

2010
MTA Bus Company Service Reductions
One Year Evaluation

Introduction

In June 2010, MTA Bus Company (MTA Bus) reduced or discontinued bus service on five low ridership routes in response to a large budget funding gap facing MTA Bus' parent agency, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). The MTA 2010 budget gap totaled \$900 million, and MTA and all of its constituent agencies embarked upon a comprehensive cost reduction program, including staff reductions, renegotiation of contracts and service cuts.¹

The 2010 service reductions resulted in a cost savings to MTA Bus of approximately \$1.425 million annually, net of revenue. Given the MTA's fiscal situation in 2010, service reductions were necessary as a means of preserving the appropriate levels of bus service across the MTA Bus system as a whole. However, MTA Bus' situation was unique because the five express and local bus routes that were discontinued were MTA Bus' least used and least cost-effective routes in the system. The elimination of these routes provided cost reductions that affected only approximately 310 riders per weekday (less than one percent) out of a total weekday ridership of almost 400,000.

In developing the service reduction plan, MTA Bus followed several principles designed to minimize customer inconvenience:

- Affect the fewest number of riders
- Minimize the negative effects to riders (e.g., reallocate a portion of the savings to the main corridor service, such as with the BxM4A proposal);
- Maintain network coverage (even if it requires adjusted frequency or altered routings, or use of alternative available services);
- Operate service within existing service and capacity guidelines (except where otherwise noted);
- Improve the cost-efficiency of the service provided.

Based on these tenets, MTA Bus focused on reductions on the least utilized routes, and route segments, while also seeking to maintain or enhance, the cost-effectiveness of services retained or restructured. As evidence that the least utilized routes were affected, ridership increased slightly from 2009 to 2010. The adopted reductions included:

- Discontinuation of the BxM4A while maintaining service on the BxM4B (relabelled BxM4).
- Discontinuation of the BxM7B while maintaining City Island service by extending two weekday peak period BxM7A trips in each direction.
- Discontinuation of the QM22 express bus route.
- Discontinuation of the QM23 express bus route.
- Discontinuation of the Q89 local bus route.

Proposals for MTA service reductions, including those for MTA Bus services, were the subject of public hearings held in March 2010 in all five boroughs of New York City, as

¹ Additional service reductions were made by other MTA agencies – New York City Transit, Long Island Bus, Long Island Rail Road, and Metro-North Railroad. These reductions are not the subject of this report.

well as in suburban counties. As a result of the public input received at these hearings and/or through written submissions, MTA Bus revised some of the proposed service reductions. The final package of service reductions was approved by the MTA Board at its April 2010 meeting.

The proposed service reductions were listed in a summary publication, *2010 MTA Bus Company Service Reductions*, January 21, 2010 and revised March 17, 2010, which was distributed to the MTA Board, posted on the MTA website, and made available at public hearings. This follow-up report summarizes the reductions and addresses how ridership and cost effectiveness have changed since most of the changes were implemented in June 2010, based on observations in the months since the reductions were implemented.

Methodology

Similar types of bus impacts for bus service changes were examined using various data analyses, including:

- Farebox ridership counts on bus routes that were directly affected by the service reductions and on bus routes that riders may have shifted to were analyzed. In some cases changes in subway ridership were also analyzed where appropriate.²
- To determine the cost efficiency of the bus service changes, the cost per rider before the service change was compared to the cost per rider after the service change on the remaining affected routes using the same 2009 comparable cost factors. Note that given contractually mandated wage increases and volatile fuel costs, the actual cost factors have increased since the service reductions were proposed.
- Operational issues, such as running time increases or reduced reliability due to traffic were also considered.

Findings

The June 2010 service reductions affected five bus routes, and the overall reduction in service was expected to result in a small net reduction in MTA Bus ridership. However, system-wide ridership did not decline. There were small overall increases in both local express and local ridership.

