

Understanding the New York City Bus Idling Regulations

Why it Matters to Your Travel Experience

At Trans-Bridge Lines, our commitment to providing a safe, comfortable, and reliable travel experience is at the core of everything we do.

We are also firmly dedicated to transparency and the sharing of information. This special edition newsletter is aimed to inform our passengers about New York City's bus idling regulations and a lawsuit by the American Bus Association against the City of New York regarding it.

Why We're Sharing This Information

We recognize that some passengers have experienced discomfort when boarding buses that are not yet fully cooled or heated. We understand how this can affect your travel experience, and we want to provide clear insight into why this occurs and what constraints we must operate within.

NYC Idling Law: What It Means

New York City enforces strict anti-idling laws aimed at reducing emissions and improving air quality. These regulations limit the amount of time a vehicle engine can run while parked. For motorcoach operators like Trans-Bridge Lines, this means:

- **Bus engines cannot run more than three minutes on streets or in lots.**
- **Bus engines cannot run at all within the Port Authority Bus Terminal even when boarding or unloading passengers. (This ruling conflicts with posted signage at the PABT, which states up to three minutes is allowed. See photo above.)**
- Compliance is mandatory and closely monitored.



Idling signage as posted at Trans-Bridge Lines Gate 4 at the Port Authority Bus Terminal (PABT).

Even when Trans-Bridge Lines buses have idled at the PABT for under three minutes, we have received tickets. We have also received tickets when our buses are permitted to idle due to temperatures under 40 degrees. We must then manage the summons by going to court to prove our case; a time-consuming and costly process.

According to the American Bus Association, the motorcoach industry strongly supports environmental stewardship and recognizes the importance of reducing unnecessary emissions. However, they have also noted that rigid idling restrictions can present operational challenges — particularly in high-density transit hubs where passenger comfort and safety must be balanced with regulatory compliance.

How This Affects Your Trip

Because the air conditioning and heating systems on motorcoaches require the engine to be running,

we are often unable to begin cooling or warming the bus until just prior to departure. This can result in a brief period where the on board temperature may not yet be at an optimal level when passengers first board.

Our Position

Trans-Bridge Lines fully supports efforts to reduce emissions and promote cleaner air. At the same time, we advocate for practical, balanced approaches that consider the realities of passenger transportation. As highlighted by the American Bus Association, the motorcoach industry is one of the most environmentally efficient forms of travel, moving large numbers of passengers with a smaller environmental footprint per person compared to single-occupancy vehicles, rail, and air travel.

Since 2007, the engines of motorcoach buses have clean diesel engines, which utilize advanced diesel technology and sophisticated emission control systems to minimize environmental impact. Improvements were also made in 2010, 2012, and in the newest 2027 engines, as advances are continuously made.

We continue to monitor developments in regulations and industry guidance, and we actively participate in conversations that seek to balance sustainability with passenger comfort.

At your convenience, we invite you to read this newsletter of shared information to gain a better understanding of the issue and the struggles we face, along with our industry partners.

Thank you for your consideration. Any comments or concerns may be sent to webmaster@transbridgelines.com.



What IS the Anti-Idling Law?

Anti-idling laws are state or local regulations restricting how long a vehicle engine can run while parked to reduce air pollution, noise, and fuel waste.

According to portal.311.nyc.gov (The Official Website of the City of New York):



New York City Anti-Idling Law

In New York City, vehicle idling is illegal if it lasts more than 3 minutes or more than 1 minute when adjacent to a school. This includes buses and delivery trucks.

There are a few exceptions:

- When the temperature is less than 40 degrees F (for vehicles having a seating capacity of 15 or more passengers, such as a bus)
- When the engine is powering a loading, unloading, or processing device
- When the vehicle is a legally authorized emergency vehicle, such as an ambulance.

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) enforces the idling law. **Fines range from \$350 to \$2,000.**

Motivating Complaint Reporting

The sharp increase in vehicle idling complaints in NYC is largely fueled by the city's financial incentive program. Through the NYC Department of Environmental Protection's Citizens Air Complaint Program, residents can earn 25% of the fine issued to commercial vehicles caught idling beyond the legal limit. **Because violations can carry penalties ranging from several hundred to \$2,000, and plans are in place to potentially raise fines to as high as \$6,000, successful complaints can generate significant payouts for participants.**

This reward system has led to the rise of highly active reporters — sometimes referred to as "Idling Warriors", who regularly document violations and, in some cases, have earned substantial sums through the program.



