

# NYPIRG STRAPHANGERS CAMPAIGN TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

## News Release

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**M66 Wins Pokey Award For Slowest Bus; Crawls at Abysmal Speed of 3.1 MPH Slower Than a Turtle, And That's a Glacial 4 MPH!**

**Schleppie Award Goes to ... It's a Tie! M1 and M101/102/103 Arrive Bunched Together or With Major Gaps In Service 37% of the Time**

**68% Increase in Number of Unreliable Bus Routes In Last Year; 19 Routes Given a Schleppie in 2014 Jumps to 32 Schleppie Awards in 2015**

New York, New York — The NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign and Transportation Alternatives today gave out two “awards” highlighting poor bus service in New York City.

The first is the fourteenth-annual “Pokey” for slowest local bus route in New York City.

The uncoveted Pokey award is a golden snail on a pedestal. The award is based on the speed of rides recorded by Straphangers Campaign staff and volunteers on 35 routes. Lines were selected because they had high ridership or were historically slow Manhattan crosstown routes. (See methodology.)

**The “winner” of the 2015 Pokey is... the M66 crosstown.** It had the slowest bus speed out of the 35 lines surveyed by the Straphangers Campaign, clocked at an excruciating 3.1 miles per hour at 12 noon on a weekday.

Turtles move up to 4 MPH in contrast to the observed 3.1 MPH speed for the M66, the groups noted.<sup>1</sup>

—more, more, more—

“In the classic fable, the tortoise (an even slower relative of the turtle) beats the hare, spawning the moral: slow and steady wins the race,” said Straphangers Campaign Attorney Gene Russianoff. “But add the M66, and that crosstown bus comes in behind both the turtle and the hare. Bus riders are painfully familiar with a different moral: crawl in traffic, end up in last place.”

In 2014, the M66 moved 12,449 riders on an average weekday and ranked 58th in riders out of 182 New York City Transit local bus routes. The M66 travels crosstown on 65th through 68th Streets between West End and York Avenues.<sup>2</sup>

According to the groups, the slowest bus routes in each borough are:

B35	5.8 mph	between Sunset Park and Brownsville, Brooklyn
Bx2	4.8 mph	between Kingsbridge and Mott Haven, Bronx
M66	3.1 mph	Crosstown on 65th through 68th Streets, Manhattan
Q58	7.0 mph	between Ridgewood and Flushing Main Street, Queens
S48/98	8.2 mph	between Mariners Harbor and St. George Ferry, Staten Island

In the 2002 Pokey Awards, the groups found that the city’s slowest bus route was the M96. In 2003, the groups awarded the Pokey to the M23, in 2004 and 2005 to the M34, in 2006 to the M14A, in 2007 to the M23, the M96 in 2008, the M42 in 2009 and 2010, the M50 in 2011, the M42 tied the M66 in 2012, the M42 and M50 tied in 2013 and the M79 won in 2014.

The groups cautioned that comparisons with past Pokey Award findings were difficult due to changes in methodology and bus routes over the years. In addition, changes in bus speeds since 2004 have generally been too small to demonstrate significant trends. (See methodology.)

In this survey, the total number of routes observed was 40. Five routes were dropped because of construction on them during the survey period,<sup>3</sup> three of which are in the midst of significant upgrades as part of the Select Bus Service program.<sup>4</sup> As a result, we included 35 bus routes in this report.

New Yorkers know from bitter daily experience that bus service is slow and unreliable. But there is real hope for dramatic improvement for better local bus service by using techniques pioneered for Select Bus Service. City traffic and transit officials should closely study which of the SBS features could be applied to local bus service.

Select Bus Service has features that provide faster service, such as collecting fares before boarding buses; buses with three doors and low floors to speed up boarding and alighting; reconfiguring bus stops and bus lanes to reduce conflicts with other traffic; wider subway-style spacing between stops; and enforcement of bus lanes by camera to keep the lanes moving.<sup>5</sup>

**The second award is the tenth-annual “Schleppe” for the city’s least reliable bus routes and is based on official transit statistics**, which measure how well buses keep to scheduled intervals. The Schleppe is comprised of golden lumbering elephants on a pedestal.