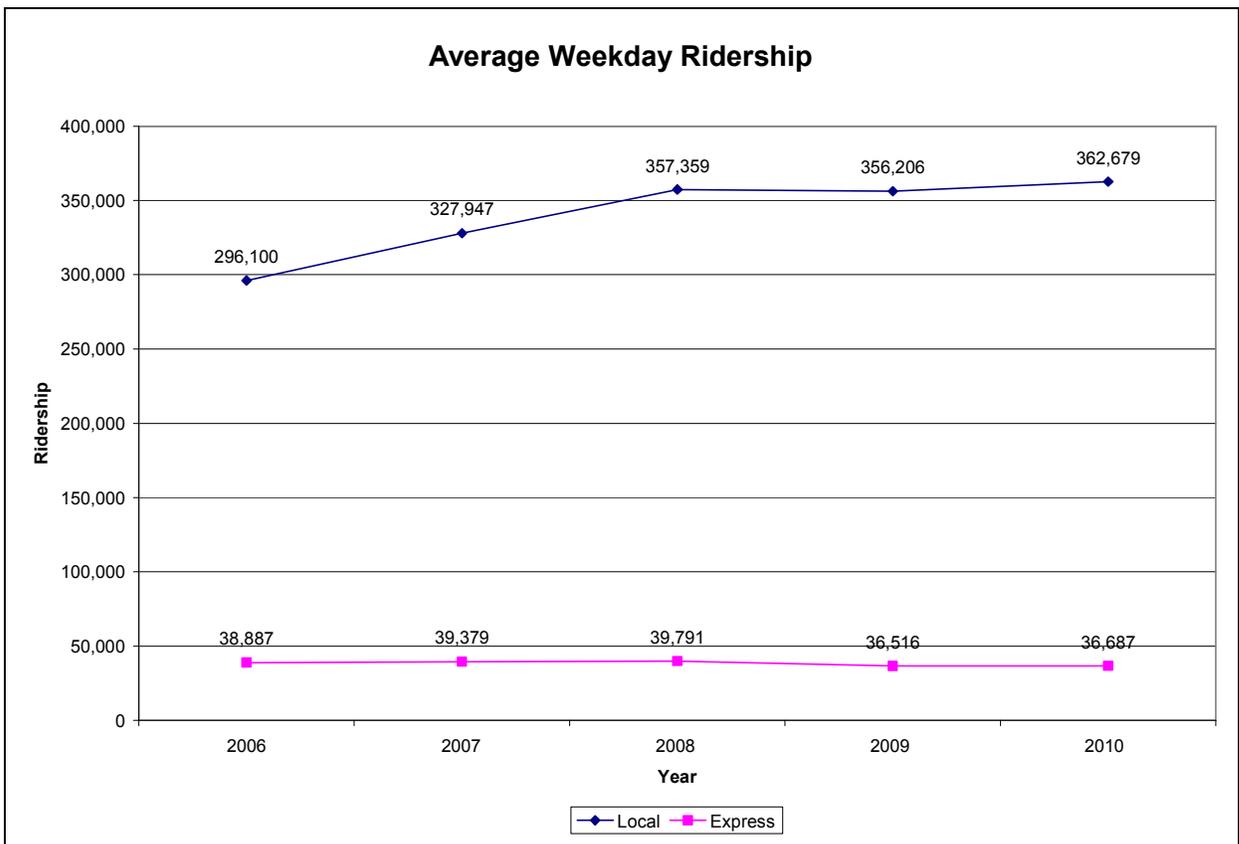
Systemwide Ridership Changes

In addition to the service changes, there are many factors that can affect ridership, such as

