 1.4 million passengers daily. Ridership peaks during weekday rush hour as commuters head to work, but ridership typically remains high during off-peak and weekend hours. Between the five boroughs, Brooklyn has the highest bus ridership, with over 104 million passengers in 2023, compared to Staten Island, which has the lowest bus ridership at a little over 20 million passengers. Bus ridership has increased over the years since the COVID-19 pandemic, but remains significantly lower than pre-pandemic ridership, at around 63% of ridership recovered since 2019. For more information on ridership, the MTA publishes daily ridership numbers as part of their MTA Metrics [data program](#).

The MTA bus network runs over 300 routes across over 3,200 miles in New York City.<sup>2</sup> Some of these routes, such as the M15/M15 SBS, carried over 16 million passengers in 2023. Bus routes are divided into three types of service: Local/Limited routes, Select Bus Service routes, and Express routes.

- **Local routes** provide service to all stops along a route, with **Limited buses** skipping certain stops. Local/Limited routes often travel through busy commercial and residential corridors, and in most cases do not have dedicated infrastructure.
- **Select-Bus Service** (SBS) routes are similar to Limited buses, but have additional treatments

### Congestion Pricing

The MTA's Central Business District Tolling Program, commonly called congestion pricing, commenced on January 5, 2025. This report focuses on the City-level efforts to improve bus infrastructure and traffic enforcement related to bus speeds, and does not assess the impact of congestion pricing on bus speeds. Slow bus speeds are a concern across the entire City of New York, while congestion pricing specifically applies to Central and Lower Manhattan. While speeds may improve in central and Lower Manhattan, speeds in the surrounding communities may decrease due to the spillover effect. Moreover, bus speed data for January 2025 was not available at the time of this analysis. As additional monthly data on bus speeds under congestion pricing becomes available, the impact of congestion pricing specifically will become clearer. IBO is actively monitoring the public impact and response to congestion pricing, but it is not the focus of this report.

designed to increase efficiency and speeds, such as dedicated bus lanes and all-door boarding.

- **Express buses** serve customers traveling between boroughs, traveling mostly on major roads and highways with significantly less stops in between, and are primarily designed to bring workers to the major work centers.

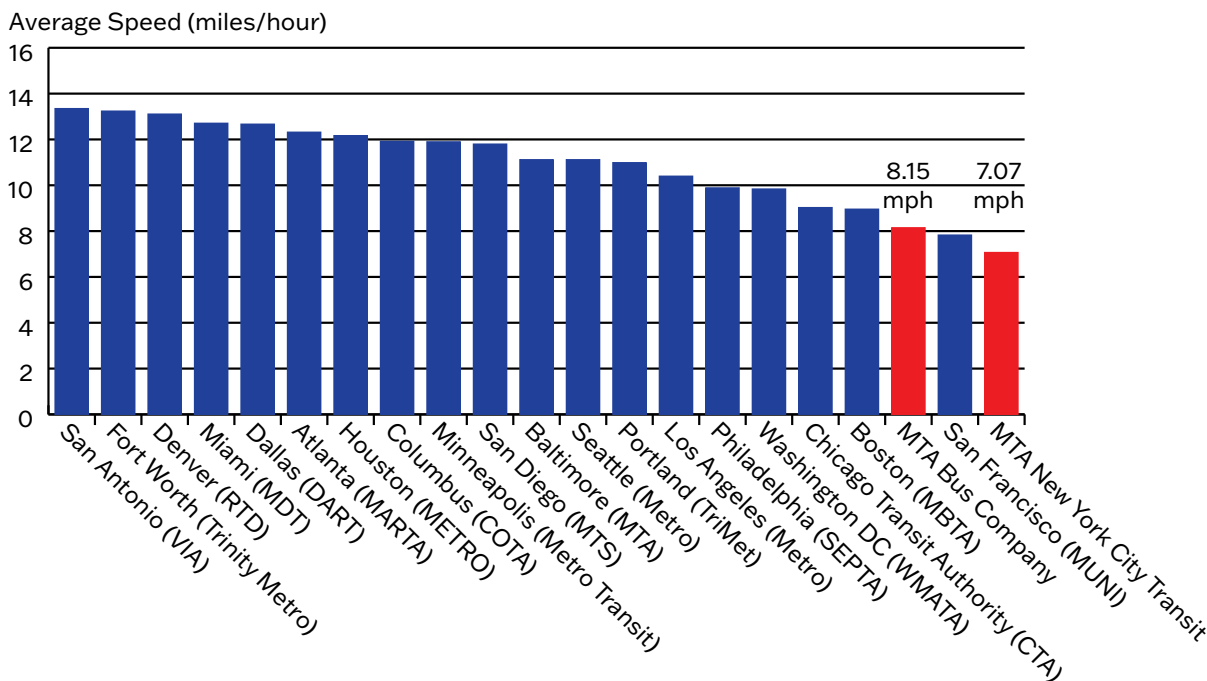
Most bus routes operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, though some may have modified frequencies and routes during late night or weekend hours. Buses serve a unique role in the City, particularly in the boroughs outside of Manhattan where they serve as an integral mode of transportation in areas that the subway does not reach. This is especially important for residents for whom other transportation modes, such as personal or for-hire vehicles, are not a feasible option.

Another unique quality of the bus network is that it can provide a transportation option to older adults and persons with limited mobility. This stands in contrast to the subway system, which can be difficult to navigate for those who have difficulty with staircases and escalators. Many subway stations do not have elevators and are not otherwise compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a subject of several [lawsuits](#). The MTA’s other surface-level public transit option—Access-A-Ride Paratransit Service for disabled riders—requires users to medically qualify for services and book rides at least 24 hours in advance effectively creating more barriers for usage than the buses, which are all equipped with ramps or lifts.

### City Efforts to Enhance Bus Service

Concerns about slow buses—as highlighted in the 2017 City Comptroller [report](#)—are not new, nor are New York City bus speeds reflective of a general trend across urban bus systems. Rather, New York City buses are among the slowest buses in the nation. As shown in Figure 1, according to 2018 Federal Transit Administration data, New York City bus speeds ranked at the bottom relative to other large U.S. cities (note that the MTA Bus Company and New York City Transit are both owned and run by the MTA).

**Figure 1**  
**New York City Buses Rank Among the Slowest in the Nation**  
 Average Local Bus Speeds in Major U.S. Cities (2018)



SOURCE: Federal Transit Administration 2018 bus service data  
 NOTE: MTA buses are separated into the MTA Bus Company and the New York City Transit, both of which are run by MTA.  
 New York City Independent Budget Office

For context, in January 2015 the citywide average bus speed across all hours was 8.4 miles per hour. Between January 2015 and January 2019, bus speeds had decreased to a citywide average of 8.2 miles per hour. New York City buses averaged around 8.1 miles per hour for calendar year 2024.<sup>3</sup>

Multiple mayoral administrations have promised to increase bus speeds and improve bus service overall. One of the first comprehensive initiatives to improve bus service across the City was the de Blasio Administration's 2019 [Better Buses Action Plan](#). The plan was in response to rising concerns over the bus network, including slow speeds. It focused on increasing citywide bus speeds by 25% and reversing downward ridership trends. The initiative established goals such as improving 5 miles of existing bus lanes each year, installing 10-15 miles of new bus lanes each year, expanding bus lane camera enforcement, and advocating with the MTA for all-door boarding.

