

HIT OR MISS: A SURVEY OF NEW YORK CITY SUBWAY STATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council wants to acknowledge the impressive progress that has been made in stations over the past two decades, primarily due to the extensive rehabilitation program that began in 1981 with the first Capital Program and continues to this day.

Ten years have passed since the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC)¹ last conducted a subway station conditions survey (1994). This survey grew out of a continuing desire among members of the Council for an evaluation of the transit environment from the passenger's perspective. In 1983, at the urging of the Council, MTA New York City Transit began conducting a quarterly Passenger Environment Survey (PES). The original PES evaluated buses and subway cars; stations were added at the end of 1992. In mid-2003, budgetary considerations reduced the frequency of the PES to a semi-annual survey.

While it is doubtful that bus and subway customers would rate NYC Transit facilities as highly as NYC Transit does, it is clear that Transit's critical eye has been sharpened when evaluating itself. When the Council's stations survey was first undertaken in 1994, Transit PES scores, as reported, were too good to be true. Nearly half of the 27 indicators (49%) scored 98, 99 or 100%. In the most recent PES (fourth quarter 2003), only 4 (20%) indicators scored 98%.

Both the Council survey and the PES seek to evaluate the transit environment from the passenger's perspective rather than simply from an operational viewpoint. However, the Council survey both serves as an independent confirmation of PES results and incorporates rating definitions and criteria not included in the PES. Where the indicators assessed by the Council survey and the PES are the same, the results should be similar, but this is not the case. The PES examines all NYC Transit subway stations and is conducted by a dedicated team of NYC Transit employees. The Council survey covers a sample of fifty subway stations in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens and is conducted by NYCTRC members and staff.

Among the graded indicators station ceilings and walls were in the worst shape and have continued to decline since 1994 when 52% of stations had acceptable walls and ceilings. The current survey found 32% of stations failing for cleanliness and condition, and another 44% and 42% respectively, receiving only a grade of C. Water damaged ceilings were a serious problem with 22% failing, and 42% receiving a grade of C. The cleanliness and condition of floors was

¹ The NYCTRC will be referred to as "the Council" from this point forward.

also a problem at 50% of stations, while litter was a problem at 42% of stations. Passenger Information Centers also scored especially poorly with none containing all the required information.

Stations were ranked from worst to best based on calculated scores with 100% being the best a station could receive. Of the five worst stations, four are located in the Bronx, and three are on the B/D lines. The five worst stations are Mosholu Parkway on the 4 line (59%), 174-175th Streets on the B/D lines (60%), Kingsbridge Road on the B/D lines (60%), Atlantic Avenue on the L line (61%) and 205 Street – Norwood on the D line (63%). The five best stations are scattered throughout the boroughs and are 21st Street - Queensbridge in Queens on the F line (90%), Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn on the 2/3 lines (90%), Intervale Avenue in the Bronx on the 2,5 lines (86%), Park Place in Brooklyn on the S line (86%) and 81st Street- Museum of Natural History in Manhattan on the B/C lines (85%). A full listing of station scores and ranking can be found in Appendix E.

Highlights

- Improvements were made in the number of stations with telephones since 1994. At that time the council found that 32% of stations did not have telephones in any of the station areas that were evaluated. The current survey found only one station without a telephone; however, improvements still need to be made, since 11% of telephones were not working.
- In 1994 the Council also found no correct and legible system maps. Although the indicator has improved, 38% of stations surveyed still did not have a current system map.
- In 1994 the Council found working booth microphones at 64% of stations. In contrast, the 2004 Council survey found only 2% of microphones in station service booths not operating properly.
- In 1994 entrance stairs and handrails were in good repair at 80% of stations surveyed. Ten years later, entrance stairs continue to be in good repair at 82% of stations, while platform stairs and handrails are in worse condition with only 66% in good repair at stations with platform stairs.
- Exposed or hanging wires were found in 36% of the stations surveyed in 1994; the problem has now grown to 54%. The council recommended that this important indicator be added to the PES, yet it still has not been included.
- Similar to 1994 it appears that many of these problems arise from a lack of supervision of station areas. For many indicators, control areas, which are

under the surveillance of the token booth clerks, scored higher than platforms and entrances, which have relatively little supervision. This is an issue the Council will continue to monitor given the removal of many station agents from station booths.