**The “winner” of the 2015 Schleppe is ... a tie!** The 2015 Schleppe goes to the M1 and the combined M101/102/103, both with a dismal 37 percent of buses arriving with big gaps in service or bunched together.

New York City Transit calculates “wait assessments” for “42 high-volume routes,” the same routes first chosen by Transit two decades ago. Wait assessment measures how closely a line sticks to scheduled intervals for arrival. Wait assessment becomes poorer the more buses arrive in bunches or with major gaps in service.<sup>6,7</sup>

“In the realm of unreliable bus service, the M1 is the king, and the local M101/102/103 is the queen,” said Paul Steely White, Executive Director of Transportation Alternatives. “Their unhappy subjects, the riders, must endure the tyranny of frequent and long waits, followed by a parade of buses that pass by in bunches, like a herd of lumbering elephants.”

**The number of bus routes awarded Schleppies increased a worrisome 68 percent in the last year**, jumping from 19 Schleppe routes in 2014 to 32 Schleppe routes in 2015. Schleppies go to any route with an average wait assessment greater than 20% of buses arriving with big gaps in service or bunched together.

Transit officials found a statically significant worsening in wait assessment during the first six months of 2015.<sup>8</sup>

**The groups called on the MTA to analyze the causes and possible cures for declining wait assessment.** They noted that MTA officials have repeatedly praised wait assessment as better reflecting the experience of customers, while denigrating other performance measures as weak indicators of service, such as on-time performance.

The M1 goes from the East Village to Harlem along Fifth and Madison Avenues. The route moved 12,210 riders on an average weekday in 2014 and was ranked 61st in bus ridership in the city out of 182 local routes operated by New York City Transit. (Another 47 local bus routes are operated largely in Queens and Brooklyn by the MTA Bus Company, but are not in the 42 high-volume routes.)

The M101, M102, and M103 go from Lower to Upper Manhattan along Third, Lexington, Lenox and Amsterdam Avenues. The routes moved a combined 52,311 riders on an average weekday in 2014.

The most unreliable bus routes in each borough with over 20% of buses bunched together or big gaps in service are:

B15	26.7% unreliable btwn Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn and JFK Airport
Bx15	28.6% unreliable btwn Fordham Plaza, Bronx and Harlem, Manhattan
M1	37.0% unreliable btwn East Village and Harlem, Manhattan
M101/2/3	37.0% unreliable btwn Lower Manhattan and Upper Manhattan
Q43	22.2% unreliable btwn Floral Park and Jamaica, Queens.
S78	26.8% unreliable btwn St. George and Bricktown Mall, Staten Island

The Schleppe went to the M1 in both 2006 and 2007, to the M101/102/103 in 2008, the B44 in 2009, the Bx41 in 2010, the M101/102/103 in 2011, the M4 in 2012, again to the M101/102/103 in 2013 and to the M15 in 2014. Transit’s methodology for calculating this measure was changed in 2008. But it has not changed since then and comparisons of wait assessments used to award a Schleppe is appropriate.

Full tables of bus speeds and buses with unreliable service are available online at [www.straphangers.org](http://www.straphangers.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <http://hypertextbook.com/facts/1999/RachelShweky.shtml>.

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from [http://web.mta.info/nyct/facts/ridership/ridership\\_bus.htm](http://web.mta.info/nyct/facts/ridership/ridership_bus.htm).

<sup>3</sup> According to NYC DOT and supported by our own observation, the M34 SBS and M34a SBS are in the midst of a long-term capital construction project on the eastern portion of the route. The M15 and M15 SBS also travel this portion of Second Avenue and were subsequently dropped from the survey. Retrieved from <http://www.nyc.gov/html/brt/html/routes/34th-street.shtml#updates>.

