



Express Bus Accessibility and Rider Satisfaction

What questions did the audit look at?

- ▶ Did the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) provide accessible express bus service to people with disabilities?
- ▶ Are riders satisfied with express bus accessibility, performance, and communication?

Why does it matter for New Yorkers?

The MTA's bus network includes express buses, which travel between Manhattan and parts of the outer boroughs. The report was initiated following a series of Disability Justice roundtables in which advocates expressed frustration with being unable to regularly board express buses. In addition, disability and express bus rider advocacy groups complained about inadequate service.

During field observations, auditors found that nearly 25% of sampled express buses were inaccessible for a variety of reasons, including malfunctioning wheelchair lifts and drivers' inability to operate lifts. In some cases, drivers simply failed to stop or pick up passengers. Additionally, when wheelchair users were able to board buses, they were often delayed and not properly secured.

The auditors also found that since 2018, the MTA piloted only one viable alternative bus design and did not adequately engage the accessibility community in decision making. Further, the MTA chose not to move forward with the pilot despite positive feedback from riders—including wheelchair users. The auditors also administered surveys to express bus riders measuring overall satisfaction. These surveys highlighted broader service issues affecting all riders, including buses not adhering to schedules and service cancellations, leading to extended wait times exceeding an hour.

These findings underscore critical gaps in the City's public transportation system—particularly for individuals with disabilities who rely heavily on accessible services. Many express buses serve transit deserts—neighborhoods that lack rail service—and are the only direct access between the outer boroughs and Manhattan. For many residents, reliable and timely bus service is essential for daily activities, such as commuting to work, attending medical appointments, and participating in community life. The identified deficiencies not only hinder mobility but also impact the quality of life for many people with disabilities. It is vital that the MTA address these issues to ensure equitable access to transportation for all New Yorkers.

REPORT FINDINGS



25% of express buses were inaccessible to wheelchair users.



Drivers lacked experience and training on wheelchair lifts, leading to delays and safety risks.



Many express buses were canceled or failed to adhere to schedules, with some riders experiencing hourlong waits.



Rider satisfaction was low overall, with complaints about reliability and poor communication.



Insufficient efforts were made to pilot alternative bus designs and engage the accessibility community.

Audit Recommendations

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| 1 | Immediately conduct refresher trainings on wheelchair lift operation, as well as American Disability Act (ADA) and MTA requirements for providing service to people with disabilities. This includes immediately informing Bus Command Center (BCC) of lift issues, safely boarding customers, securing wheelchairs, making bus stop announcements as required, and appropriate etiquette. |
| 2 | Ensure that all express bus drivers receive annual hands-on training in operating wheelchair lifts and provide express bus drivers with field instructions for operating wheelchair lifts. |
| 3 | Separately report express bus wheelchair lift deployments, including the number of failed deployments and successful deployments. |
| 4 | Pilot additional low-floor entry buses or other accessible bus designs and consider implementing those buses as vehicles are retired. |
| 5 | Make meaningful efforts to engage the accessibility community on new bus designs, including designs that provide ramp entry. Those efforts should include, but not be limited to, selecting buses to pilot, accessibility features and bus design, and revenue service pilots. When piloting new bus designs, ensure that demonstration buses are equipped with accessibility features that the MTA proposes to implement and that a sufficient number of people with disabilities are engaged so that their feedback is projectable to the population. |
| 6 | Compare express bus scheduled pick up and drop off times to actual times and revise bus schedules as necessary to ensure they are realistic and as accurate as possible. |
| 7 | Address bus driver shortages and mechanical failures to minimize the impact of service cancelations. If shortages cannot be addressed, revise service schedules to minimize service cancelations. |
| 8 | Improve MTA communication applications to ensure that they provide customers with accurate and timely information on service alerts, bus locations, and estimated bus arrival times. |

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