Around the same time, the MTA presented its own reforms, the [Bus Network Redesign](#). This initiative aimed at improving bus service in each borough by improving connections, simplifying routes, and speeding up buses. Currently, the Staten Island Express Bus Network Redesign and the Bronx Local Bus Network Redesign have both been completed and implemented, with the Brooklyn and Queens Bus Network Redesigns still in the planning stage.

In 2019, the City started a pilot program that transformed 14<sup>th</sup> Street in Lower Manhattan into a bus-only street, also known as a "busway." From 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., only trucks and buses are allowed to travel through the corridor. The City made the pilot permanent citing increases of "bus speeds by as much as 24% and ridership by as much as 30%".<sup>4</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup> Street busway has been used as a prime local example of the benefits of converting busy commercial corridors to bus-only pedestrianized corridors. Busways have also been implemented in Queens and Brooklyn.

Bus speeds did notably increase during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the decrease in traffic, but then speeds quickly dropped back down to pre-pandemic levels just as ridership rebounded back up. Post-pandemic, the City's effort to speed up buses has most recently been spearheaded by the 2021 [New York City Streets Plan](#), the Department of Transportation (DOT)'s five-year master transportation plan covering the use of streets, sidewalks, and pedestrian spaces across the City. The *Streets Plan* was developed to comply with [Local Law 195](#) of 2019 (LL195), which includes several legally mandated targets for the construction of new protected bus lanes, transit signal priority intersections, protected bike lanes, and more.

## Buses in New York City Are Still at 2019 Speeds

IBO conducted an analysis of publicly available bus speed data from New York State Open Data and the MTA to better understand the current state of the City's bus network. Bus speeds are calculated by dividing the distance traveled by the duration from start to end of a route, including all time at bus stops. IBO's analysis focuses on weekday bus trips during peak hours to avoid the variability in weekend and off-peak bus speeds. Peak hours are defined by the MTA as 6:30 AM to 9:30 AM and 3:30 PM to 8:00 PM, from Monday through Friday, times when ridership is at its highest.

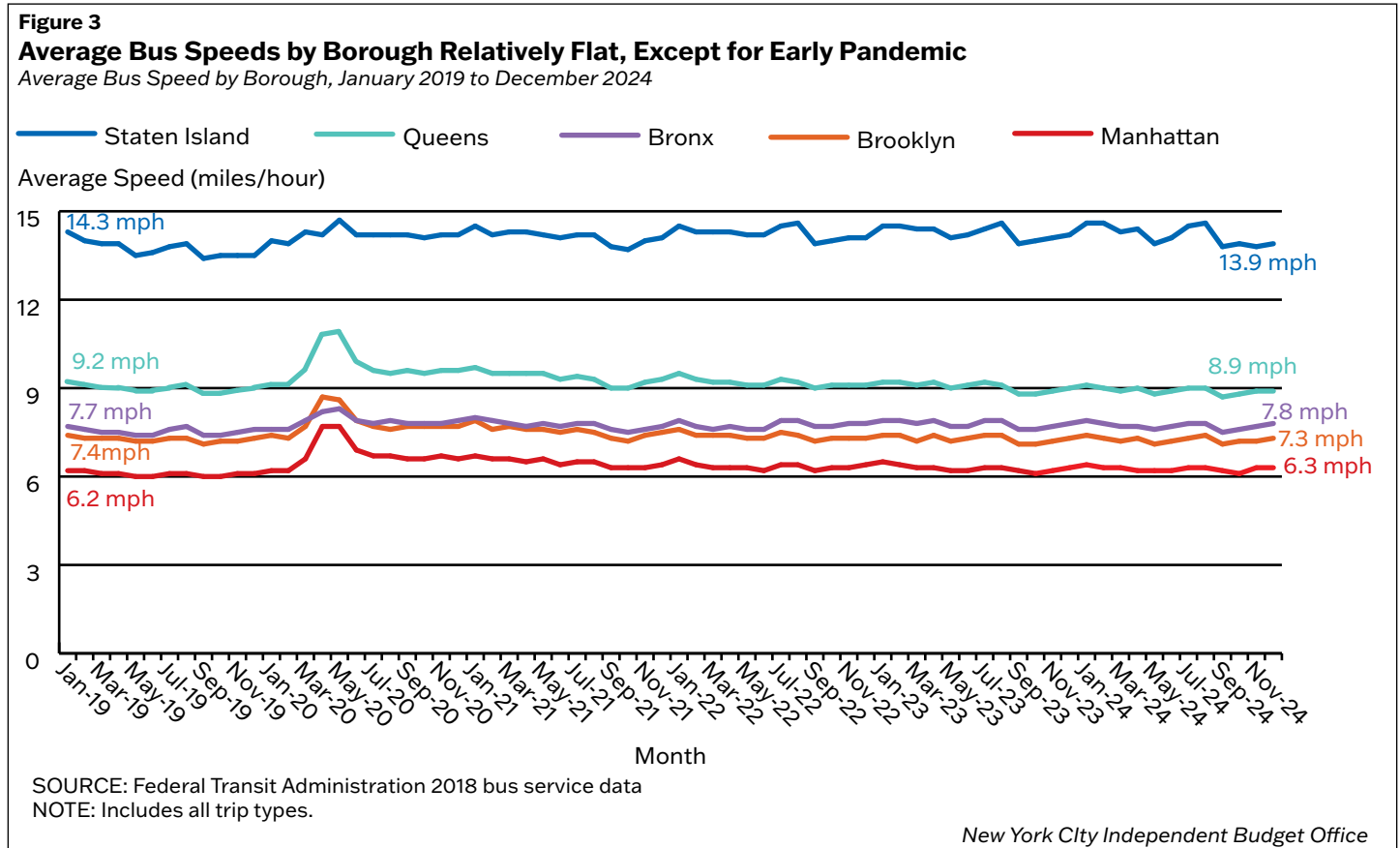
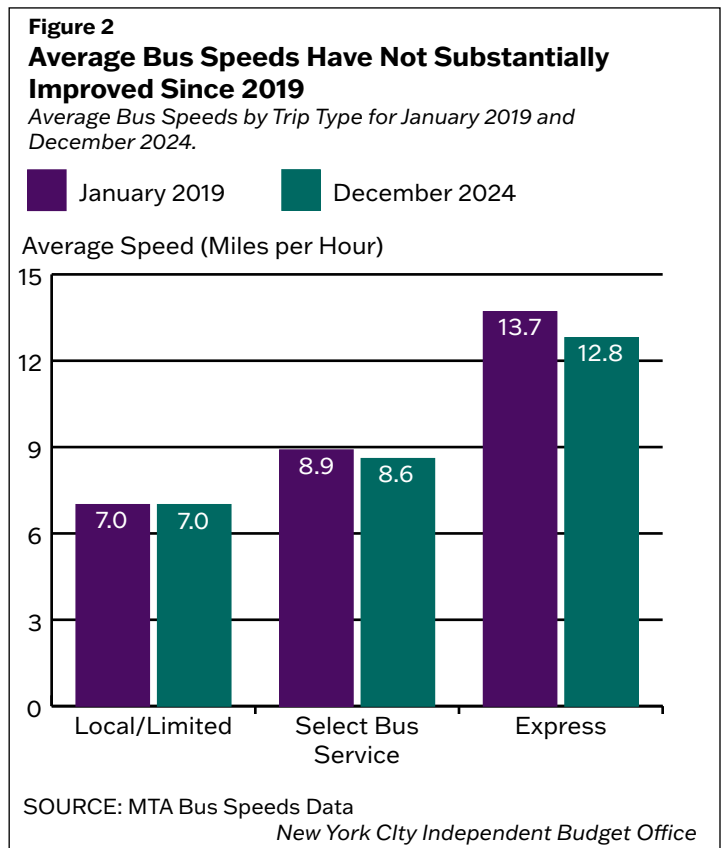
To account for the anomaly of the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption it had on public transit, IBO's analysis compared current bus speeds to pre-pandemic speeds, using January 2019 as a benchmark. Despite multiple City and MTA plans to improve bus speeds, between January 2019 and December 2024, bus speeds have not changed substantially for any of the three trip types. Average bus speeds across all 316 bus routes during peak weekday hours stands at 7.6 miles per hour, consistent with January 2019 speeds at 7.8 miles per hour.<sup>5</sup>