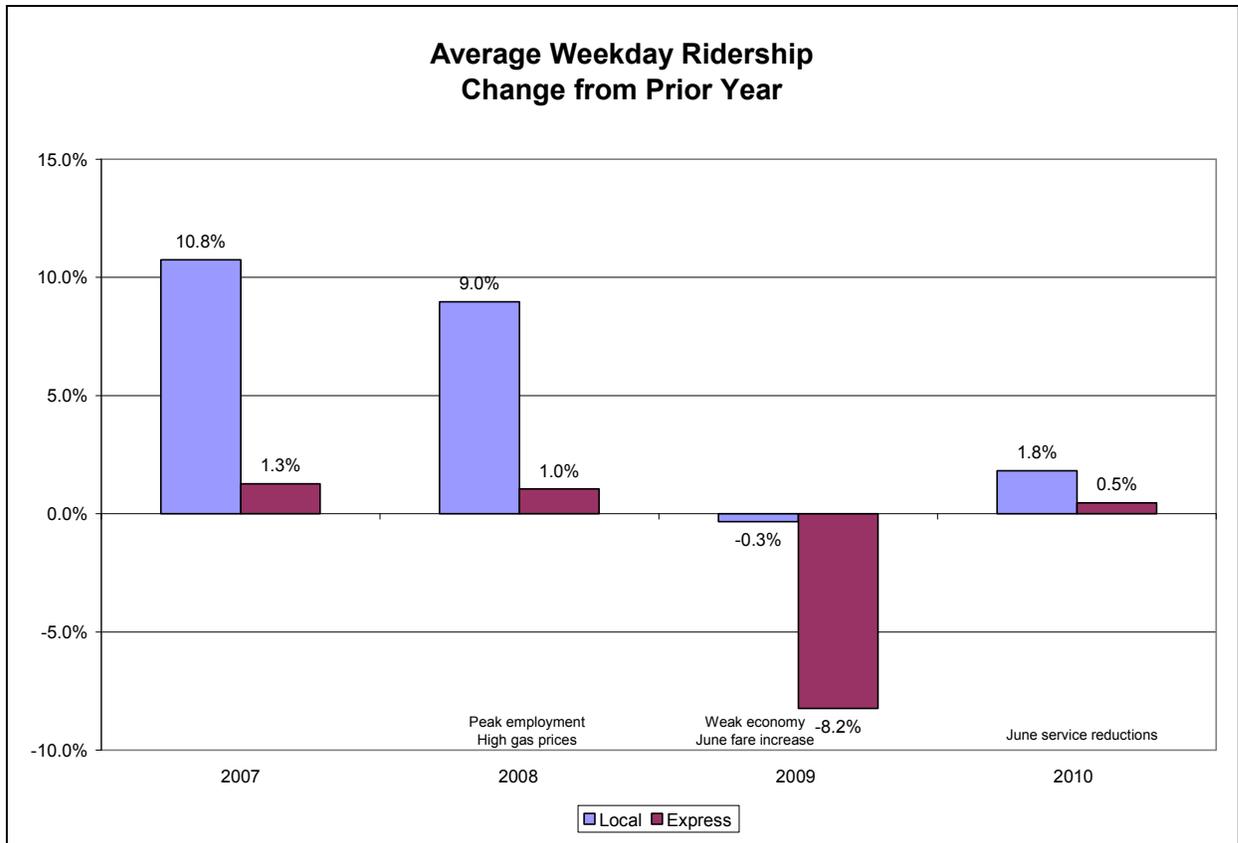
² Average weekday ridership is for the period September – November 2009 and 2010, and average Saturday and Sunday ridership is for the period from July – November 2009 and 2010. December is excluded due to the post-Christmas blizzard of 2010, which affected ridership significantly. July and August are excluded from the average weekday ridership as weekday ridership typically decreases in the summer months, while weekend ridership does not decrease as much during the summer.

fares, the economy and demographics. From the completion of the merger of the seven former private bus companies into MTA Bus in early 2006, ridership has generally been increasing. MTA Bus implemented many service improvements, such as by providing service at levels to meet ridership levels; normalizing service with uniform, clock-face headways; streamlining routes where possible; standardizing maintenance practices across the MTA Bus system, and introducing new buses. In 2009, well before the service changes, ridership began to decline as a result of the weak economy and the June 2009 fare increase. Express bus ridership was more greatly affected than local bus ridership

The chart below shows ridership trends since completion of the merger into MTA Bus in 2006.



The next chart shows the percent change from the prior years for system-wide local and express bus service.



Projected and Actual Ridership Change Resulting from Service Reductions

The service reductions were conservatively projected to cause a small loss in ridership of less than one percent (310 weekday riders), although all riders that were affected had nearby transit alternatives. MTA Bus system-wide ridership increased slightly for 2010.

Route-Specific Findings

In analyzing the bus service reductions, in some cases it is not possible to know where all the riders went.

