



A Memorandum for District 4
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Crumbling MTA Infrastructure and Inaccessibility

Any subway user can attest to the continuing decline in the quality of transportation service in New York City. The New York City Comptroller's office recently found that when facing subway delays, which have increased 267 percent from just five years ago, 50 percent of riders have been forced to take a taxi or other for-hire vehicle to work, 42 percent have walked to work, 40 percent took the bus, 10 percent drove and six percent biked.¹

The situation is even worse for people who require stair-free access to the subway. New York has the least accessible major subway system in the country. Nearly 30 years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, only 23 percent of the city's subway stations have elevators²—and more often than not, many are out of service, leaving even fewer stations accessible to those with mobility impairments.

While the Metropolitan Transit Authority recently embarked on a program to rehabilitate stations, adding stair-free access to currently inaccessible stations was not part of the plan. At the current pace of installing new elevators, New York City will not reach 100 percent accessibility until 2100. Meanwhile, both Chicago and Boston with similarly aging train³ systems

¹Gelinas, Nicole. The MTA's Escalating Cost Crisis: Issue Brief July 2017 Answers to Questions About the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Finances. Rep. Manhattan Institute, July 2017. Web. (p. 4) <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/IB-NG-0717.pdf#page4>

²"Access Denied." Access Denied. Transit Center, 20 June 2017. Web. <http://transitcenter.org/publications/access-denied/>

³ Chicago Transit Authority, Infrastructure Accessibility Task Force Report, Fall 2012, http://www.transitchicago.com/riding_cta/accessibilitytf.aspx

are on track to reach 100 percent accessibility in the next 20 years.⁴ We cannot continue to ignore the more than 10 percent of the population who have disabilities and the 13 percent who are older than 65 and might find the stairs prohibiting. There is currently a lack of strong leadership and policy when it comes to providing access to all New Yorkers.

As advocacy group Transit Center recommends, the MTA should pick up the pace and take a more adaptable approach to accessibility and build accessibility into the 2020-2024 capital program. If the MTA committed to adding 15 newly accessible stations a year, New York would be on track to reach 100 percent accessibility in 25 years. One easy step toward meeting this goal is prioritizing work at stations that already have elevators but still aren't completely accessible (e.g. by adding ramps at short staircases), such as at the 181st Street, 191st Street, 28th Street, and Clark Street stations.⁵

Second, the MTA should follow the lead of Boston and Chicago and create offices with authority and resources that serve as clearinghouses for accessibility initiatives and maintenance. This would allow accessibility to become a priority, with clear targets and standards. As the Transit Center says, "a centralized accessibility office is necessary to monitor elevator performance, negotiate vendor contracts, determine station priority for accessibility, and ensure capital improvements are implemented."⁶ This office could also spearhead the overhaul of maintenance and management practices, which is crucial to keeping stations accessible, but also necessary to keep an aging system out of general crisis mode.

Finally, the MTA should take advantage of long-term shutdowns of lines or stations to make more stations accessible. Last year, the governor announced that 30 stations would be

⁴ Chicago Transit Authority, "All Stations Accessibility Program," <http://www.transitchicago.com/accessibility/asap.aspx>.

⁵ "Access Denied." Access Denied. Transit Center, 20 June 2017. Web. <http://transitcenter.org/publications/access-denied/>

⁶ "Access Denied." Access Denied. Transit Center, 20 June 2017. Web. <http://transitcenter.org/publications/access-denied/>

closed for up to 12 months for revamping, yet the proposed New York City Transit Subway capital program for 2015-2019 includes ADA-compliant elevators for only 19 stations overall.⁷ This is a huge missed opportunity to upgrade our transportation system to serve all New Yorkers.

As the Manhattan Institute has pointed out, the Governor and other policy makers have blamed a lack of funding for the current state of the MTA, despite the fact that the MTA is taking in a record amount of revenue that has more than kept pace with inflation and with the costs associated with ridership growth. In turn, City Council Members and the Mayor regularly blame the Governor and state-elected officials. Instead, we should show real leadership and hold the MTA accountable for the \$10.1 billion we provide as what Comptroller Scott Stringer has called an “invisible fare,” including \$612 million from the City budget.⁸ In addition to holding regular oversight hearings to closely examine areas where the MTA has fallen short, the Mayor and City Council should demand that more funds in the MTA capital plan be put toward infrastructure maintenance and ADA compliance.

⁷“8th Proposal of Governor Cuomo’s 2016 Agenda: Bring the MTA into the 21st Century to Dramatically Improve the Travel Experience for Millions of New Yorkers and Visitors.”*NYC*. N.p., 11 Jan. 2016. Web. <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/8th-proposal-governor-cuomo-s-2016-agenda-bring-mta-21st-century-dramatically-improve-travel>

⁸Scott, Stringer M. *The “Invisible Fare”: Revealing NYC’s Full Contribution to the MTA*. Rep. Office of the Comptroller, n.d. Web. http://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/MTA_Report_Invisible_Fare.pdf