

I asked AI:

Will Mamdani be able to get the MTA Buses Free

Zohran Mamdani, who was inaugurated as Mayor of New York City on January 1, 2026, has made "fast and free" buses a central pillar of his administration's platform. However, he faces significant hurdles to immediate implementation.

Current Status of MTA Bus Fares (2026)

**Fare Increases:** Despite Mamdani's goal, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is proceeding with a scheduled fare hike on January 4, 2026.

Base Fare: Increasing from \$2.90 to \$3.00.

Reduced Fare: Increasing from \$1.45 to \$1.50.

**Payment Changes:** MetroCard sales ended on December 31, 2025; the system is transitioning fully to OMNY (tap-and-go).

Challenges to "Free" Buses

**Jurisdiction:** The MTA is a state-controlled agency, not a city-controlled one. Mamdani lacks direct authority to unilaterally set or eliminate fares.

**Funding Gap:** The MTA estimates that making all city buses free would cost approximately \$750 million to \$800 million annually. Mamdani has proposed funding this by:

Increasing the corporate tax rate to 11.5%.

Implementing a 2% tax on individuals earning more than \$1 million.

Using revenue from unpaid fines, such as those for landlord code violations.

**State Cooperation:** Any tax increases or major MTA policy changes require approval from Governor Kathy Hochul and the State Legislature. Governor Hochul has expressed skepticism, preferring to focus on expanding discounts for low-income riders rather than universal free service.

Current Initiatives & Potential Compromises

**Expanded "Fair Fares":** Instead of universal free buses, there is a push to expand the city-funded Fair Fares program, which currently provides half-price rides to low-income residents.

**Infrastructure:** Mamdani has appointed Mike Flynn as Department of Transportation (DOT) commissioner to focus on city-controlled improvements, such as building more bus-only lanes to fulfill the "fast" portion of his campaign promise.

**Fare Capping:** The MTA has made the OMNY 7-day fare cap permanent; riders who pay for 12 rides in a week receive all subsequent rides for free during that period.