CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

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January 29, 2009
Start: 10:53am
Recess: 11:40am

HELD AT: Hearing Room
250 Broadway, 16th Floor

B E F O R E:
JOHN C. LIU
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Darlene Mealy
Miguel Martinez
Diana Reyna
Vincent Ignizio

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Robert Walsh
General Superintendent and Project Manager, Automatic Vehicle Locator Program
MTA New York City Transit Department of Buses

Sassan Davoodi
Co-Project Manager, Automatic Vehicle Locator Program
MTA New York City Transit Department of Buses

Ed Figeroa
President
Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 1056

Matt Shotkin

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Good morning. Welcome to today's hearing of the City Council's Committee on Transportation. My name is John Liu. I have the privilege of Chairing this Committee. And, I deeply apologize for the delayed start of today's hearing. And, we have members that will be coming in and out as there are three hearings being conducted at the same time.

Nonetheless, we're delighted to have our officials from the MTA join us today to give us an update on their efforts to install GPS or other vehicle-tracking devices on our City's buses so that the public can be more convenience in knowing where their buses could be at any given moment. It's an initiative that had been talked about in the past. It's an initiative that has been successfully implemented in other major cities. And, it's something that our bus riders sorely need at this time. And so, I'm very happy to invite representatives of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to come up and testify. Please proceed.

ROBERT WALSH: Good morning, Chairman Liu and members of the City Council. I

am Robert Walsh, General Superintendent with MTA New York City Transit's Department of Buses and Project Manager for Automatic Vehicle Location, AVL, Programs. I'm accompanied by Department of Buses' Sassan Davoodi, who is the Co-Project Manager for the AVL programs.

As the Transportation Committee has requested, we're here this morning to address the topic, "When will the MTA be able to track the location of its buses and provide real-time arrival times to its riders?" To present this matter in context, we will first share background information with you on our experience over the past several years in attempting to develop an AVL system for buses. And then, we'll discuss the status of our current efforts.

In an effort to develop an AVL system for buses, New York City Transit's purpose has been twofold; to establish a service management tool for Department of Buses to use in tracking bus locations and monitoring schedule and route adherence; and, two, to provide bus riders with on-board next stop announcements, as well as access to real-time estimates of bus arrival times

via electric signs at the bus stop shelters and via the internet.

New York City Transit launched its first AVL project in October 1996. That contract was awarded to Orbital Sciences Corporation. The scope of this pilot project was limited to equipping the buses assigned to one depot in Manhattan with an AVL system. Thus, the contract did not include customer information signs at bus stop shelters.

At approximately the same time, New York City Transit awarded a separate contract to another vendor, Transportation Management Solutions, to provide a Customer Information System consisting of electronic customer information signs at bus stop shelters. This project was to interface with the AVL project and use the real time bus location data that the system provides as a means of projecting bus arrival times at the bus stop shelters. Thus, the Customer Information System contract was designed to essentially piggyback the AVL contract.

The AVL pilot contract experienced numerous problems. Due to the difficulty in

achieving a reliable and working system, the parties terminated the contract by mutual agreement in March of 2001. Because of its dependency on the AVL project, the Customer Information System contract with TMS was cancelled, as well.

In August, 2005, New York City Transit awarded the Service Management and Customer Information System contract to Continental Incorporated, formerly Siemens VDO. Based on our experience with the first pilot project, New York City Transit's qualification criteria for potential vendors was strengthened significantly, requiring applicants to have proven commercial off-the-shelf systems successfully implemented at other Transit agencies and to provide a field demonstration phase of the actual product before an award of the contract.

The Service Management Customer Information System was to provide both the AVL and the Customer Information System features in a phased implementation. The base contract was for implementation of the system in one depot. And, upon successful implementation, New York City

Transit's intention was to expand the project system-wide.