Generally, service reductions resulted in the following ridership on the overall affected routes increasing, or staying roughly the same, and the average cost per rider decreased, indicating that riders shifted to other routes and the remaining routes were more cost efficient. The other alternative routes have been able to accommodate the additional ridership because of the low ridership of the routes affected by the service reductions.

Specific ridership and cost per rider data for the bus service reductions is provided in the attached “Evaluation of Changes to Bus Service.”

The MTA Bus service reductions consisted of the five actions, which affected five of the lowest ridership routes or route segments.

- Discontinuation of the BxM4A while maintaining Grand Concourse corridor service on the BxM4B (relabelled BxM4).
- Discontinuation of the BxM7B while maintaining City Island service by extending two weekday peak period BxM7A trips in each direction.
- Discontinuation of the QM22 express bus route.
- Discontinuation of the QM23 express bus route.
- Discontinuation of the Q89 local bus route.

Conclusions

Despite attempts to minimize negative impacts, the service reductions did result in certain customers experiencing degradation in their service. When service cuts are driven by the need to reduce costs, such customer impacts are essentially unavoidable. However, many of the riders affected by the service reductions have been able to use alternate subway or bus service, which because of the low ridership of the affected routes, have been able to accommodate the additional ridership. Overall, the service reductions in June 2010 have worked out as anticipated.

Over 99 percent of all riders were not affected by the service reductions, and for those riders the impact has been neutral.

Evaluation of Service Reductions

Discontinuation of BxM4A Express Bus Service

Description of Action

- Discontinued BxM4A express bus service between Bedford Park, Bronx and Midtown Manhattan on weekdays, Saturdays, and Sundays.
- Grand Concourse corridor service was maintained as per scheduling guidelines with the BxM4B between Woodlawn, Bronx and Midtown Manhattan.
- Service on the former unique portion of the BxM4B route (north of Bainbridge Road at East 210th Street) normalized on weekends to a more marketable 60 minute frequency instead of the previous 120 minute frequency.
- BxM4B was relabeled BxM4.

Projected Net Annual Savings

\$947,000

Ridership and Cost per Rider

	Ridership Change Pre to Post Service Reduction			Cost per Rider		
				Weekday (WD)		
	WD	SAT	SUN	Pre	Post	Change
BxM4A/BxM4B/BxM4	-122	12	-38	\$ 17.67	\$ 14.52	-17.8%
BxM3	-87	30	16	\$ 10.95	\$ 9.70	-11.4%
Subway	358	661	297			
Total	393	679	335	\$ 18.42	\$ 11.43	-37.9%
Percent of Total	2.22%	7.56%	4.94%			

	Cost per Rider					
	Saturday (SAT)			Sunday (SUN)		
	Pre	Post	Change	Pre	Post	Change
BxM4A/BxM4B/BxM4	\$ 24.19	\$ 22.38	-7.5%	\$ 21.57	\$ 29.71	37.7%
BxM3	\$ 10.49	\$ 9.70	-7.5%	\$ 14.43	\$ 13.45	-6.7%
Subway						
Total	\$ 19.55	\$ 5.52	-71.8%	\$ 24.97	\$ 18.59	-25.5%
Percent of Total						

