

New Laws Address Illegal Vans

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By Corey Bearak, The Public Ought To Know

Queens, NY – Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1056 and 1179, and Presidents/ Business Agents Mark Henry (1056) and Bennie Caughman (1179) welcome the expected signing into law today (Wednesday, February 15) by Mayor Bill de Blasio of legislation sponsored by City Council Member I.

Daneek Miller to address the proliferation of illegally operating commuter vans that greatly impact public bus transit throughout the City of New York primarily in Queens.

ATU supports both Miller bills, Int. No. 860-A which requires a study of safety related issues in the commuter van industry and suspending new or existing commuter van licenses pending its completion and Int. No. 861 to increase penalties for illegal van operations.

A majority of commuter vans – licensed and unlicensed – operate illegally and unsafely – in contravention of the City's Vision Zero initiative – along bus routes duplicating existing bus service provided by the MTA. Many vans prey pick up and discharge passengers at MTA bus stops; this deprives the MTA of revenue that it can re-invest in bus service and reduces passenger counts that the Authority uses to cut service. The vans' operation de facto recreates the two-fare zones we fought to eliminate over 20 years ago.

These illegally operating vans offer a dangerous alternative to MTA bus service; unlike MTA buses – the vans remain ADA inaccessible, foster more congestion both along bus routes and at already heavily congested bus and subway transit hubs and often race along city streets putting all at risk and causing many pedestrian accidents.

Unlike the drivers such as ATU (and TWU Local 100) members who operate MTA buses in Queens, these van drivers face no regular oversight. This includes no requirement to maintain a Commercial Driver's License, receive no recurring training, no drug testing and no periodic medical evaluations.

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