<sup>4</sup> The M86 was dropped as it underwent an upgrade from local to Select Bus Service during the survey period. See <http://www.nyc.gov/html/brt/html/routes/86th-street.shtml>.

<sup>5</sup> Looking at two SBS buses that can be fairly compared to local service on that route, we found:

- SBS on the Bx12 increased bus speeds by 25 percent the Bx12 local. The Bx12 local was clocked by our surveyors at 8.3 MPH. But the Bx12 SBS traveled at 10.4 MPH — 25 percent faster than the Bx12 local.
- SBS on the Bx41 increased bus speeds by 19 percent over the Bx41 local. The Bx41 local was clocked by our surveyors at 7.4 MPH. But the Bx41 SBS traveled at 8.8 MPH, 19 percent faster than the Bx41 local.

<sup>6</sup> MTA NYC Transit uses a measure of reliability known as “wait assessment.” It “is measured weekdays between 7 a.m. and midnight. It is defined as the percentage of observed service intervals that are no more than the scheduled interval plus 3 minutes during the peak (7 a.m. to 9 a.m., 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.) and plus 5 during off-peak (9 a.m. to 4 p.m., 7 p.m. to 12 p.m.) The results are presented for a sample of 42 high-volume routes.” The most recent WA statistics can be found in the MTA New York City Transit Committee Agenda from September 2015 on pages 282-285. Retrieved from [http://web.mta.info/mta/news/books/pdf/150921\\_1000\\_transit-bus.pdf](http://web.mta.info/mta/news/books/pdf/150921_1000_transit-bus.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> NYCT reported wait assessments for the M15 and M15 SBS in the September NYCT Committee Agenda, so we have reported them here, though the routes were removed from consideration for this year’s Pokey Award due to construction overlap with the M34a SBS.

<sup>8</sup> New York City Transit Committee Agenda, September 21, 2015, page 282: [http://web.mta.info/mta/news/books/pdf/150921\\_1000\\_transit-bus.pdf](http://web.mta.info/mta/news/books/pdf/150921_1000_transit-bus.pdf).

Table One:  
**THE POKEY AWARD**  
 Slowest to Fastest  
 Average Noontime Speeds, Both Directions  
 of 35\* Selected New York City Transit Local Bus Routes  
 June 19 - October 26, 2015

<b>Route</b>	<b>Average MPH, beginning at 12:00 Noon</b>
M66	3.1
M23	3.7
M42	3.7
M14A	3.9
M57	3.9
M106	4.2
M50	4.3
M14D	4.8
Bx2	4.8
M96	4.9
M8	5.0
M101	5.1
M72	5.1
M21	5.2
M79	5.2
M116	5.6
B35 LTD	5.8
Bx36	6.0
B44	6.1
B6	6.5
Bx1 LTD	6.7
Q58	7.0
B46	7.3
Bx41	7.4
B44 SBS	7.7
Bx15 LTD	7.9
Q44 LTD	8.1
S48/98	8.2
Bx12	8.3
Bx41 SBS	8.8
Q27	8.9
M60 SBS	9.1
Bx12 SBS	10.4
S53	11.2
S79 SBS	14.5

\*See "selection of routes" in the report methodology.

Table Two:  
**THE SCHLEPPIE AWARD**  
Worst to Best

More Than One in Five Buses on Route Arrived With Major Gaps or  
Bunched Together or Left Significantly Off Schedule\*  
First Half 2015