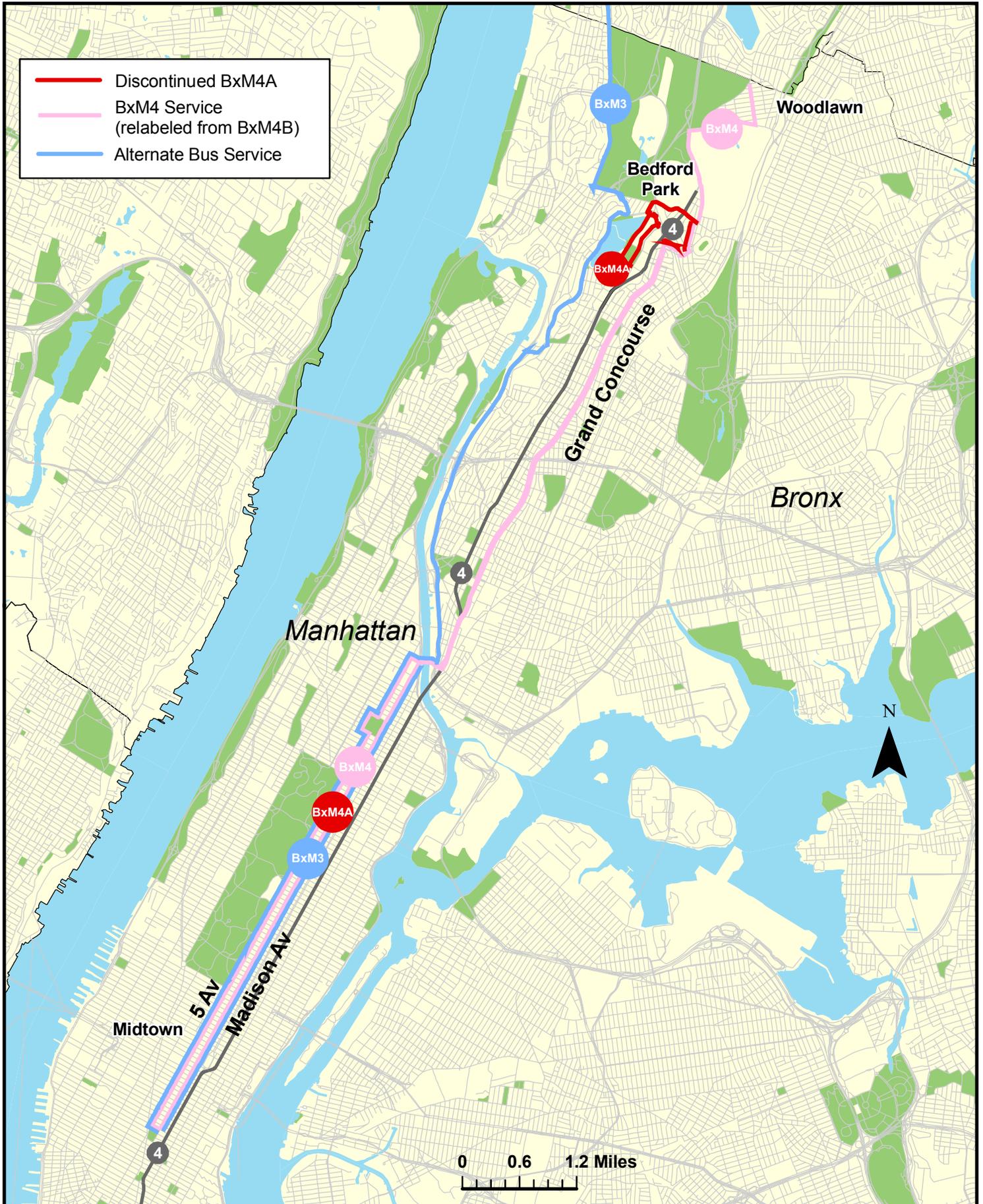
*Ridership at the Bedford Park Blvd-Lehman College and Mosholu Pkwy 4 train stations.

Discussion

Ridership has decreased following the service reductions. An alternate bus route, the BxM3, also experienced a decrease in ridership. It is likely the service changes encouraged use of the 4 train which increased ridership at the Bedford Park Boulevard and Mosholu Parkway stations.

The BxM4 also had a small increase in Saturday ridership which could be partially attributed to more marketable 60 minute headways at the northern end of the route, which previously only served by the BxM4B branch at 120 minute headways.

Discontinued BxM4A Bus Service



Discontinuation of BxM7B Express Bus Service and Replace City Island Service with Extended BxM7A Trips

Description of Action

- Discontinued BxM7B express bus service between City Island, Bronx and Midtown Manhattan, 2 weekday trips in each direction.
- Maintained a City Island express bus option by extending two BxM7A trips in each direction from their terminus at Pelham Bay Park to City Island (please note that the BxM7A was re-labeled to BxM8 in early September 2011).