Unsurprisingly, IBO found that Local/Limited routes are the slowest buses, and Express buses are the fastest, on average (see Figure 2). SBS buses were about 22% faster than Local/Limited buses in December

2024. However, at 8.6 miles per hour they remained slower than average speeds for other major US cities as shown in Figure 1, despite SBS routes being specifically designed for efficiency, reliability, and speed. IBO also found that average bus speeds have fallen across bus trip types, with SBS and Express routes running slower when compared to January 2019.

Overall bus speeds also varied widely across the five boroughs and over time, as shown in Figure 3. Staten Island, which is historically more car-oriented than the other boroughs, had the highest speeds by a notable margin. Manhattan—the densest and most traffic-congested borough—had the slowest speeds citywide on average. For December 2024, speeds in Staten Island averaged 13.9 miles per hour, while speeds in Manhattan averaged 6.3 miles per hour. Since 2019, borough-level bus speeds have largely remained flat other than a brief increase in speeds at the onset of the pandemic in spring 2020.

The overall range of bus speeds by specific bus route also varies greatly. Some Local/Limited buses ran at substantially higher-than-average speeds,





such as the “S89 Eltingville-Bayonne LTD” in Staten Island which ran 16.1 miles per hour in December 2024. Some buses, however, are only slightly faster than a brisk walking pace, such as the “M50 W 42 St Pier - East Side” crosstown bus in Manhattan at 4.2 miles per hour. Buses in Manhattan are expected to be slower, as borough-level data shows, but some bus routes do perform notably better than others. The “M98 Washington Heights-Upper East Side LTD” for example, ran at 8.5 miles per hour, the fastest local service in Manhattan.

## Traffic and Enforcement Are Common Explanations for Slow Buses

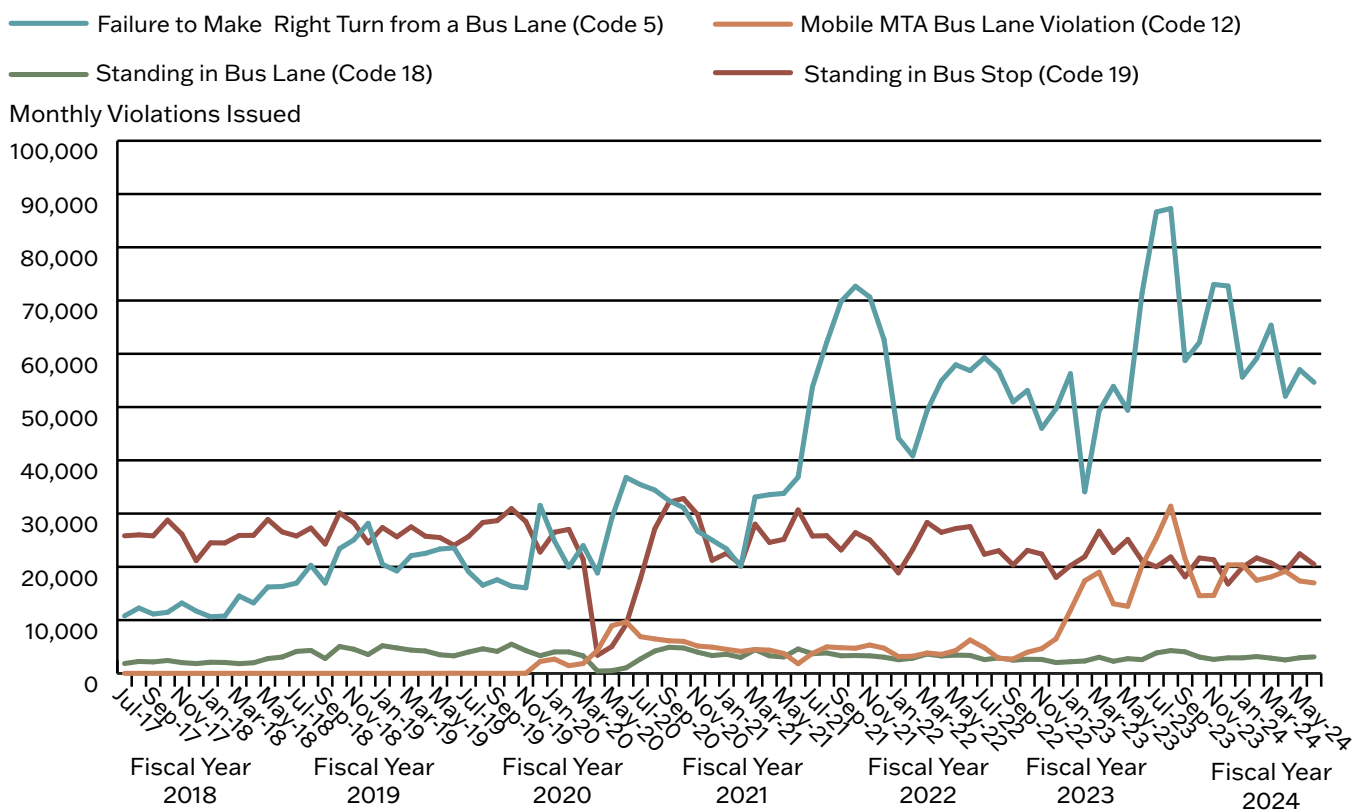
There are many possible explanations for slow buses. The most visible and commonly cited reason is traffic congestion. Particularly in Manhattan, where the City is densest, high levels of congestion can lead to buses getting stuck in traffic, especially during peak hours. In highly trafficked corridors, such as major avenues and tourism zones, this can be especially true. For example, the MTA has estimated that over 700,000 people enter the Manhattan Central Business District every day, which has contributed to average travel speeds for all vehicles within the district drastically falling from 9.1 miles per hour to 7.1 miles per hour since 2010.<sup>6</sup> Over the same period, the MTA has pointed at a significant increase in taxis and for-hire vehicles (e.g., Lyft and Uber) traveling within the Central Business District in Manhattan. In 2018, more than half of all the vehicles in the Central Business District were taxis and for-hire vehicles.<sup>7</sup> In most of these corridors the buses share the same infrastructure as all other vehicles, so they are forced to remain in the same traffic. With the MTA’s congestion pricing commencing in January 2025, traffic patterns in Central Manhattan are expected to shift over time, potentially easing some of the gridlock that buses currently face.