<b>Route</b>	<b>% Unreliable From/To</b>	
M1	37.0%	Harlem to East Village on Fifth and Madison Avenues
M101/2/3	37.0%	Upper to Lower Manhattan on Third/Lexington/Lenox/Amsterdam Avenues
M15 SBS	36.0%	East Harlem to South Ferry on First and Second Avenues
M4	33.9%	Fort Tryon Park or Washington Heights to Penn Station
M3	33.5%	Fort George to East Village on Fifth/Madison/St. Nicholas Avenues
M7	32.4%	Harlem to Chelsea on 6th/7th/Columbus/Amsterdam Avenues
M2	32.2%	Washington Heights to East Village on Fifth/Madison Aves/AC Powell Blvd
M15	30.5%	East Harlem to South Ferry on First and Second Avenues
Bx15	28.6%	Fordham Plaza, Bronx to Harlem, Manhattan
S78	26.8%	St. George Ferry Terminal to Bricktown Mall on Hylan Boulevard
B15	26.7%	Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn to JFK Airport, Queens
B41	26.0%	Downtown Brooklyn to Kings Plaza or Bergen Beach on Flatbush Avenue
M104	25.6%	Harlem to Port Authority Bus Terminal on Broadway and 42nd Street
B46	25.3%	Kings Plaza to Bedford-Stuyvesant or Williamsburg Bridge Plaza
S74	25.1%	St. George Ferry to Bricktown Mall on Richmond Road and Arthur Kill Road
Bx40/42	24.7%	Morris Heights to Fort Schuyler or Throgs Neck on Tremont Avenue
M10/20	24.5%	Harlem to Columbus Circle/Lincoln Center to South Ferry
B35	24.2%	Sunset Park to Brownsville on Church Avenue and 39th Street
Bx36	23.7%	Soundview, Bronx to Washington Heights, Manhattan
B44	23.3%	Sheepshead Bay to Williamsburg on Nostrand and New York Avenues
Bx1/2	23.0%	Riverdale or Kingsbridge to Mott Haven on Grand Concourse
M14	22.8%	Chelsea Piers or West Village to Lower East Side on 14th Street
M31	22.7%	Yorkville to Clinton on York Avenue and W. 57th Street
Bx12	22.7%	Pelham Bay Park to University Heights on Pelham Pkwy/Fordham Road
Q43	22.2%	Floral Park to Jamaica, Queens on Hillside Avenue
M66	22.1%	Upper East Side to West Side on 66th and 67th Streets
Bx19	22.0%	NY Botanical Garden, Bronx to Riverbank State Park, Manhattan
M86	21.9%	Yorkville to Upper East Side on 86th Street
Q85	21.9%	Rosedale to Jamaica on Merrick Blvd and Conduit Avenue
S76	21.4%	Oakwood Beach to St. George on Richmond Road/New Dorp Lane
Q58	21.4%	Ridgewood to Flushing on Fresh Pond Road and Corona Avenue
Bx41	20.6%	Williamsbridge to The Hub on Webster and Melrose Avenues

\* Schleppe Awards are based on the percentages of buses departing significantly off scheduled interval, based on MTA New York City Transit data. A Schleppe is awarded to any route with an average unreliability greater than 20%.

# Methodology:

## 2015 Pokey and Schleppe Awards

### I. Pokey Award

This report is a follow-up to the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign thirteen previous *Pokey Award* reports issued annually from 2002 to 2014. The methodology used by the Campaign in this report is similar to the ones used in earlier reports.

#### *Selection of Routes*

The Straphangers Campaign chose to measure speeds on a sample of 40 bus routes. The survey was designed to provide a 'snapshot' of the most-used routes in the system and in each borough, as well as traditionally slow-moving crosstown bus routes in Manhattan. Because of significant differences between route patterns of the Manhattan M14A and M14D, these routes were measured separately. On four routes — the B35, Bx1, Bx15 and Q44 — regular local bus service did not run terminal to terminal on weekdays at 12:00 noon, and therefore limited bus service speeds were measured on these routes. The Bx12 local and Bx12 SBS routes, as well as the B44 and B44 SBS routes, and the Bx41 and Bx41 SBS routes were measured separately. We did not include the M34 SBS, M34a SBS, M15, M15 SBS, and M86 SBS because of substantial construction at the time of the survey, resulting in 35 reported routes.

