

Queens Civic Congress Transportation Chair quoted in New York Times article on G Train

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/09/nyregion/09subway.html>

The New York Times

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At Last, Some Attention for Subway Line Less Traveled

By ANTHONY RAMIREZ

Like a stray strand of spaghetti just outside of the dinner plate, the route of the G subway line runs, for the most part, from Brooklyn to Queens — but decidedly not into Manhattan.

Without Manhattan ridership, the G line's rider count is lower than that of other lines, so rider advocates say the G line is too tempting a target for budget cutters. G trains also consist of four cars instead of the six or more found on other lines. And its stations seem especially labyrinthine.

So, as any G line rider will testify, the cars are teeming, the stations are peeling and transferring to a Manhattan-bound line can be a long march of the sole.

On Tuesday, the subject of how to improve the G line came before the City Council's transportation committee, which heard from community advocates, the general public and officials from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

The issue was especially timely after the State Legislature's action on Monday rejecting Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's congestion pricing plan, which would have used federal funds to improve subway service outside Manhattan.

For G train riders, tempers were running high on Tuesday, especially on why they felt their line had been shortchanged.

Rolf Carle, 47, a carpenter from Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and a frequent G line rider, said it was obvious what the authority had done.

"It cannibalized the G line to create V trains" that run from Queens to the Lower East Side of Manhattan, Mr. Carle contended.

"In 2001, for the first month or so of the V train's existence, only the first one or two cars had the orange 'V' logo on it — the rest of the cars on the trains still bore the green 'G' logo," Mr. Carle added. "If I'd known that the M.T.A. would deny this now, I would have taken photos."

Charles Seaton, a spokesman for the authority, denied the charge. "We purchased new cars in 2001," he said, "which has freed up cars to be shifted around the system, and those cars ended up on the V line."

Businessmen were concerned about the troubles of the G line, which regularly runs from Smith-Ninth Street in Brooklyn to Long Island City-Court Square, and extends to Forest Hills-71st Avenue during off hours.

James Trent, transportation chairman for the Queens Civic Congress, a business group, said that when a trip to Queens Center Mall “becomes an ordeal involving changing trains and climbing up and down stairs and a 400-foot walk through a tunnel, those retail dollars are more likely to end up in Manhattan.”

City Council hearings are often similar to Congressional hearings, where legislators in high dudgeon interrogate bureaucrats who testify without inflection, but with a microscopic attachment to a neighborhood.

For example, Lynne Serpe, 36, a political consultant and frequent G train rider, testified that the line should be extended to 179th Street in Jamaica, and if not, at least to Queens Plaza.

“I live in Astoria, by the Steinway stop of the G/R/V,” Ms. Serpe testified. She then began a lengthy recitation of subway line and verse, offering precise details of when and where specific trains stop, all at her great inconvenience. “What that means for me,” she concluded, “is that to catch the G, I need to take the R or V two stops to Queens Plaza, then transfer to the E one stop to Court Square.”

For the record, Peter Cafiero, the chief of operations planning for New York City Transit, said, “My hope is to dispel any notion that the G line is the stepchild of the subway system, or that we are secretly trying to get rid of it.”

He said the transit agency was committed to improving the G line by extending it in Brooklyn to Church Avenue, which should increase the number of opportunities for passengers to transfer to other lines.

Still, Mr. Cafiero said, the agency did not have the money to do all the things it wanted. For example, it wants the line to run to Court Square “at all times” and decrease overall wait time.

But, Mr. Cafiero said, “the current fiscal climate has not allowed us to proceed with this enhancement at this time.”

Councilwoman Letitia James replied, “I feel your pain, but we have to have another plan.”

[editor's note: Queens Civic Congress President Corey Bearak emailed the reported to correct the reference to QCC as only a business group.]