Another explanation for slow bus speeds is a lack of bus lanes. Dedicated infrastructure, such as bus lanes, can help speed up buses by providing lanes exclusively for buses to travel in. Ideally, this means that while a particular corridor could be congested, buses could bypass traffic and continue operating their routes efficiently. Major thoroughfares, such as 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, have bus lanes that provide buses with dedicated infrastructure in otherwise busy roadways. There are bus lanes in major roadways throughout the five boroughs, some of which are as simple as painted lanes while others have physical barriers separating them from the other lanes. However, relatively few bus routes have dedicated bus lanes along their roads, an issue further discussed later in this paper.

Even where there is existing bus infrastructure, City buses are plagued by a lack of bus lane and traffic rule enforcement. DOT sets the rules for parking violation codes, and then the New York Police Department (NYPD) is responsible for enforcing through the issuance of citations (tickets) to those in violation. Citations such as Code 5 (“Failure to Make a Right Turn from a Bus Lane”) and Code 12 (“Mobile MTA Bus Lane Violation”) are tracked and issued via cameras either fixed above bus lanes or fixed in the front of MTA buses. In contrast, Code 19 (“Standing in a Bus Stop”) and Code 18 (“Standing in a Bus Lane”) are issued by traffic enforcement agents.

As shown in Figure 4, Department of Finance data shows that violations generally trended upward from July 2017 through August 2023, reflecting increased enforcement. Since then, violations have plateaued or decreased slightly, hovering around 100,000 violations monthly. While all types of violation codes have increased over this period, camera-based violations have increased much more than those issued by officers. This is in line with the addition of many enforcement cameras at intersections and on buses. For example, bus-mounted cameras increased four-fold in recent years, from 123 buses in 2019 to 623 by the end of 2023. The MTA plans to expand this program to over 3,000 buses by the end of 2028.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 4**  
**Monthly Violations Issued Related to Bus Enforcement have Increased, Led by Camera-Based Enforcement**  
*Monthly Violations by Violation Codes Related to Bus Enforcement*



SOURCE: Department of Finance Violation Data  
 NOTE: Codes 5 and 12 are camera-enforced, while Codes 18 and 19 are officer-enforced.

New York City Independent Budget Office

## The City’s Progress on the Streets Plan and Local Law 195

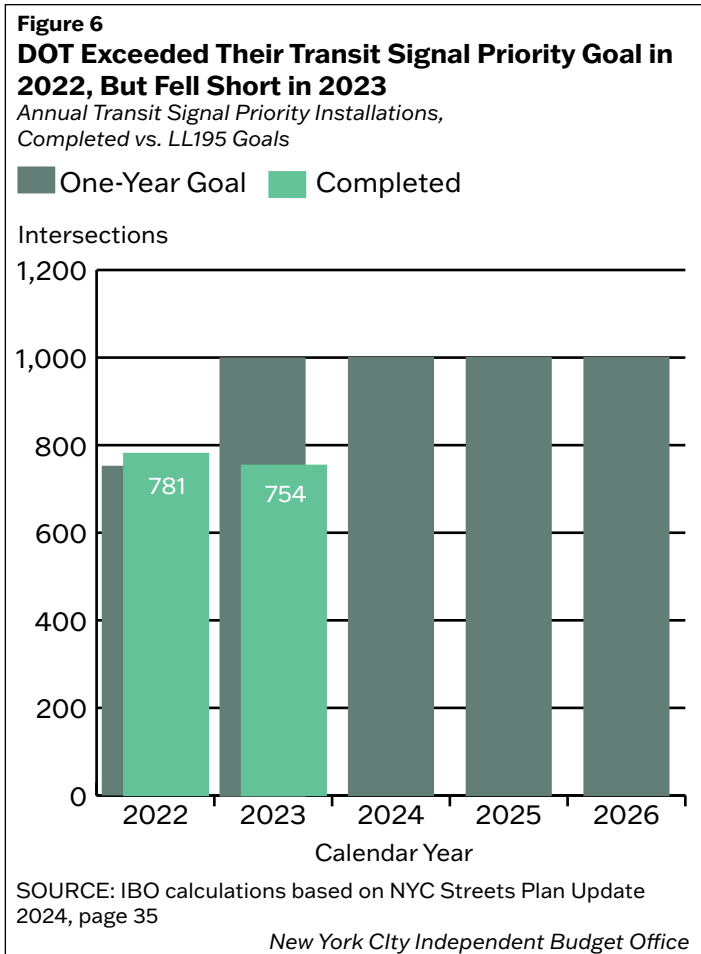
**The City is not on track to meet the benchmarks established by LL195 of 2019.** In November 2019, the City Council passed [LL195](#), directing DOT to develop and implement a series of 5-year transportation master plans that would integrate planning across the entire City’s streets, sidewalks, and travel modes. In addition, the plan was intended to improve the safety, accessibility, and quality of City streets. The first of these master plans, known as the *Streets Plan*, covers the calendar years from 2022 through 2026.

