

Best Foot Forward: Training Front Line Personnel to Provide Quality Customer Service

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Effective communication and excellent customer service are paramount to running a successful transportation system. In fact, a recent report by the Public Agenda found that forty-six percent of people interviewed had walked out of a business in the past year due to bad customer service.¹ Bad customer service results in lost business. This can translate into lost ridership in the transportation industry.

Front line employees, such as ticket clerks/station service agents, travel information representatives, conductors and bus operators, provide a service, which necessitates customer communication and interaction yet employees don't always remember that this is an important aspect of their role. Front line employees, knowingly or unknowingly, function as transportation agency "ambassadors" and strongly influence riders' perception and experience. Public perception about transportation service plays a key role in transportation use.

Effective communication and customer sensitivity require special employee skills and attitudes. Ensuring that employees are adequately prepared to fulfill their responsibilities is a recurrent process that begins during the hiring phase and continues through the initial training, monitoring and evaluation by management as well as in the ongoing provision of refresher training. Achieving excellent transportation customer service also requires effective communication among the employees themselves, which is grounded in the overall management philosophy, the handling of day-to-day operations and the use of communication technology.

The Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC)² has long expressed the need for consistent, high quality customer service. The PCAC's 1984 report on this topic, ***Passenger Relations Training Programs, Disciplinary Procedures and Incentive Programs: A Comparison of MTA Affiliates to Public Transit Agencies Around the United States***, recommended that the MTA implement a number of measures to improve training, disciplinary and reward programs for front line employees. Recommendations for customer service training included the need for knowledgeable and trained instructors, continued managerial and supervisory staff support and special skills workshops.

¹ Public Agenda (2002) ***Aggravating Circumstances: A Status Report on Rudeness in America***.

² The PCAC is the coordinating body and funding mechanism for the three councils created by the New York State Legislature in 1981: the Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council (LIRRCC); the Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC); and the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC). The Councils were created to give users of MTA public transportation a say in the formulation and implementation of MTA policy and to hold the MTA Board and management accountable to riders.

Other suggestions included improving supervisor skills and procedures for handling disciplinary issues, standardizing disciplinary procedures among the operating agencies, and implementing incentive programs to improve employee morale and working conditions.

Twenty years later, the PCAC felt it was time to reexamine the practices used by the MTA operating agencies to ensure that they provide front line employees with the necessary customer service skills and information to address customer needs. This report describes, compares and evaluates the policies and practices of the MTA agencies in 2003 specifically with regard to: front line employee hiring criteria, customer service training, employee communication, performance evaluation tools, performance incentive programs and disciplinary procedures and employee refresher training. The report also examines innovative programs offered by national transportation organizations and other U.S. transportation agencies that relate to obtaining and maintaining high quality front line staff.

Finally, the report makes recommendations to the MTA to improve the existing level, acquisition and retention of employee customer service skills for aspects of hiring, training, accessing and providing customer service information, evaluating job performance and refresher training. Agency specific recommendations for Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Railroad, New York City Transit (subway and bus) and Long Island Bus are also proposed.

Some of the recommendations may require union approval.

FINDINGS

The MTA agencies have made impressive strides in the area of training since the report's 1984 release. Training now actively seeks to address customer service. Also, the importance of recognizing and dealing with the impacts of stress have been incorporated into many of the agencies' front line customer training programs.

- **Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA):** As the umbrella agency, the MTA has the ability to promote and support efforts to improve customer service practices among its operating agencies. The MTA needs to take a more active role in initiating and coordinating efforts to share effective and exemplary customer service practices and resources among the operating agencies.
- **Long Island Rail Road (LIRR):** Long Island Rail Road excels in its pre-hire conductor training and deserves recognition for the development of a multi-departmental customer service Roundtable refresher training program. The LIRR is also the only MTA operating agency to hold quarterly conferences for Transportation Department managers to discuss and share front line

management challenges and to increase employee and departmental communication.

Customer service related improvements are needed to better assess applicant customer service aptitude and skills prior to hiring, to provide up to the minute train service information to ticket clerks and station agents and to emphasize customer service and management skills for supervisors at the Travel Information Center. The need for regular reinforcement of knowledge of the LIRR transportation system for travel information representatives was also identified.

- **Metro-North Railroad (MNR):** All applicants for positions at MNR must take the Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) test to assess customer service skills and aptitude. MNR and NYC Transit Department of Buses are the only agencies that specifically assess customer service skills as a factor in determining applicant employment aptitude. Metro-North's Customer Information Center (CIC) and its communication network to all stations are outstanding and should serve as a model for all of the MTA agencies.

MNR conductor training, particularly relative to on board announcements and emergency training, were found to need improvement.

- **New York City Transit (NYCT)**
Department of Subways: New hires at the Transit Information Center (TIC) are required to learn the complexity of the NYC Transit bus and subway systems prior to learning the computer based OTIS system. The TIC training also incorporates tests to reinforce material retention and prepare transit customer service specialists with the knowledge to respond to specific customer needs.

Areas requiring customer service improvement at the Department of Subways are: accessing applicant customer service skills prior to hiring; more formalized customer service training for station agents and more formalized on-the-job customer service and announcement training for conductors. Station agents and transit customer service specialists need improved access to and provision of customer information. More regular, formalized post probationary period job performance evaluations and better intra-and inter-departmental communication about customer service issues and incentives for better customer service performance were also identified.

Department of Buses: NYC Transit's Department of Buses' participation in the development of the Bus Operator Selection System (BOSS) as part of the American Public Transit Association (APTA) has resulted in its adoption of hiring practices that have substantially reduced bus accidents and led to a better informed and qualified core of bus operators. The development of the BOSS system has been highly beneficial to the bus industry.