Equipment and software were installed at the 126th Street Depot in Manhattan in the Bus Command Center, at radio sites and in selected bus stop shelters. After completing the equipment installation in all buses assigned to the Depot, the contractor was unable to achieve a satisfactory level of performance and reliability. Repeated attempts by the contractor to address the software and hardware problems were unsuccessful.

In December 2007, New York City Transit met with the executives from Continental, the company that had taken over Siemens VDO. Continental reconfirmed its commitment to resolving the outstanding issues and meeting the contract requirements. However, after an additional eight months, the vendor was, in our view, unable to meet its commitments in delivering a reliable system in a single depot. This matter is now in the hands of our legal department.

While there are other bus systems through the country which already have AVL systems in place, New York City Transit has the

distinction of having, by far, the most challenging operating and environmental conditions under which to develop and sustain a reliable system. New York City Transit's stringent contract requirements were developed in an effort to ensure that a system can work reliably in such a demanding environment.

We have visited and spoken with other transit agencies which have, or are, implementing AVL systems. We've learned that, while there are some that consider their AVL systems to be generally acceptable, many have had or continue to experience problems with their systems, or a component of their system, that appear to be similar to those we've experienced.

During the implementation of the base AVL contract, which required that the vendor implement the system to our satisfaction at one depot before the award of a roll-out contract, New York City Transit learned that at least two other transit agencies, Atlanta, MARTA, and Hampton Roads, Virginia, have experienced significant software problems similar to those of New York City Transit. In some cases, transit properties

do not collect accurate data regarding system reliability or availability, while others have much less stringent acceptance criteria. In some other instances, the transit agencies have already paid a large percentage of the cost of the contract and therefore, have no ability to hold the vendor accountable.

Despite the difficulties and disappointments New York City Transit has experienced in pursing AVL projects, the agency remains committed to developing a reliable system that can be used both as an aid to manage bus service and a means to provide real-time information to bus riders. Improvements in GPS technology have substantially resolved some of the initial challenges we faced in our efforts to develop an application that functions reliably in an environment such as Manhattan with its tall structures creating urban canyons, in which GPS signals can become partially blocked. We also face additional challenges posed by closely scheduled bus service and extreme traffic congestion during peak periods.

At this junction, we are

aggressively investigating and evaluating options that we believe may have the potential to meet the needs of our bus system. On behalf of New York City Transit, thank you for providing a forum to discuss the status of our efforts to develop an Automatic Vehicle Location System for buses and for your ongoing interest in the public transit system. Mr. Davoodi and I are now happy to answer any specific questions that you may have.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you, gentlemen, for coming to our hearing today and giving us, I guess, I guess we would try to call it an update. Let me note that we've been joined by members of this Committee, Council Member Darlene Mealy of Brooklyn and Council Member Miguel Martinez of Manhattan.

Gentlemen, you must understand that there's a fair amount of frustration on the part of bus riders that, after all these years, and when they visit other cities, notwithstanding the two examples you cite, that it's easy for bus riders, or should be easy for bus riders, to know where the bus is.

Today, with GPS technology, with

computers and softwares running programs and carrying information at light speed, it's just incredible that, in this day and age, we're nowhere closer to being able to know where the buses are at any given point. I'll state from the outset that this is totally unacceptable. This is something that this Committee has discussed with the MTA over the years and that we were told that progress was being made. And so, it came as an incredibly rude awakening just a few months ago where we read news reports that the MTA had basically scrapped its plans to install a system that would help it and, therefore, the public, locate the buses. It's inconceivable that, in 2009, we still have no idea when we're going to know where the buses are.

So, I'm not, you know, I'm going to try very hard, and don't take anything personally. I'll state that from the outset. This is nothing personal against you guys. But, the frustration that I'm voicing is on behalf of our constituents that constantly complain about late buses, delayed buses, buses that are supposed to show up a half an hour ago and finally show up packed full, not

allowing any other passengers to get on. It's something that is extremely frustrating.