Projected Net Annual Savings

\$129,000

Ridership and Cost per Rider

	Ridership Change Pre to Post Service Reduction	Cost per Rider		
		Weekday (WD)		
	WD	Pre	Post	Change
BxM7B	71	\$ 15.47		
BxM7A (BxM8*)	-137	\$ 7.50	\$ 8.03	7.0%
Bx29	280	\$ 2.02	\$ 1.70	-15.8%
Subway	147			
Total	219	\$ 4.63	\$ 4.50	-2.8%
Percent of Total	2.00%			

* - BxM7A was re-labeled to BxM8 in early September 2011.

Discussion

Ridership data shows the BxM7A (re-labeled to BxM8 in early September 2011) retained about half of the former City Island ridership served by the discontinued BxM7B, which served City Island exclusively. The remainder is likely using the Bx29 local bus, which is operated by NYC Transit, to the 6 train at Pelham Bay Park station as ridership on those alternatives has increased.

Discontinued BxM7B Bus Service and Extended BxM7A Weekday Peak Period Service



Discontinuation of QM22 Express Bus Service

Description of Action

- Discontinued QM22 express bus service between Jackson Heights, Queens and Midtown Manhattan, which operated on weekday peak periods only.

Projected Net Annual Savings

\$143,000

Ridership and Cost per Rider

	Ridership Change Pre to Post Service Reduction	Cost per Rider		
		Weekday (WD)		
	WD	Pre	Post	Change
QM22	62	\$ 13.28		
Q69	436	\$ 1.23	\$ 1.09	-11.2%
Q47	270	\$ 1.43	\$ 1.31	-8.3%
Total	644	\$ 1.28	\$ 1.16	-9.4%
Percent of Total	4.16%			

Discussion

Despite discontinuation of the QM22 express bus route, bus ridership on the corridors formerly served by this route increased. The local bus alternatives Q69 in Astoria, Long Island City, and North Jackson Heights, and the Q47 in North Jackson Heights both increased ridership. These riders have likely switched to the local bus routes where they have direct connections to multiple subway routes at several stations.

Discontinued QM22 Bus Service



Discontinuation of QM23 Express Bus Service

Description of Action

- Discontinued QM23 express bus service between Brooklyn Manor, Queens and Penn Station, which operated weekday peak periods only.

Projected Net Annual Savings

\$101,000

Ridership and Cost per Rider

	Ridership Change Pre to Post Service Reduction	Cost per Rider		
		Weekday (WD)		
		Pre	Post	Change
QM23	27	\$ 18.85		
QM15	1	\$ 8.72	\$ 8.25	-5.3%
BM5	44	\$ 12.91	\$ 11.87	-8.1%
Total	18	\$ 9.99	\$ 9.36	-6.3%
Percent of Total	1.01%			

Discussion

The QM23 primarily provided service along the same corridor (Woodhaven Boulevard) as the QM15 and BM5, with the exception of two unique stops along Jamaica Avenue. Ridership on the corridor has increased since the discontinuation of the QM23 and riders have likely switched to the QM15 and BM5. The few QM23 riders (approximately 5-10 per day) on Jamaica Avenue likely switched to the **J** train or the Q56 local bus to transfer to the QM15.

Discontinued QM23 Bus Service



Discontinuation of Q89 Local Bus Service

Description of Action

- Discontinued Q89 local bus service between Jamaica, Queens and South Ozone Park Queens, which operated on weekdays only.

Projected Net Annual Savings

\$123,000

Ridership and Cost per Rider

	Ridership Change Pre to Post Service Reduction	Cost per Rider		
		Weekday (WD)		
		Pre	Post	Change
Q89	96	\$ 6.18		
Q9	65	\$ 1.37	\$ 1.32	-3.1%
Total	-31	\$ 1.44	\$ 1.32	-7.8%
Percent in Total	-0.57%			

Discussion

The former Q89 ridership was very low and is likely using many alternate routes as no other bus route serves a similar travel path. On the Q9 which is the best point-to-point alternative to travel between terminuses, ridership increased. It is also likely customers are now using one of the many north-south local bus alternatives in the area, such as the Q4, Q5, Q6, Q40, Q84, Q85, Q111 and Q113, to travel between various points on the route.

Discontinued Q89 Bus Service