- In 1994 the Council survey found that of the 42 surveyed stations that had PIC's, 76% were correct and legible. The current survey found no stations with complete and correct PIC's.

Other indicators received lower scores in the NYCTRC Station Survey than they did in the PES:

Indicator	1994 NYC Transit Passenger Environment Survey Rating	2004 NYC Transit Passenger Environment Survey Rating	2004 NYCTRC % with Acceptable Conditions
Stations with No Excessive Graffiti	96%	100%	72%
Stations with No Excessive Litter	97%	68%-88%	58%
Stations with Acceptably Clean Floors	96%	58%	50%
Token Clerks Displaying Customer Responsiveness	100%	Removed From PES	93%

The results of the Council's survey indicate that while NYC Transit's PES methodology has improved significantly since the Council's 1994 report, it continues to fall short of its goal of evaluating the transit environment from the customer's perspective. Two particular improvements to the PES were the inclusion of two inspections for litter, and the modification of floor and seat indicators. In the current PES, one inspection is performed before the AM peak to capture the condition of the stations after the nightly cleaning and the other inspection is conducted after the AM peak. Another improvement was the broadening of the criteria for the cleanliness of seats and floors to include permanent stains. The Council is disappointed that the PES no longer evaluates station lighting conditions.

The PES is not achieving its full potential for three reasons:

- 1. The PES weighted rating system masks serious problem areas by averaging good scores with bad scores.**
- 2. The PES does not include a number of indicators that have an impact on passenger satisfaction.**
 - Cleanliness/Appearance of Ceilings
 - Cleanliness/Appearance of Walls
 - Water Leakage on Walls
 - Water Leakage on Ceilings

- Water/Puddles/Slippery Stairs/Floors
- Lighting
- Exposed Wires
- Structural Condition of Stairs and Handrails
- Cleanliness/Appearance of Stairs and Handrails
- Service Notices (current, placement, accurate)
- Public Telephones with #3333 MTA Service Information Stickers
- Operational MVMs, EVMs and Card Readers
- Station Agents Who Are Customer Responsive

3. NYC Transit Does Not Use the PES as a management tool.

In its current format the PES is not useful for tracking the condition of stations over time or identifying problem areas. The NYC Transit PES should include a ranking of station performance, a summary of station performance over time, and a systemwide analysis of performance by indicator over time. With these tools, the PES can be used as a measurement standard to which the NYC Transit President should hold the Division of Station Operations accountable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The NYC Transit PES should be used as a tool to set and achieve goals.

The strength of the PES is in its ability to be used as a measurement standard to which the Division of Station Operations should be held accountable. This accountability must come from the NYC Transit President's office. The PES needs to have a station tracking and ranking system to be effective. The information can then be used to determine when a station's condition warrants acceleration of its renovation timetable, to rectify an imminent danger and to identify stations where maintenance is not up to NYC Transit standards.

Change Grading System to Better Reflect Customer Perception.

To clearly identify problem areas averages should not be used. Averages allow acceptable areas to compensate for failing areas, thus masking problems. Station areas should be evaluated based on the lowest grade received, as this would better reflect the public's perception of station conditions.

Improve the Usefulness of Station Data.

The PES should add three new data formats to its presentation:

- Station Tracking: The grades for each station should be tracked from one PES to the next.
- Station Ranking: Each station should be ranked according to the number of failures.
- Indicator Ranking: Each indicator should be ranked according to its failure rate to identify systemic problems.

Conduct a Communication Issues Survey Once a Year.

The Council recommends a separate PES be conducted each year regarding communication issues in the stations. This would include: ensuring service notices are posted, accurate, and timely, ensuring maps are current and telephones and emergency buttons are operational.

Separate the Cleanliness of the Floor and Seat Indicator.

The floor and seat indicators should be separated to give better clarity for follow up.

Add Important Indicators to the PES:

- Cleanliness/Condition of Ceilings
- Cleanliness /Condition of Walls
- Water Leakage on Walls
- Water Leakage on Ceilings
- Water/Puddles/Slippery Stairs/Floors
- Lighting
- Exposed Wires
- Structural Condition of Stairs and Handrails
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