LL195 set detailed benchmarks that DOT is required to meet, down to annual miles of protected bus lanes, protected bike lanes, total redesigned intersections, square feet of pedestrian space, among other criteria.<sup>9</sup> Several of these benchmarks are focused on speeding up buses: DOT is required to build “at least” 150 miles of protected bus lanes from the first 5-year plan, defined as lanes physically protected by barriers or enforced with cameras. As shown in Figure 5, to date DOT has made slow progress on protected bus lanes, building just 9.6 miles of these lanes in the first two calendar years of the plan. This data comes from DOT’s *Streets Plan* updates, which are published annually; at the time of this publication, the most recent *Streets Plan Update* contained data from 2023.

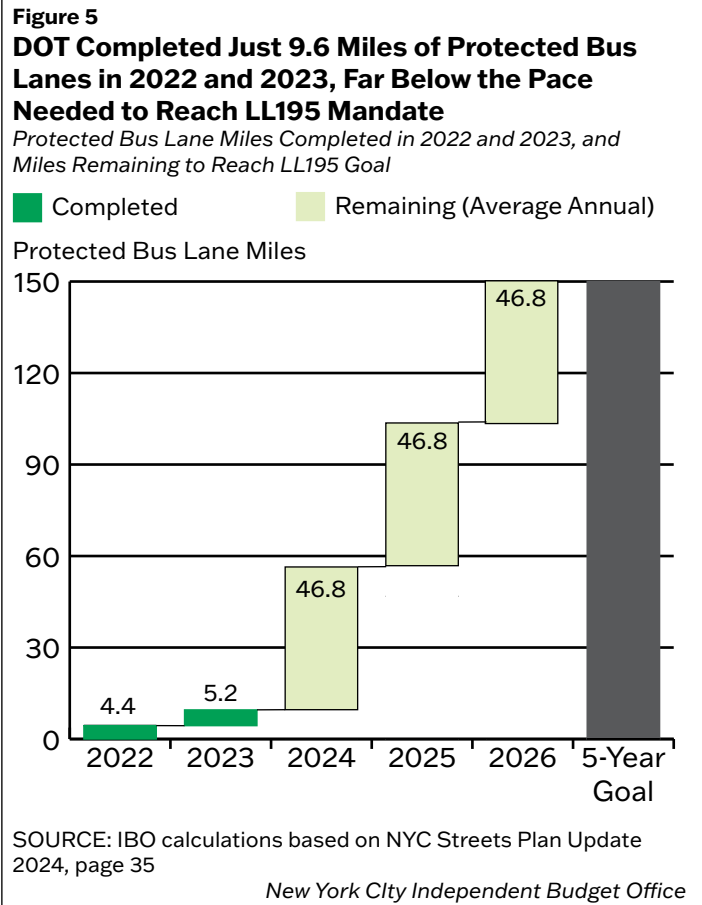
LL195’s mandated goals pose a significant challenge for DOT. To meet its protected bus lane goal by the end of 2026, DOT would need to build 46.8 miles of protected bus lanes each in 2024, 2025, and 2026, respectively—a virtually impossible outcome. In 2023, the agency’s entire bus lane installations and upgrades, including the 5.2 miles of protected lanes, totaled 15.7 miles.<sup>10</sup> To further place the LL195 mandate

in context, the goal of building 150 miles of new protected bus lanes in five years would require DOT to double the approximately 150 miles of existing lanes built over the last 50 years, a monumental task.

The *Streets Plan* also requires DOT to implement transit signal priority to help move buses through intersections: 750 intersections in the first year, and 1,000 per year thereafter “where such implementation is feasible.”<sup>11</sup> Transit priority signals automatically adjust traffic signals as buses approach the intersection, therefore making it easier for buses to go through. The agency has fared better on its transit signal priority goal, exceeding 750 intersections in the first year, although falling short of 1,000 intersections in 2023, as shown in Figure 6.



example, some short bus lanes at the most congested and highly trafficked areas of the City could have greater impact than a long bus lane on a previously quiet street.



### City Council and DOT at Odds Over LL195 Compliance

The City Council and DOT have often been critical of each other over the City’s ability to meet the benchmarks set by LL195. DOT has long maintained that the agency cannot meet the requirements of LL195 without several billions of dollars in funding and a “significantly reconfigured agency.”<sup>12</sup> This argument has been advanced by DOT since the first hearing at which LL195 was first reviewed. More recently, the agency testified in spring 2023 that DOT faced staffing challenges and was focusing on “quality over quantity” in its *Streets Plan* work.<sup>13</sup> DOT’s focus was on building and improving targeted bus infrastructure that would have the most impactful effect on daily ridership and speeds, rather than build infrastructure for the sake of meeting the requirements set by LL195. For

At the Executive Budget hearings in May 2024, the City Council Transportation Committee pressed DOT to explain why the agency wasn't in compliance with LL195. DOT argued that most of the agency's bus lane improvements do not count toward the *Streets Plan*, and that greater Council support is needed to advance proposed DOT bus projects and meet plan targets.<sup>14</sup> In many cases, while there are community groups and leaders who support bus lanes, there are others who are concerned with losing parking and delivery space and are vocal in their opposition to DOT proposed bus projects, hindering progress on LL195.

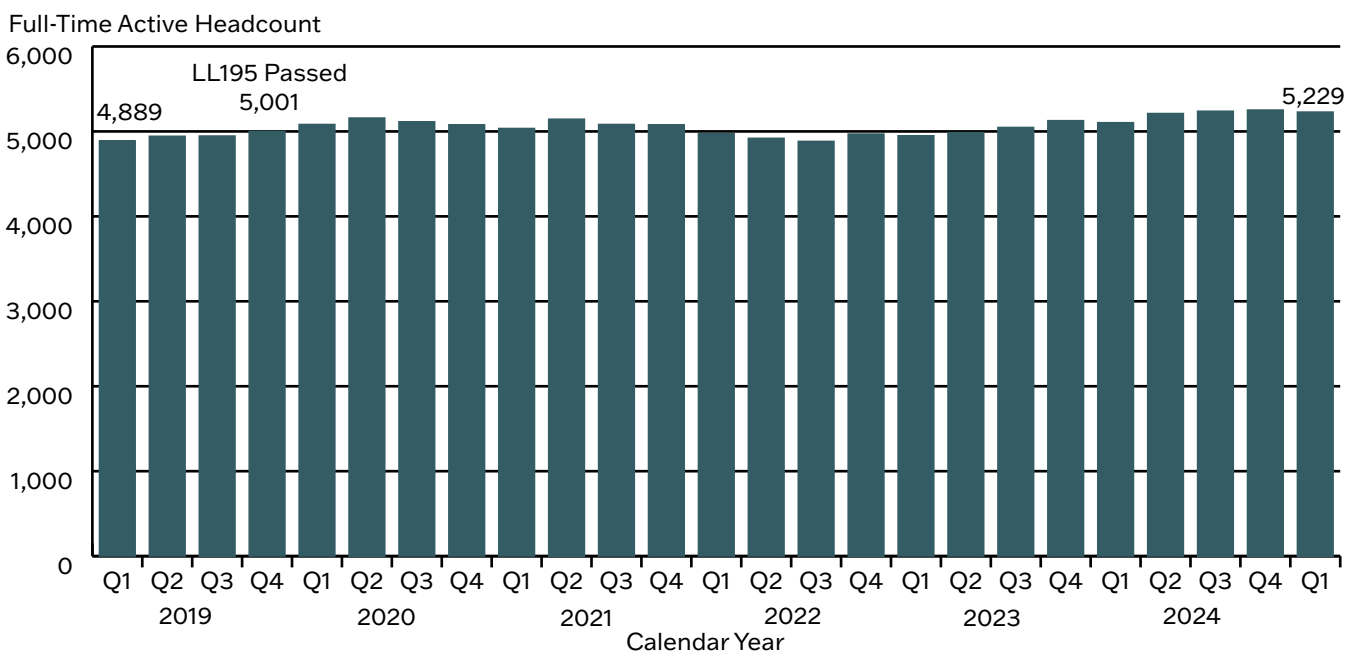
The City Council, before passing Local Law 195, recognized that DOT would require more funding. In October 2019, the City Council's Finance Division estimated that to achieve the first five-year master plan minimum benchmarks, DOT would require an additional \$377 million in expense funding and \$252 million in capital funding between fiscal year 2022 and fiscal year 2026.<sup>15</sup> It was estimated that building 150 miles of protected bus lanes alone would account for a projected \$123 million in expense funding for the first five-year master plan.