And, we have heard this excuse of urban canyons for too long. Do you know how many urban canyons there are in Queens? In Staten Island? In Brooklyn? In the Bronx? There aren't any urban canyons there. And so, once again, this belies this incredible focus on Manhattan. Nothing against people in Manhattan but, the realities in Manhattan where the so-called urban canyons exist that there are lots of other modes of transportation available, from subways to cabs. There are lots of other options. But, in other places, where, quite frankly, there is no such thing as an urban canyon, people rely on the buses. That's their only mode of transportation. And, those are the places, again, in the so-called outer boroughs, where people are experiencing the worst kinds of delays with their bus service.

So, let's get with it here. There are no urban canyons. That is an absolute false premise. It is something that never should have been the focus of creating this kind of system in the first place. The MTA, it sounds like the

MTA's going back to the drawing board. The MTA needs to get out to where the bus is absolutely necessary, being the only mode of transportation, understand that there is no such thing as an urban canyon that could get in the way of satellite signals and get the system up and running. It's not that difficult if the MTA would just make a priority out of this.

How long would you say that the MTA has been looking at this kind of system? Our reports say that for 20 years the MTA has been trying to do something like this. Is that way off the mark? Or, is that pretty much…?

SASSAN DAVOODI: Well, the first pilot started in 1996.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: I'm sorry. I know your colleague identified yourself. Could you identify yourself for the record?

SASSAN DAVOODI: Yes, [crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON LIU: And, just come a little-- or, pull the mic closer to you.

SASSAN DAVOODI: My name is Sassan Davoodi from New York City Transit. The first pilot, their first AVL pilot, started at 1996.

So, essentially, that's when, you know, was the first attempt in having an AVL system running as a service management tool.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay. So, 13 years. Although, conceivably, it had been planned for many years before it actually-- the first system was actually put in place.

SASSAN DAVOODI: Well, yeah, there were plans. There was a design phase before the contract was awarded.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: So, approaching 20 years. The reports are not that way off. So, it's been a long time, really. And, most of your testimony, most of your testimony centers around the failures of the contractors. Has the MTA looked at exactly why they failed? I know you cite some of these things here. But, is the idea of urban canyons, is that the biggest thing that's going here?

SASSAN DAVOODI: Well, I think the reference to the urban canyon problem was made as something that we experienced in the past. I think information that with the technology today, that's not much of an issue. There are other

systems that, you know, help in tracking a bus driven into urban canyon situations. So, that was mentioned as something that we did experience in the past. However, that is not the only problems that AVL problem can have.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Well, what other kinds of problems exist besides the urban canyons?

SASSAN DAVOODI: Well, I think, essentially the problem that we had was having an overall system that was reliable enough as a system. It is not just, you know, one feature or one function, but the system, as a whole, needs to work reliably. And so, essentially, that's why, in our view, the system wasn't up to the requirements.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: It's not only in your view, the people who are on the-- the people who are at the bus stops reading the sign that came across that said that the bus will arrive in five minutes and it never arrived. Those are the people who will tell you right off the bat that the system ain't working. So, it doesn't take a lot of analysis to understand that the system failed. What I'm asking you, if there's been any

investigation on the part of the MTA or examination into why the system's not working. I'm asking you why isn't it working. You're telling me it's not working because we realize there were problems with it. Well, what kind of problems?

SASSAN DAVOODI: Well, as, you know, as stated, the matter with the most recent contract is in the hands of our legal department. And, therefore, we cannot get into any details regarding that.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: And, I don't suppose the lawyers are here. You're lawyering up without the lawyers here. All right. What are the current plans now? How do we move forward from here? Is there any plan that the MTA has right now, apart from the litigation that appears to be taking place?

ROBERT WALSH: The litigation is taking place now. And, there are plans to look and see what options we have now. We just finished-- we're just at the tail end of the last project. And, we're looking to move forward, 'cause we're in agreement with the Board that this

is very important to the riders and to the City of New York to have a system like this in place.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: So, in other words, there is nothing on the table right now?

