



## UPTOWN GRAND CENTRAL

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February 11, 2019

President Andy Byford  
MTA NYC Transit  
2 Broadway  
New York, NY 10004

Dear President Byford:

We are writing to congratulate you on the transformation we have seen thus far during your leadership of MTA NYC Transit, and to ask that you take a similar fresh look at the M35 bus route.

As you well know, the M35 is the shortest of MTA bus routes, in that its loop route between Randall's Island and 125<sup>th</sup> Street & Lexington Avenue in East Harlem is scheduled to take just 20 minutes. As you most likely have heard, this route has caused community outcry for decades now for several reasons:

- **Human congestion:** The northwest corner of 125<sup>th</sup> Street & Lexington Avenue is the first stop when the bus comes off the island, and is incredibly difficult for area residents, workers and commuters to navigate. The sidewalk is relatively narrow here, and the entrance to the 4/5/6 line is also located on this corner, so there are often bodies bumping bodies as people try to connect to the subway, M60, M100, M101 or Bx15 buses, Metro-North, or simply walk by.
- **Unsafe conditions:** This congestion is worsened by the fact that many of the bus riders who are commuting from the shelters on Randall's Island do not leave this corner once they arrive here, and instead hang out all day. Over the course of time, the corner has turned into a place to purchase or openly use drugs, which means that this very central part of our commercial corridor is not safe for families and children.

It also has led to an incredible amount of street trash on that street corner that must be cleaned by local small businesses and property owners, and created a burden on the nearby small businesses who must hire part-time security and/or deal with a large amount of disruption and theft caused by the waiting passengers.

The situation has for too long been unsafe for the large number of people with disabilities who attend day programming inside the buildings adjacent to the bus stop. These programs, including Sinergia, AHRC, Chelton Loft and Lifespire, have implemented a policy of creating "human chains" of staff members, so that they can ensure that clients are able to safely exit their building and board their buses and vans.

- **Fare evasion.** Any regular rider of the M35 knows that it is not necessary to pay the fare to ride the route, since drivers must choose personal safety over enforcing that each individual that boards the bus swipe a Metrocard.



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- **Irregular/infrequent buses:** Despite its short loop, the M35 does not run predictably, leaving gaps in service that make it difficult for workers who must commute to jobs on the Randall's Island and teams that play sports on the island to arrive to their work or games on time. Irregular boarding and departure also contributes to the culture of hanging out and creating congestion at 125<sup>th</sup> & Lex, since riders must stand and wait for departure. It also disproportionately disadvantages Randall's Island shelter clients who have mobility issues, since their only way on and off the island is via the M35.
- **Vehicle congestion:** Lexington Avenue is a narrow two-lane street, and is also the pathway for vehicles coming into Manhattan off the Third Avenue Bridge. Traffic is already tight there, and it is worsened on the block between 125<sup>th</sup> & 126<sup>th</sup> streets by the M35 buses that park while drivers often take breaks. Add to this the buses and vans that try to service the clients from Sinergia and AHRC, and you have a loud and dangerous situation.

Since 2013, when we got our start as the New Harlem East Merchants Association (NHEMA), Uptown Grand Central has worked to revitalize East 125<sup>th</sup> Street and spur economic and cultural development along our corridor by hiring formerly homeless individuals to clean our streets, supporting our small businesses, sponsoring community events and public art, and actively advocating for our area. Just one block away from the M35 stop, we adopted the space underneath the Metro-North tracks at 125<sup>th</sup> Street & Park Avenue as a community plaza that features exercise classes, a pop-up small business snack shop, a year-round farmers market, plus live music and performances.

We would like to see the same transformation we have begun to see at 125<sup>th</sup> Street & Park Avenue begin to take place at 125<sup>th</sup> & Lex, and we feel progress will be made by the following:

1. **Get an accurate count of M35 riders.** Since Metrocards are not required to ride the bus, how is ridership on the bus measured? We request that the MTA take a closer look at the situation and take a manual count.
2. **Increase the frequency of buses, and other modes of transportation.** With an accurate count of ridership, the MTA will have better data on the number of buses that must run in order to keep commuters moving effectively. It may also be possible to re-engage the Department of Homeless Services in expanding their van service that used to run more robustly.
3. **Improve the conditions at the M35 bus stop.** Many community groups, including our local Community Board 11, have suggested moving the stop to the south side of 125<sup>th</sup> Street, so that passengers disembark onto the much wider sidewalk adjacent to the former Pathmark supermarket. This location has the advantage of having more space to absorb waiting riders, enabling the clients with disability issues on the northwest corner of 125<sup>th</sup> & Lex to board their buses and vans safely.
4. **Consider expanding the route.** Having the M35 route extend west across 125<sup>th</sup> Street would allow commuters to and from the island to have connections to the 2/3, A/B/C/D and 1 subway



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lines, and reduce the congestion that accumulates by having the route terminate on one small block in East Harlem. Routes to and from Randall's Island should also be considered to and from the Bronx and Queens.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us should you have any questions. We are excited to work with you on your plan to reimagine the New York City bus network, as this route is one that deeply needs a new vision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carey King". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carey King  
Director