Since 2021, DOT's expense budget has increased, but this growth is better explained by general growth in City spending overall rather than allocations to *Streets Plan* work. Since fiscal year 2021 (the year before the *Streets Plan* commenced), DOT's annual operating budget has grown by \$323 million, or about 28%, from \$1.2 billion in 2021 to \$1.5 billion in the latest Preliminary Budget for fiscal year 2025. The City's overall expense budget, meanwhile, increased by 27% in the same period, largely reflecting rising inflation, Federal Covid stimulus funds, and 2024 collective bargaining agreements, factors which are also reflected within the DOT budget.<sup>16</sup> DOT's annual Capital Commitment Plan has grown from \$1.3 billion in fiscal year 2021 to \$1.8 billion in 2025, or by 39%, per the most recent Preliminary Budget, but large year-to-year fluctuations in capital projects are common and make this comparison difficult to interpret.

Regarding DOT's claim of staffing shortages, IBO's analysis of DOT administrative staffing data shows a relatively constant overall staffing level from late 2019 to the first quarter of 2025 (see Figure 7). Further

**Figure 7**  
**DOT Full-Time Active Headcount Has Remained Fairly Stable Since 2019**

*DOT Full-Time Active Headcount, All Work Units (2019 - Q1 2025)*



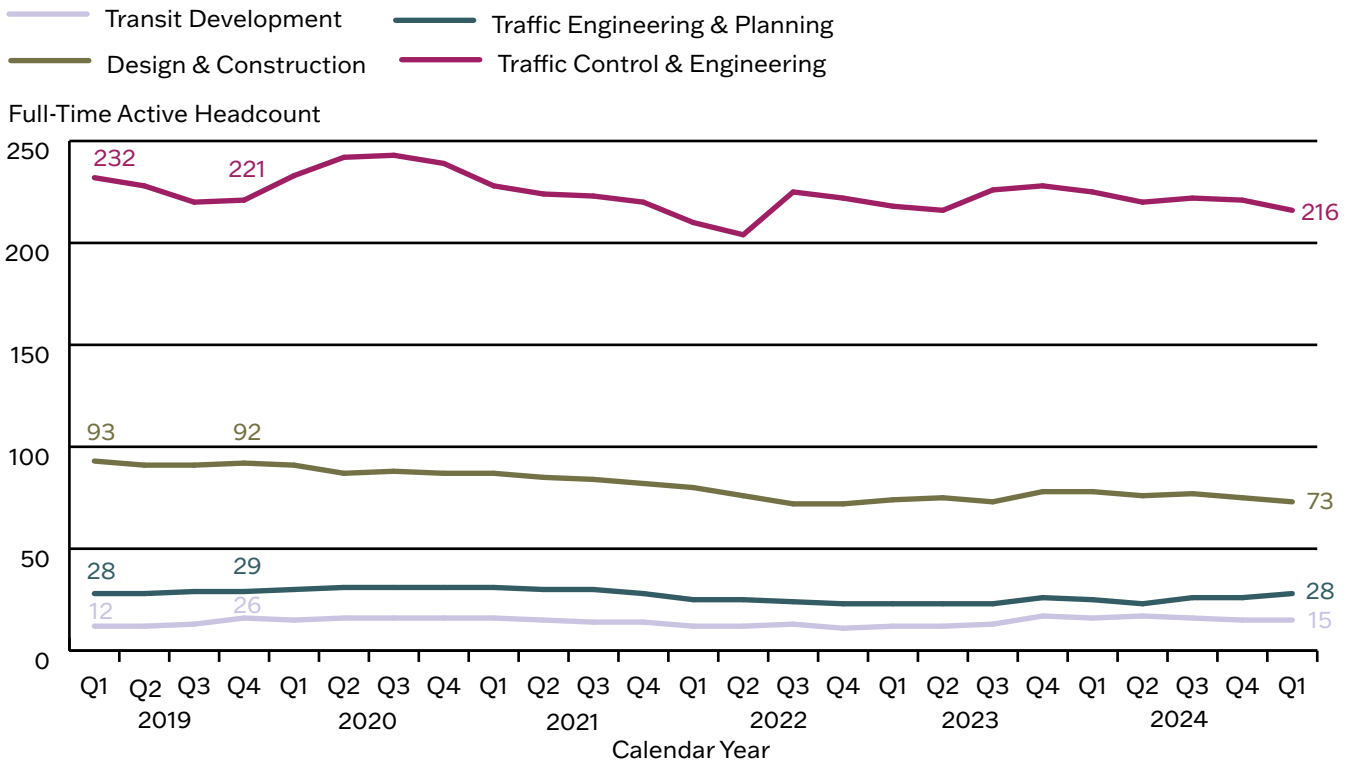
SOURCE: City Human Resources Management System (CHRMS)

NOTE: Data excludes part-time workers.

New York City Independent Budget Office

**Figure 8**  
**DOT Transit Development Headcount Has Remained Stable, But Key Positions For Project Review and Oversight Have Declined Since 2019**

DOT Full-Time Active Headcount by Bus-Related Work Unit (2019 - Q1 2025)



SOURCE: City Human Resources Management System (CHRMS)  
 NOTE: Data excludes part-time workers.