ROBERT WALSH: Right now, I have nothing to offer you right now.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: That is incredible. It's incredible that there's nothing on the table; that there's no plan. We understand that the, you know, you say that the contractor failed. So, you're going through a litigation. You're trying to recover whatever damages that they may owe. But, at least, let's get with it. We shouldn't wait until the litigation, which could take who knows how long, before the Authority starts putting a plan on the table so that people can finally know where the buses are. Am I that far off the mark here?

ROBERT WALSH: I understand your frustration. And, we're just as frustrated.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: So, and, there's absolutely no timetable. What about a timetable? What about a scheduled meeting that's supposed to take place so that you can start talking about

this? Is there any meeting scheduled?

ROBERT WALSH: At this moment, no.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Unbelievable. This is unbelievable. And, you know, this is why we have to hold these kinds of hearings because, if we don't hold these hearings, I mean, you know, we figured that we give it a couple of months after the news reports came out that this was completely stalled and that maybe by then the MTA would have gotten its act together, at least start some kind of planning, given that the earlier efforts have completely flopped. And, even now, it's incredible. It really is.

I know we have some questions as well from other members here. In New York City, and maybe if the MTA has absolutely nothing on the table, not even any meetings scheduled, let me give you some constructive suggestions. Let me give you some constructive suggestions here. The City has been successful in implementing an Automatic Vehicle Locator System, an AVL system, as you termed it. The Department of Information and, I can never remember the name of this agency, but D-O-I-T-T, DOITT, they already completed a

system that will enable the City to track all of its vehicles from police cars to sanitation trucks to other agency vehicles to someday, hopefully soon, school buses. It is our understanding that that system can also accommodate MTA buses, even all 6,000 MTA buses. Has anybody, at the MTA, had discussions with DOITT and the City to see if there might be some synergy that could be found there; synergy in terms of cost savings, as well as time expediency?

SASSAN DAVOODI: I think there have been meetings with between New York City Transit and DOITT. I'm not sure, I believe you may be referring to the Nice Win [phonetic] network that the City or DOITT has in place. I know there have been meetings. I haven't been directly involved with that.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: That's, I believe that is what I'm referring to. The City has invested half a billion dollars in this system.

SASSAN DAVOODI: And, I know there have been discussions and we have looked into that. I believe there are concerns about the Nice Win and the status of the project and its

capability to support the bus AVL system. And, I believe it's ongoing. There is additional information that needs to provided before we can, you know, have [crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay. Well, there are always concerns. That's a given. Let's get past those concerns. Let's iron them out. It's a system that is working. It's underway already. So, I would strongly suggest the MTA get on the bus with that system. Get onboard that system. Save some money. Save a lot of time and just get on that system. And, that system, by the way, is not impeded by the so-called urban canyons because that's a system that is not solely dependent upon satellite technology. They have sensors on the sides of buildings, on the street, on street poles. So, it's a system that's in place already.

What does it take for the MTA to get onboard? Would you two be the people to make that recommendation?

ROBERT WALSH: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Who calls the shot on that?

ROBERT WALSH: Yes, we're the AVL, you know, team, project managers. So, we would be the ones to recommend, to investigate, to look at it, to work with whomever.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: And, is that a decision that has to go up to the Board?

ROBERT WALSH: It would have to--

CHAIRPERSON LIU: [Interposing] Or, a recommendation that has to go to the Board for approval?

ROBERT WALSH: Yes, sir.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: When's the next Board meeting?

ROBERT WALSH: [Off-mic]

CHAIRPERSON LIU: I realize that. When's the next one?

ROBERT WALSH: [Off-mic]

CHAIRPERSON LIU: A month from now. Would it be possible for your team to put together some kind of a proposal or recommendation so that the next Board meeting, they can consider that proposal? Or, is that too tight a timeframe?

