

# Bright blue beacons on express bus lines may violate state law

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Flashing blue lights on new express buses in the Bronx and Manhattan may catch riders' attention - but they also could be illegal.

State law prohibits the use of blue lights on motor vehicles except those used by first responders like police and volunteer firefighters. Those lights are intended to alert drivers that there's an emergency and they should get out of the way.

M15 Select Bus Service vehicles - launched on the East Side by the MTA and the city Transportation Department earlier this month - have flashing blue lights above the windshields heralding their arrival and promoting the new service between East Harlem and South Ferry.

Blue lights also adorn Select Bx12 buses that have been running on a smaller route in the Bronx since 2008.

A state Department of Motor Vehicles spokesman declined to say if the NYC Transit buses violate the law but conceded the law restricts use of blue lights to first responders.

The blue-light restrictions in the state's vehicle and traffic law are "in place for safety reasons, to distinguish various first-responder vehicles," DMV spokesman Nick Cantiello said.

"If someone issued a ticket, it would be up to a judge to make a decision," he said.

Computer consultant Eugene Falik said he called a police precinct to complain about the bus lights after they first appeared on the Bx12 route more than two years ago and also lodged a complaint on the city's 311 hotline. He received no satisfaction, he said.

"One of the concepts behind traffic engineering is you shouldn't have to stop and read the rules," Falik said. "The reason for standardizing these things is so driver reaction becomes subconscious. When you take that way, overall, it endangers public safety."

A transit source said the decision to install colored bus lights was made by the prior NYC Transit administration. Agency spokesman Charles Seaton dismissed any safety concerns.

"The blue lights are for the most visibility for our customers," Seaton said. "They have helped SBS ridership grow in the Bronx and will do so in Manhattan. I doubt whether there's anyone out there who will mistake a 60-foot bus for a volunteer firefighter's vehicle."

Edward Mamet, a retired captain in the NYPD's Highway Unit, agreed, saying he wasn't even aware of the blue-light rule.

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