#### *Bus Speed Measurement*

Surveys were conducted by Straphangers Campaign Coordinator Cate Contino Cowit and five staff members between June 19 and October 26, 2015. Each route was measured with an actual trip in both directions, beginning with the first bus departing from a terminus after 12:00 noon. The return trip was made from the second terminus back to the first on the next bus available. During each trip, surveyors recorded to the second the amount of time taken from terminus to terminus. Timing began as each bus pulled out of the first stop and concluded immediately after stopping at the last. In our analysis, times were converted to a fraction of an hour. Distances covered were measured to the nearest 1/100th mile using GIS software. Bus speeds were calculated by dividing the total number of miles per run by the fraction of the hour taken to cover the total distance. Below is an example of how this methodology was applied to a sample route, Manhattan's M116.

#### *Sample Calculation — M116 Crosstown*

Bus speeds on the M116 were measured on August 10, 2015. Surveyors boarded a westbound M116, which pulled out of its terminus at E. 120<sup>th</sup> Street and Pleasant Avenue. This trip began at 12:00:12 PM and concluded at 12:28:16 PM at the western terminus, W. 106<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway. The westbound trip represents a distance of 2.48 miles, which was covered in 28 minutes, 4 seconds.

Immediately following their westbound measurement, surveyors boarded the next eastbound M116 at its western terminus — W. 106<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway — at 12:40:14 PM. The bus came to a stop at its eastern terminus — E. 120<sup>th</sup> Street and Pleasant Avenue — at 1:10:04 PM. This trip represents a distance of 2.88 miles, which was covered in 29 minutes, 50 seconds.

In all, the two-trip run on the M116 covered a distance of 5.36 miles in a time of 57 minutes and 54 seconds, or 0.965 hours. This corresponds to an average bus speed of 5.6 miles per hour.

The Straphangers Campaign wishes to thank the staff that assisted in the survey: Tiffany Brown, Jaqi Cohen, Patrick Krug, Tassia Rosa, and Emily Skydel.

## II. Schleppe Award

This report is also a follow-up to the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign's nine previous *Schleppe Awards* issued annually from 2006 to 2014.

In awarding the Schleppe, the campaign used official “wait assessment” data released in September 2015 by MTA New York City Transit for bus service during the first half of 2015, the most recent period available. The measure is reported for 42 high-volume routes.<sup>9</sup>

“Wait assessment” is defined as follows by transit officials:

“Wait Assessment is measured weekdays between 7:00 a.m. and midnight. It is defined as the percentage of observed service intervals that are no more than the scheduled interval plus 3 minutes during peak (7 a.m. – 9 a.m., 4 p.m. – 7 p.m.) and plus 5 during off-peak (9 a.m. – 4 p.m., 7 p.m. – 12 a.m.).”<sup>10</sup>

The campaign believes that this is the best measure made by transit officials that shows how closely buses are sticking to their scheduled intervals. As such, it reflects the degree to which buses bunch together, or arrive with big gaps, a gauge of what riders experience.

To be eligible for a Schleppe, a route must have at least 20% of its buses arriving bunched or with big gaps in service. This year, transit officials used “Bus Time data for the 42 high-volume routes as compared to sample data used for the First Half 2014.”<sup>11</sup>

Since 2008, transit officials significantly changed this measure. In the past, the agency reported a different measure for evening service. It used to compare how closely service arrived according to printed schedules at night. Now the agency reports only wait assessment for the entire day. As a result, historical comparisons of Schleppe Awards before 2008 are not meaningful.

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<sup>9</sup> Wait assessment data can be found at pages 282-285 of the September 2015 MTA New York City Transit Committee Agenda.

<sup>10</sup> Since September 2010, transit officials have measured wait assessment differently for the subways. It is reported on a monthly basis and is measured on weekdays between 9 a.m. and midnight. It is defined as the percent of actual intervals between trains that are no more than the scheduled interval plus 25%.

<sup>11</sup> MTA New York City Transit Committee Agenda, September 21, 2015, Page 281. Retrieved from [http://web.mta.info/mta/news/books/pdf/150921\\_1000\\_transit-bus.pdf](http://web.mta.info/mta/news/books/pdf/150921_1000_transit-bus.pdf).