ROBERT WALSH: It's something that we can discuss with, internally, with our people

and see if it's possible to get it done in that time.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay. We have questions from Council Member Darlene Mealy.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Good morning.

ROBERT WALSH: Good morning.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I must say this is the MTA that operates I guess the largest bus system in North America. Is that not true?

ROBERT WALSH: Yes, yes, ma'am.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: About 900 million people per year. And, you're saying now that the-- isn't there a GPS system at East New York Depot?

ROBERT WALSH: The GPS, the Command Center's at East New York, which--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: At the--

ROBERT WALSH: --monitors it.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: --Command Center?

ROBERT WALSH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: And, isn't working?

ROBERT WALSH: No, the system is actually at a depot in Manhattan.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Manhattan.

ROBERT WALSH: We monitor it in Brooklyn.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: 'Cause when I worked there, the GPS system, that's why you put the big letters on the top of the buses, right, 'cause it takes the satellite from the satellite and you know exactly where the bus is at all times.

ROBERT WALSH: Knowing where the bus is is just one aspect--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Um, hm.

ROBERT WALSH: --of a GPS system. Knowing where the bus is and where is he supposed to be. It's not enough to know that there's a bus ten blocks away or what time is he scheduled to be there. Is he on time? Is he behind time? It's got to be-- that's where the software end comes in-- it's got to be tied into the schedule. There's a lot of GPS positioning systems being used in City where they know where the vehicle is. But, that's only one aspect of what transit--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Right.

ROBERT WALSH: -- New York City Transit requires to have a successful system.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: All right. That's one. Then in operation planning, they had the kiosk system. That should let you know on-time bus service, right?

SASSAN DAVOODI: Well, I think there's, really, two components to this. The location of the bus is needed in an AVL system in order to know where the bus is and provide customer information system.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: That's the kiosk system.

SASSAN DAVOODI: There was a pilot that--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Yes.

SASSAN DAVOODI: -- you know, we make reference to years ago. But--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: About--

SASSAN DAVOODI: -- there was no--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: -- four years ago.

SASSAN DAVOODI: There was no

installation of the Customer Information device.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: It was a pilot program went for least about six months. And, it was a success. I believe Andy Botter [phonetic] from Operation and Planning and that was a success. So, why just didn't follow through with it?

SASSAN DAVOODI: I'm not sure exactly what project you're referring to.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: The kiosk system on-time bus service, where you can have the kiosk system will let you know exactly when the bus is coming or the train is coming, the same exact system that they got--

ROBERT WALSH: I believe--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: -- from--

ROBERT WALSH: I believe that what would that have been is an access to the MTA website, which would show the scheduled time that the bus is due or train is due to arrive at a location. I know that Customer Services was working on that for their website, which is available now on the MTA website.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Uh, huh.

ROBERT WALSH: But, it doesn't show-- what we are working with is actual arrival times.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Actual.

ROBERT WALSH: Not scheduled, actual, actual.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So, has there been any discussion linking the GPS system with text messaging?

ROBERT WALSH: It's all part of the package. It's something that, from this end it may not be believable to a lot of people, but it's frustrating to this end and it's not there because it is such a plus to have a package like this out there for the people to be able to get a text message that your bus is five stops away. It's time to leave the office, go down and get it. In Queens, in particular, sir, you talk about needing it. You'll have a lot of head ways out there at nighttime where it's 20 minutes or so. It's nice to know that the bus is there. He's going to be on time. You can look and see the bus on the map.

We share in the frustration in this not being done by this point. And, you're right.

Through text messaging, through websites, through signs in the bus stop shelters, information that we can give, and not just schedule information as to whether a bus-- what time the bus is coming, but any other information that we may need to provide to our customer.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Okay. I understand that. Thank you. But, could you tell me the total amount that's spent on the GPS system so far? I see you had a lot of problems. So, how much have you spent as of yet?

