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MTA New York City Transit Bus Hackathon Yields Three Winners

Three Ideas Chosen Among 15 Proposals in Data-Driven Challenge to Improve Staten Island Transit Network

Winners were chosen from among the approximately 150 app developers, planners and transit fans who participated in MTA New York City Transit's first hackathon focused on transforming the Staten Island bus network last week. Judges awarded a total of \$2,000 in cash prizes to three ideas that either partially or wholly focused on streamlining express bus service between Staten Island and Manhattan.

Fifteen proposals were submitted during the one-day bus hackathon, which was a partnership between the MTA, TransitCenter and New York University's Rudin Center for Transportation. For the March 5 challenge, NYC Transit released express and local bus ridership and performance data sets that were paired with Staten Island population data, historical traffic data, and customer feedback from NYC Transit's recent Staten Island bus study. Developers were tasked with finding solutions that range from maximizing resources within the existing network to shorter commute times or wait times, all while being cost neutral.

The top prize, with a \$1,000 award, went to Sri Kanajan's "How to Optimize Express Bus Routes in Staten Island" presentation, which used census, ridership and route data to visualize delays on express bus routes. Using his data mapping, Kanajan found that most express bus customers alighted at a limited number of stops in centralized areas, and suggested reducing the number of stops in Manhattan to avoid circuitous routes where traffic was heaviest.

The best solution for express bus service, with a \$500 award, went to "Better Than The Subway," submitted by a team consisting of Colin Foley, Mariya Carey, Raymond Chia, Larry Gould and David McCreery. Their solution used route, population and ridership data to visualize express bus service that is concentrated along high-ridership routes and streamlined portions of routes to provide direct service to either lower Manhattan or Midtown.

A team of six developers was awarded the best solution for local bus service with "Buses in SI." Adam Davidson, Austin Krauza, Jenny Ye, Steve Bauman and Sunny Zhang took the \$500 cash prize for their idea to terminate all Staten Island express bus service in lower Manhattan and redistribute those resources to add peak-hour service on local routes within Staten Island. Using ridership and route data, the team proposed new Bus Rapid Transit service and shuttles to connect to ferry points that bring residents to key transfer points in Manhattan or across the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge to Brooklyn.

The judges for the hackathon were John Gaul, MTA NYCT Vice President for 21st century service delivery; Sarah Wyss, MTA NYCT senior director for bus service planning; Manasvi Menon, senior strategic consultant at Intersection; and Shin-pei Tsay, TransitCenter's deputy executive director. Technical support was provided by Google and CartoDB.

"The hackathon gave us an incredible opportunity to see and hear about ideas that come from residents and transit enthusiasts thinking outside the box," Wyss said. "We were impressed with the solutions that these developers presented, and extend our thanks to all of the participants who showed us their ideas and the hard work they put into them. We look forward to delving deeper into whether we can take some of these ideas off the screen and put them to work on the streets to improve Staten Island's transit network."

"We all need to embrace the concept of tapping into the expertise of those well versed in evolving technologies in hopes of affording us a better chance at finding solutions to the challenges of municipal government. I also appreciate the MTA's participation and willingness to commence the entire process of the Comprehensive Bus Study with such an open mind. I am hopeful this collective effort will yield positive results for Staten Island commuters," Staten Island Borough President James S. Oddo said.

Solutions from the hackathon will be presented to the public in the future for additional feedback. Photos from the hackathon and web links to the winners' presentations and other proposals are available on the Rudin Center's blog.