Growing Challenges for Private Bus Operators

Private bus carriers operating in NYC are facing mounting pressure as enforcement of anti-idling regulations intensifies. Private citizens are empowered to report idling commercial vehicles by recording video and submitting complaints to the Department of Environmental Protection.

The financial consequences for carriers can be significant. Current penalties range from \$350 to \$2,000 per violation. **Since 2020, more than 4,000 summonses** have reportedly



Photo by Jake D. Oster

been issued to private bus operators throughout the city.

For carriers such as Trans-Bridge Lines, the impact has been substantial, with the company reportedly incurring thousands of dollars in targeted idling-related penalties. In addition to direct fines, companies must also absorb legal costs, admin-

istrative burdens, and operational disruptions associated with responding to complaints and managing compliance.

Industry groups argue that the current rules disproportionately affect private motorcoach operators while exempting public transit fleets operating under similar conditions. As a

result, the American Bus Association (ABA) has filed legal action against New York City challenging the enforcement structure.

To reduce risk, carriers are implementing stricter operational policies. Recommended best practices include reinforcing driver training regarding the three-minute idling limit and encouraging drivers to shut engines down whenever parked at terminals.

As enforcement continues to expand, private bus operators remain concerned about balancing environmental compliance with the operational realities of safely transporting passengers in one of the nation's busiest urban environments.

Op-Ed | Lots of anti-idling 'mony mony' for NYC: Maybe it is time to shut-off the Billy Idol Citizen Complaint Engine?

Source: AMNY.com

In 2020, rock star Billy Idol and then-Mayor de Blasio launched the \$1 million "Billy Never Idles" campaign to promote the Citizen's Air Complaint Program (CACP), which lets New Yorkers submit videos of commercial vehicles violating the City's anti-idling laws. The City uses the footage to issue fines between \$350 to \$2,000, and participants – known as "Idling Warriors" – collect 25% of each ticket the City wins.

That \$1 million campaign has paid off, as the number of summonses from Idling Warriors has increased ten-fold. The top Idling Warriors have racked up hundreds of thousands of dollars in bounties, and the City now collects tens of millions annually through the program.

The New York City Council enacted Local Law No. 49 in 1971, limiting vehicle idling to 3 minutes. Buses were banned from idling at terminal points along an established route when the temperature was above 40°F. Later amendments cut the idling limit to 1 minute near certain schools and parks and launched the CACP bounty program.

Policymakers have not thoroughly considered the legality or wisdom of totally outsourcing enforcement to financially-motivated private citizens. In 2023, 99.7% of anti-idling summonses came from the CACP. Similar delegations of enforcement power to private citizens have been scrutinized by the courts because a central premise of the Constitution is the maintenance of structural checks



Matt Daus, founder and chair of the Windels Marx Transportation Practice Group, authored an op-ed in amNY Law examining the explosive growth of NYC's idling bounty program and its distorted enforcement priorities.

against the arbitrary exercise of executive power. The City's air inspectors are public employees who meet civil-service qualifications and follow agency training, supervision, and internal discipline rules; in other words, they are accountable to the public. The Idling Warriors, meanwhile, watch a short instructional video as training, check a box to affirm that they are telling the truth, and submit a three-minute clip for cash rewards.

American Bus Association Sues NYC Over Discriminatory Idling Enforcement

Source: Buses.com

The American Bus Association (ABA), the leading voice in North America's charter bus, motorcoach, group travel and tourism industries, joined by leading interstate motorcoach operators, has filed a federal lawsuit against NYC and its Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), seeking to halt what it calls an unfair, discriminatory, and costly enforcement regime under the City's idling law, one that is driving up costs, disrupting interstate commerce, and threatening a vital sector of the region's economy.

The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, challenges the City's use of its Citizens Air Complaint (CAC) program. The ABA asserts that the program disproportionately targets private motorcoach companies, while exempting publicly owned fleets, including buses operated by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and New York City Transit, from enforcement under the same law.

In New York alone, the motorcoach industry generates more than \$12.7 billion in economic impact, supports 59,200 jobs, and drives \$5.9 billion in visitor spending annually.



The ABA contends that New York City's idling enforcement regime is unlawful, arguing that it:

- Violates constitutional protections by treating similarly situated transportation operators differently;
- Unlawfully burdens interstate commerce by increasing the cost and risk of entering and operating in New York City; and
- Conflicts with federal safety regulations that often require buses to idle to maintain critical systems such as air brakes, passenger safety equipment, cabin temperatures for passengers, wheelchair accessibility equipment, and emissions-control technology.

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