ROBERT WALSH: I don't think that's a number that we have right now that we can discuss. We can get back to you. It's in litigation. But, we can get that information and get it back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So, I hear you talking about the urban canyons.

ROBERT WALSH: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: It's a 1500 thousand dollar system that is a GPS that two of our tour companies are using. And, they operating in New York. They run about the same amount of distance that the New York City bus, and even

further. I believe that's Grey Line and the Coach, USA. So, why haven't you all duplicated that? Have you all networked with any of these programs? Have you talked to them to see what their system is? Are you trying to find out a better way instead of just saying it's not working?

ROBERT WALSH: That's--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: We're not going to do it anymore.

ROBERT WALSH: That's the point we're at right now.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So, what steps are you all taking to change that?

ROBERT WALSH: We need to open up investigation of other systems to see what works and what makes them different than what we've had.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: New Jersey Transit, they have a system I seen. They already have it on 3,000 buses. That's right near us. Have you talked to them? Have you all sat down and--

SASSAN DAVOODI: Well--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: --just

asked?

SASSAN DAVOODI: We have talked to a number of transit agencies. I think we know, I think, as Bob mentioned, tracking a bus is not the only thing that we're looking for. There are a large number of systems out there that track buses or trucks. For the transit system, it's not just to locate a bus, but, you have to interface with a number of other systems. You have the schedule. At the same time, you have to have that location information and be able to come up with estimated arrival times that are used by customers. So, it is not just simply a tracking system or a tracking device.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So, this is my last question, Chair, 'cause we just went through a press conference in regards to you trying to get GPS on a school bus, school buses. You're saying there's so many different other things. Could you explain to me what's the difference from Atlanta and Baltimore, their GPS system, their bus system, than New York City Transit? They do the same exact thing that Transit, get people to A and B. They have their

GPS. You're saying that they don't go by schedule?

SASSAN DAVOODI: No, I--

ROBERT WALSH: The difference--

SASSAN DAVOODI: --I don't think we said that, no.

ROBERT WALSH: The difference would be the smaller property and the different landscape of the area. That's it. That's the only difference.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So, what is, if it's only just the landscape, what's the difference between New York City Transit just getting it onboard?

SASSAN DAVOODI: Well--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Putting it in the system and…

SASSAN DAVOODI: There are other transit agencies who have had problems with their systems. I mean, some of them are fairly satisfied with their AVL system. But, at the same time, I think New York City has probably the most challenging environment. It's not just the urban canyons, but their schedules, their tight

schedules, the head race, the traffic. The operating environment, I think, is the most challenging of any city's.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Could you tell me one city that's comparable with New York City?

SASSAN DAVOODI: Not really.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: With their GPS…

SASSAN DAVOODI: And, not--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So, we just one--

SASSAN DAVOODI: Not in--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: --in a million.

SASSAN DAVOODI: As far as I know, not in the U.S. New York is the most challenging.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Wow.

SASSON DAVOODI: But, again, you see, aside from the challenging environment, there are cities or agencies that may not have the stringent requirement that we've had. So, they may not have accurate data on how reliable the system is working. And, but, we have been in

contact with other transit agencies. We know that some of them have had problems with their systems. And, some of them still have it. But, they may have different requirements. They may not be looking at the, you know, reliability of the data, as we have, you know. We've had pretty stringent requirements because we have a very challenging environment and we want to have accurate information for our customers.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Mr. Chair, can I just request that they give us a follow up of how much they spent so far on this program, please? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Yeah, we'd ask the MTA to provide that information to the Committee. I like to keep everybody honest when they're testifying before this Committee. I, you know, I mean, I guess it's-- we can't stop you from saying that you share our frustration. But, you must understand how ridiculous that sounds to us because you're telling us that you're the team that's responsible for putting this in place. And, you share our frustrations. That's kind of a circus show going on right there. Let's not say

that you share our frustrations. Let's say, you can say that you can see, you fully understand. You're fully cognizant of the frustrations; not of us, of the public, of the bus-riding public. And, let's get the system up and running. It's not that complicated. It really isn't.