New York City Independent Budget Office

analysis of a selection of DOT’s bus-related work units shows flat or even declining staffing. The headcount for “transit development”—the work unit dedicated to bus project planning—has remained constant since late 2019 (see Figure 8). This is also the case for the “traffic control and engineering” work units, which include staff who must approve final bus project signage. Meanwhile, some work units involved in DOT bus project oversight and review have seen declines in headcount. Specifically, the “traffic engineering and planning” staff who coordinate initial consultant work on bus projects declined by about 20% in 2022 and only just recovered in late 2024. The “design and construction” staff who review and sign off on bus lane construction plans have continued to decline, with a total drop in headcount of 21% from 2019 to January 2025.

None of these four work units have seen sustained headcount increases since LL195 was passed in 2019. Although this analysis does not include many other DOT staff who work on bus projects, it does suggest that, at least in these units, staffing may be a contributing factor to DOT’s slow progress on protected bus lanes. Notably, the City is operating broadly on a 2:1 hiring policy (i.e., only one employee can be hired for every two terminations) albeit with certain exemptions for positions related to public safety and revenue generation. This constraint has likely contributed to DOT’s relatively flat headcount.

Taken together, these trends suggest that while DOT’s resources have kept pace with general pressures on City spending, such as inflation and collective bargaining settlements, they fall short of the transformative investments the agency argues is required to meet the LL195 mandate.

## Most Bus Lanes Built Since 2022 Are Concentrated in Manhattan and the Bronx

IBO mapped the existing bus lanes across the City in Figure 9, using geographical data made publicly available by DOT. The maps distinguish between bus lanes built before and after the *Streets Plan* came into effect in 2022. However, not all bus lanes built in 2022 or later count towards the mandated 150 miles of “protected” bus lanes from the *Streets Plan* because the dataset does not specify whether lanes are protected. Bus lanes have been present in the City in some capacity since the early 1960s, and therefore some of the bus lanes presented are significantly older than others.

Manhattan, the borough with the slowest average bus speeds, has the greatest density of bus lanes, while Staten Island, the borough with the fastest bus speeds, has the least. The Bronx and Manhattan have had the greatest miles of road covered by new bus lanes since the beginning of the *Streets Plan*. Staten Island and Brooklyn have not had any new bus lanes built since the commencement of the *Streets Plan*. (Brooklyn did have one of its existing bus lanes upgraded to a protected bus lane in late 2022.) In both Staten Island and Brooklyn, the last new bus lane was built in 2020.

In addition to the static maps presented in Figure 9, IBO has published an [online version of this report with interactive bus lanes maps](#) that allow users to zoom in and inspect the data and [a comprehensive interactive map](#) with most of the data used for this report. The interactive map allows users to toggle on and off additional layers of data by Census Tract (as defined by the New York City Department of City Planning) to learn more about the demographics of communities served (and not served) by each bus lane in the City. IBO’s interactive map reveals that:<sup>17</sup>

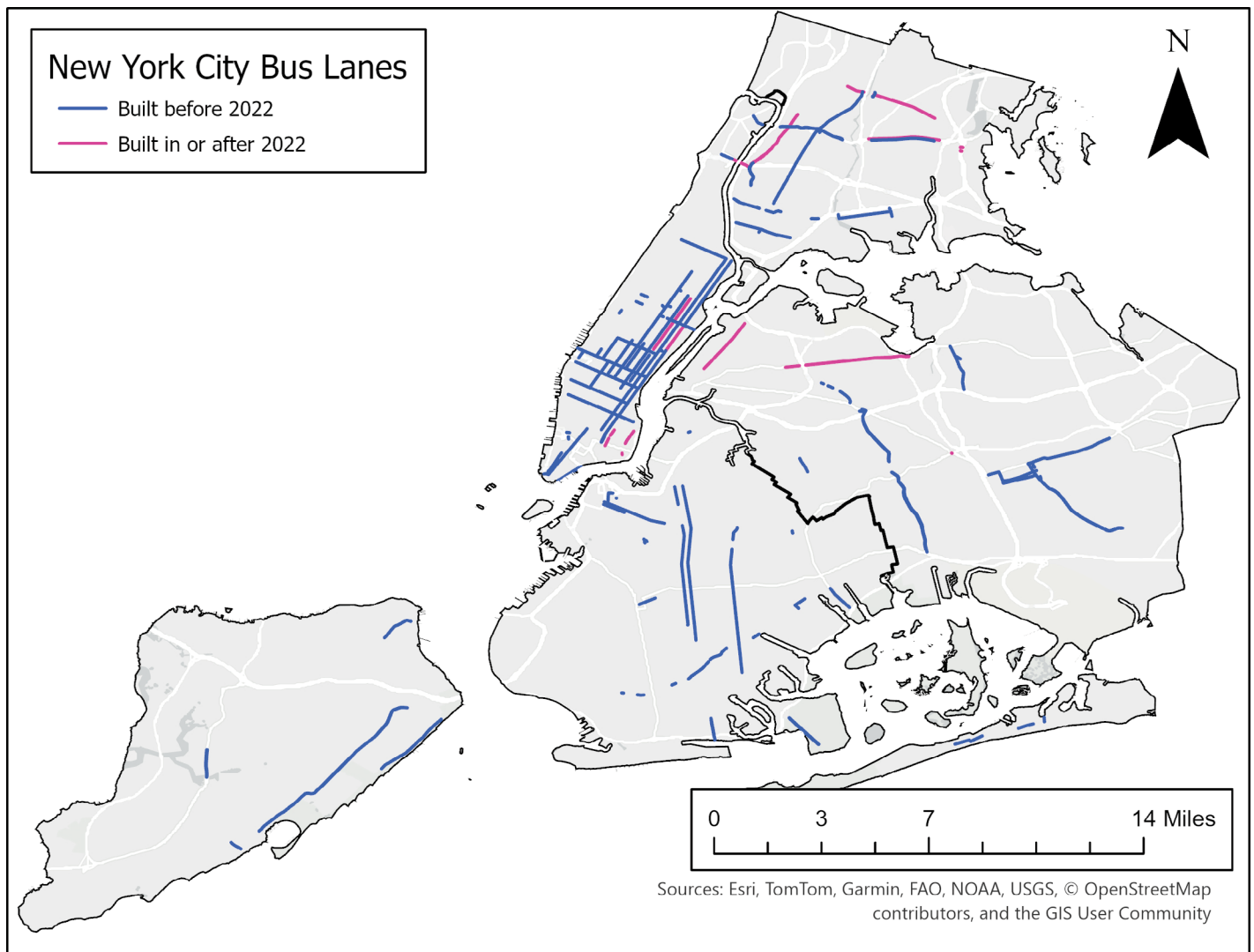
- The median income for an individual living less than a 5-minute walk from a bus lane is \$38,458, while those living outside of a 5-minute walk from a bus lane is \$37,820.
- The median age for an individual living less than a 5-minute walk from a bus lane is 37.3 years old, while those living outside of a 5-minute walk from a bus lane have a median age of 38.4 years old.
- Outside of Manhattan and Staten Island, bus lanes are more commonly present in neighborhoods with larger proportions of non-white households and with lower individual incomes. Manhattan is a notable outlier: bus lanes primarily serve higher-income areas, such as the Upper East Side and Midtown East.
- Since the commencement of the *Streets Plan*, some bus routes that have had bus lanes installed on parts of their routes have seen increases in speed. However, in some cases, speed increases are noticeably greater in the bus lane segments of the route. For example, the Q69 bus which travels through the 21st Street Offset Bus Lane increased its average speed by nearly 8% between January 2019 and December 2024. However, average speeds in the bus lane segment was 8.1 miles per hour in December 2024, while speeds were just 6.4 miles per hour outside the bus lane portions of the route.<sup>18</sup>

