

# Express bus route to Manhattan gets reprieve

By Gerald McKinstry • [gmckinst@lohud.com](mailto:gmckinst@lohud.com) • April 30, 2010

County Executive Rob Astorino on Thursday announced a plan to temporarily save the county's BxM4C express bus to Manhattan that translates into higher fares, fewer buses and more than \$1 million in [savings](#).

The compromise means that commuters will pay \$8.50 for a one-way ride into the city, a \$3 increase, starting in September and that the service will no longer operate on weekends starting June 28.

"Many of the express route riders have asked us to find some way to save this route," Astorino said. "My proposal strikes the balance between our taxpayers and our riders."

The typical commuter will pay \$340 a month, which is up by \$120. The only remaining discounts will be for senior citizens and disabled people, though they will pay more, too — \$4.25 a ride, up from \$2.75.

As a result of the changes, Westchester will save \$1.1 million this year and \$2.5 million next year, he said.

"It's a huge relief," said commuter Virginia Sheahan, a Yonkers resident who was one of the leaders in the effort to save the bus service. "I can get to work. That's what I need to do."

Though Sheahan had some concerns with what "peak hours" meant and how weekend riders would be affected, she said this showed that government was responsive.

"Hopefully this will cover the core of the ridership for the 4C and maybe if the ride proves to pay for itself, maybe we can get more service back," she said.

Home riders had said they would be willing to pay more for the service to help cover costs.

The compromise incorporated ideas from riders and county lawmakers, while eliminating the \$2.5 million taxpayer subsidy, Astorino said.

Since Westchester faces a \$166 million budget gap in 2011, the county executive said the county cannot continue to operate the route, so his administration is

working with Liberty Lines on a possible spinoff next year in which the bus operator would take control over fares and schedules.

There is no guarantee that the route will make it past Dec. 31, Astorino said, so he will continue negotiations with the MTA on finding an alternative, which could include extending city express buses from the Bronx to Manhattan to three Yonkers stops.

"Ultimately, much will depend on whether there are enough riders to keep the route viable," he said.

Astorino first proposed eliminating the route in March as part of \$16 million in short-term cuts to transportation, [social services](#), parks and staffing as a way to address a "staggering" fiscal crisis.

Riders, local leaders and some legislators quickly protested the cut, saying the service was vital to the region and [homeowners](#) along the route.

The service began in the early 1980s, when commuter train service to [New York City](#) was less reliable and more unpleasant, but that changed in 1983 when Metro-North took over the rail lines.

In recent years, bus ridership declined. The line currently serves about 800 people a day.

Chairman Ken Jenkins, D-Yonkers, who had been critical of the cut, said the bipartisan agreement was a suitable alternative and a "victory for Westchester commuters."

"I am confident that we have reached an outcome that will be extremely satisfactory to those who travel on the route," Jenkins said.

Legislators Gordon Burrows and Bernice Spreckman, Republicans from Yonkers, said they were gratified by the decision. They said the riders "were great allies" whose efforts made a strong case to salvage the line.

Greenburgh Supervisor Paul Feiner called it a "really positive" development that showed that Astorino listened to those affected and could reach agreements with other leaders.

"This highlights a willingness to listen to the people," Feiner said of Astorino.