What you gentlemen seem to be doing is trying to come up with a system that will take care of every possible thing that could possibly occur. And, just start small and simple. In fact, that's what the MTA tried to do. The MTA hasn't tried to come up with a system that takes care of everything. The MTA has only come up with pilot programs, with test programs, in smaller confined areas. And, even then, those efforts have completely failed.

So, let's not sit here and talk about how oh, it's so complicated. We got to get everything up and running; that we have to know where the vehicles are. Then, we got to match them up with their schedules or where they're supposed to be. Start small. Let's just start making some progress now. After all of these years, nearly 20 years, the progress is, after

nearly 20 years, there's been zero progress. And, that's pathetic. So, let's get out of this rut and get the system on the road here.

You know, back in 1999, ten years ago, there were reports that, in London, they had already implemented the system at over 450 stops and that 80% of their passengers consider their trips much more bearable; 80%. At the end of the day, the way you get measured is not you telling us how you're measuring yourselves, but our constituents and the public being satisfied with their bus rides. That is the ultimate measure of success. And, you look at the reports from major cities, like London, they've done it. They've had this since 1992. The report was in 1999 that talked about satisfaction of bus riders.

Bus riders know, especially in a city like New York, that inevitably there are going to be some times when there are delays. But, we owe it to them to let them know what kinds of delays they're faced with. That's what the system is about. And, you know, obviously, just in the last couple of months, there's been unfortunate incidents, most unfortunate incidents,

where bus riders have taken out their anger and frustration in the worst way. They don't take it out on any of you; not on us, although sometimes they come to our district offices. But, they take it out on those bus drivers. And, the bus drivers have no power to get this. This would be for the benefit of the bus riders. It would certainly help the bus drivers, who are the face of the MTA, whether they like it or not. Most cases, they don't like it because the schedule's beyond their control. But, they got to deal with the ire and the anger and the frustration of the riders. So, let's do this quickly, so that bus-riding experience can be more pleasant. And, we can encourage even more people to take mass transit.

I will note, for the record, also that we have an example here of Downtown Alliance that runs a shuttle bus between South Street, Seaport and Battery Park City. And, they do this. They are able to track exactly where their shuttle bus is in lower Manhattan, in the Wall Street area. Now, I'm not suggesting for a second that the MTA system could be as simple as the system that tracks a couple of shuttle buses in lower

Manhattan. But, their system uses GPS. And, guess where the deepest and most narrow canyons in New York City are. In the Wall Street area. So, if a relatively small organization, like the Downtown Alliance, which it's not really a small organization. They have a $10 million plus annual budget. But, in the grand scheme of things, compared to the MTA, they are small. If they can do this, there's no reason why the MTA can't do this.

If you want to start with a test program, why don’t you take a look at theirs? Or, just, you know, just realize that the City's far ahead of the MTA and use a system that the City has already implemented. The D-O-I-T-T, DOITT, DOITT's already done it. Let's just get onboard with that.

We've been joined by Council Member Diana Reyna from Brooklyn. And, we had also been joined before by Council Member Vincent Ignizio of Staten Island. I guess that's it. There's not much more to say, is there? But, you know your marching orders; not orders from us. You know this is what the public wants. They've been

waiting for it for a very, very long time. And, I'm going to call for another hearing in two months. And, I hope that your team can come back and give us a progress report. It could be a short conversation. But, it will be a hearing on the record. Let's just get it up and running. There should be some kind of plan already.

Thank you very much, gentlemen. And, again, don’t take anything personally. But, really, I mean, it's high time. Thank you.

ROBERT WALSH: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: We'll hear from William-- oh, Ed Figeroa, the President of Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 1056.

ED FIGEROA: Good morning.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Good morning, Ed. Welcome.