## The Economic and Environmental Costs of Slow Buses

The impact of slow and unreliable buses has economic, social, and environmental consequences for New York City. Many workers commute by public transportation, including buses. Employers and employees value predictability and timeliness in worker commutes. Particularly for those with limited alternative transportation options—including those that do not own a car, live far from a subway station, or have limited mobility—slow bus service would have a negative impact on their quality of life.

Slow buses can also have a negative impact on the environment. Buses stuck in traffic spend more time idling, which contributes to air pollution.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, buses also waste fuel when they are not able to run at a constant speed, and instead must navigate around double-parked vehicles, blocked bus lanes, and other roadway obstacles. To the extent that a good bus network can also prompt passengers to consider the bus as a viable alternative to using a private vehicle, this could in turn reduce the number of vehicles in roadways.

**Figures 9**  
**Bus Lanes Built Before and After The Streets Plan**



SOURCE: DOT Bus Lane Data

New York City Independent Budget Office

The negative impacts of slow buses are reflected in some capacity across all of New York City but may be disproportionately felt by certain groups. Buses are a primary source of transportation for neighborhoods not readily served by the City’s subway train system, such as Eastern Queens and many parts of Staten Island. In a New York City Comptroller’s Office report from 2017, it found that bus commuters tend to be lower income, with an average personal income of \$28,455, significantly lower than subway commuters (\$40,000) and overall New Yorkers (\$38,840). Bus commuters were also reported to be less likely to hold a bachelor’s degree, and more likely to be foreign-born and persons of color than compared with subway riders or the rest of the City’s population. It is important to understand that policy decisions, such as where and how the City invests in its bus network, can have economic, social, and environmental impacts that extend beyond the public transit system itself and into the lived experiences of the City’s residents, workers, and visitors. While both City Council and mayoral administrations through DOT have pinpointed increasing bus speed and efficiency as a priority for the overall City’s transit network, efforts to date have struggled with effectively addressing the scale and underlying causes of the problems.

## Conclusion

Although multiple mayoral administrations have attempted to improve speeds and services across the City, bus speeds remain consistently low. Initiatives such as the *Streets Plan* and the passage of LL195 are attempts to identify the underlying issues and address the speed and efficiency problems. Both focus on building out dedicated bus infrastructure. But the lack of progress in achieving the goals and lack of clarity on the effectiveness of additional bus infrastructure without corresponding enforcement of traffic rules indicates that New York City’s slow bus problem is not yet solved. It is an open question whether the mandated goals of LL195 are the push needed to jumpstart DOT’s investments to speed up buses, or if they are unrealistic targets that set the City up to fall behind—particularly the 150 miles of new protected bus lanes by 2026. It is also worth noting that LL195 represents a step in the right direction to improve bus speeds, but not the only step towards that goal. Small changes, such as all-door boarding and increased traffic enforcement, can have noticeable effects on bus speeds.

Addressing the issue of chronically slow buses is particularly impactful for communities that depend on buses as their main mode of transit to work, school, medical appointments, or social events, and particularly for those with mobility restrictions and older adults who rely on buses and may be more limited in accessing the subway system. A reliable and efficient bus network is an essential part of New York City’s public transportation system, and is critical for the economic growth of New York City and well-being of its riders.

---

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> American Public Transportation Association. (2024, November 20). [Public Transportation Ridership Report](#).

<sup>2</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority. [2023 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report](#), page 175.

Bus Speed Data from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority from 2019 to 2024.

<sup>34</sup> [Better Buses Restart: Mayor de Blasio Announces Major Projects to Speed Buses During City’s Phased R | City of New York](#)

<sup>5</sup> Bus speeds for all trip times and types across the five boroughs average at 8.1 miles per hour for December 2024, which is also consistent with January 2019, suggesting that speeds have not notably changed in peak or off-peak trips.

<sup>6</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s [Congestion Relief Zone](#) main webpage.

<sup>7</sup> Traffic Mobility Review Board. (2023, November). [Congestion Pricing in New York](#), page 22. Note this figure was originally presented in MTA produced briefing materials to the Traffic Mobility Review Board in August 2023. See [Central Business District Tolling Program Traffic Mobility Review Board Public Meeting #2](#), page 21.

<sup>8</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority. (2024, November). [MTA 2025 Final Proposed Budget. Volume 2](#). Page II-59.

<sup>9</sup> Local Law 195 of 2019, codified as New York City Administrative Code § 19-199.1(c)(2).

<sup>10</sup> New York City Department of Transportation, [NYC Streets Plan: Update 2024](#).

<sup>11</sup> See Local Law 195 of 2019, codified as New York City Administrative Code § 19-199.1(a).

<sup>12</sup> Trottenberg, Polly. (2019, June 12). [NYC Department of Transportation Testimony](#). Hearing Before the City Council Committee on Transportation on Intros. 1457 and 1557, page 1.

<sup>13</sup> New York City Council. (2023, May 19). [Executive Budget Hearings](#) – Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. Timestamp 00:51:00.

<sup>14</sup> New York City Council. (2024, May 8). [Executive Budget Hearings](#) – Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. Timestamp: 00:56:14.

<sup>15</sup> The New York City Council, Int 1557-2019 [Fiscal Impact Statement](#), page 2.

<sup>16</sup> Cain, Brian. Independent Budget Office. (2023, April 4). [Union Contracts to Increase Personnel Costs, Partially Offset by Low Headcount](#).

<sup>17</sup> Neighborhood Tabulation Areas or NTAs, are aggregations of census tracts that are subsets of New York City’s 55 Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs). Primarily due to these constraints, NTA boundaries and their associated names may not definitively represent neighborhoods. Source: [New York City Department of City Planning. New York City Neighborhood Tabulation Areas](#). 2010.

<sup>18</sup> New York City Department of Transportation, “[96<sup>th</sup> Street Bus Priority and Safety Improvements](#)”.

<sup>19</sup> The MTA has slowly started transitioning to a fully zero-emissions fleet, which will reduce bus pollution.