ED FIGEROA: I'm glad to be here; glad to hear what… You know, labor, the unions in Queens are last to hear this information. This is the first time I hear about the GPS system. And, we have a bus operations planning meeting today. This is the kind of stuff should be discussed, it's not discussed. So, we're the last ones to

hear about it.

I got to tell you that this is my own opinion. From January 20th, we had the hearings, the public hearings, about the massive cuts. So, I want to just tell you that now is not the time for the MTA to be spending any money on tracking or installing GPS systems to its fleet to inform the public when the bus will arrive. If the MTA goes through with their proposed plans to eliminate bus routes, cut service and lay off bus operators, I can tell you it's going to be a long, long wait.

Some of Labor's concerns, we're opposed without safeguards and labor protections. With safeguards and labor protections, we would be for it. Some of Labor's concerns with any type of bus tracking systems are will the system be used towards discipline on the workers? How can it detect problems with the equipment, like breakdowns? Will it be used to eliminate good New York City paying jobs, which we've heard it's going to eliminate the dispatcher's positions or an attempt to reduce the numbers? How much will it cost to retrofit each bus? Who will do the

work to install this? Will it be in-house? Or, will it be done outside, by an outside vendor at the highest bid? Will the system cause an unsafe condition by rushing and putting unnecessary pressure on the drivers to keep up with the schedule? And, what role will this play, if any, to help counter or assist in any terrorists acts?

So, these are questions. I still have certain more questions. Will this tracking system actually help us to speed up bus travel in any way? I think not. It will only help keep you occupied while you wait for the next bus. I have GPS in my car. And, it's a wonderful piece of equipment. And, it helps me to find a place I'm not familiar with, obviously. But, with the buses, we're all on fixed routes. Again, if there are safeguards, labor protections, people don't lose their jobs behind it, then we can work with this, obviously.

I feel that this is not a priority, in my opinion. I know the people want it. I think we need more buses. We need more service. We need less cars in New York. One bus eliminates 40 cars, so less pollution. We all breathe

easier. New York Council, all of us, we've been working hard to try and raise funds and to get a steady revenue stream for mass transit to keep up with the increase in ridership and the demand and the strain on our current system. So, our position, as I said earlier, is we are not opposed if there are safeguards and labor protections. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you--

ED FIGEROA: Questions?

CHAIRPERSON LIU: -- very much. Thank you very much, Mr. Figeroa. Okay. Matt--

MALE VOICE: Shotkin [phonetic].

CHAIRPERSON LIU: -- Shotkin, yes. Come on in.

MATT SHOTKIN: Good morning [off mic]. Good morning, Chairman Liu, ladies and gentlemen and legislative council. I don't think that GPS' are necessary on an MTA bus. Bus drivers know all the twists and turns of the Big Apple. On the other hand, as somebody just testified to, it could be helpful if a GPS was installed in an actual bus stop. That way you would know how far away a bus was and when a bus

is actually coming. They know their routes.

Kudos to the M15 and the M42, the best bus lines on New York City Transit. The couple of things that I'd like to point out. One, I seem to be having less trouble, but a little bit still, with bus drivers who don't understand a request to stop late at night. They, after 10 p.m., certain bus drivers when, let's say I live at 44th and Second and I request that stop. Somebody'll say no. Like one bus driver was like really nasty a week or two ago. He said, he was at the 46th bus stop, he said this is your stop. And, on the other hand, when a bus driver does that, it's not really nice. And, you also complained about that the time before that in a letter to MTA, a bus, and I never got a response back. And, I'm wondering why.

And, the other thing is that on 46th Street, at the bus stop last night, some gentleman got on the bus and complained about the fact that the bus stop glass had been cracked with like a hammer or something like that.

Getting rid of the M18 and the M14; pure nonsense. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you very much. Thank you. Well, there being no other witnesses, this hearing of the City Council's Committee on Transportation is adjourned.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, DeeDee E. Tataseo certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature 

Date February 11, 2009