Improvement is needed in evaluating the job performance of bus operators at the Department of Buses.

- **Long Island Bus:** LI Bus' strong connection with the ADA community has helped inform how to best meet the special needs of this community.

Areas in need of improvement at LI Bus include: better assessment of applicant customer service skills and aptitude prior to employment; better ongoing customer service job performance evaluations; a reward system to recognize good customer service; and the regular provision of refresher training. The agency also needs to fast track plans to integrate the TRIPS123 system into its operations and telephone information center to augment the provision of customer information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Hiring Practices

- **Increase transportation-related curriculum at educational institutions.** The MTA should increase relationships with high schools, community colleges and universities to create interest in transportation industry careers. They should promote more courses in transportation related skills and subjects to improve qualifications of transportation industry job applicants and serve as a job recruitment source for the MTA operating agencies.
- **Standardize titles and job responsibilities for similar front line positions.** The MTA should standardize the titles of front line positions, hiring qualifications, selection process and job descriptions for comparable jobs at its operating agencies, such as ticket clerk, ticket seller and station agent, where possible. This will help to ensure a more seamless transportation system experience for customers.
- **Review and consider adapting LIRR pre-hire conductor training program.** The benefits of LIRR's pre-hire assistant conductor training include cost savings, highly motivated employees, a common skill set and knowledge of the LIRR prior to being hired. The other MTA agencies should examine this program to determine its usefulness and possible adoption.

Training Practices

- **Incorporate customer service into all task training.** At Continental Airlines technical and non-technical courses are taught from a customer service approach. This is accomplished by explaining the importance of the task at hand and how it will impact the customer if done incorrectly.
- **Require a comprehensive customer service training program for all MTA operating agency front line personnel.** The MTA should oversee and support the customer service aspect of all front line employee training programs to ensure consistency of training and standards among the operating agencies. The MTA should review the Canadian Urban Transportation Association's Transit Ambassador program used at the Chicago Transit Authority as a guide to developing an MTA specific front line employee customer service training program.
- **Provide agency specific emergency procedure customer service training for all front line personnel.** The MTA agencies should develop and provide special emergency customer service training as part of their new hire training of front line personnel. Knowing how to handle, direct and attend to customers in emergency situations is critical to maintaining calm behavior and ensuring passenger safety.
- **Promote intra-and interdepartmental "Team Building" training.** The MTA operating agencies should create team building training programs to better facilitate daily communication and problem solving abilities among managers and front line employees within and among departments. The agencies should examine the "Leading a Winning Culture" training program offered at Continental Airlines to use as a guide in developing a program specific to each agency's needs.
- **Promote e-Learning training opportunities.** The MTA and its agencies should develop on-line *e-Learning* programs similar to those used at Continental Airlines to provide employees with a basic knowledge of the MTA's transportation network and to facilitate more informed front line employees. *E-Learning* is convenient for employees.

The courses should be required for all front line employees beginning with each agency's transportation routes and services. The programs should also include tests that must be passed as a prerequisite to qualify from probationary status as well as for promotions within each operating agency.

New telephone information representatives for example, as is done at NYC Transit, should learn the complexity of their agency's transportation system prior to gaining computer access to the information. Greater knowledge of

the agency's system and how it functions will assist telephone information representatives in providing more informed choices for customers.

- **Adapt and expand MNR's conductor training Tone Game for use in all agency front line position customer service training.** The MTA agencies should adapt the use of MNR's Tone Game training to help front line employees learn to hear the differences in voice tone that affect how information is conveyed by employees and perceived by customers. MNR should expand their use of this training for other front line employees.
- **Share innovative training practices and agency efforts to measure training efficiencies and effectiveness.** The MTA should develop pre- and post training tests to measure agency training effectiveness. The MTA should also track the progress within each agency for developing such tools and maintain best practices in the industry that can be adapted for use throughout the MTA.

The results of these evaluations will inform trainers on the participants' grasp of the material and help assess whether they have the required skills and knowledge to perform the job well. Participants who do not attain a certain score should be required to take additional training.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

- **Prioritize agency improvements in communication technology for front line employees and customers.** The MTA should make short and long term improvements to communication technologies for front line employees and customers a priority for all the operating agencies. The MTA should direct the operating agencies to develop plans to improve communication technology among conductors, central transportation operations, telephone information agents, ticket sellers and at stations. The agencies should detail ways the technology will improve communication and develop a schedule for system wide implementation.
- **Require all station based personnel at the operating agencies to have text messaging pagers as backup communication systems.** The MTA should require all agencies to install text-messaging pagers to all railroad ticket agent offices, buses and, if possible, NYC Transit station service booths to ensure backup communication options during emergencies.
- **Promote web-based access to service change information.** The MTA should encourage and oversee the use of web-based programs to inform front line staff at all the operating agencies about service changes and the reasons for the changes. More knowledgeable front line staff will convey more accurate and credible information to the public.

- **Develop “Go Teams” to facilitate communication to customers in emergencies.** In an emergency, personnel are focused on transportation problem solving. The MTA should assemble agency “Go Teams” whose principal focus is communicating with the public and providing available options to customers. This recommendation was made recently by New Jersey Transit after experiencing a train derailment.
- **Departmental supervisors across MTA agencies should meet annually to share experiences and learn from one another.** Sharing information across agencies is done, but not as much as it should be. LIRR’s Roundtable refresher training and Transportation Department conferences bring inter-and intra-agency personnel together to discuss communication and transportation department issues. Across agency discussions also occur more informally among the MTA agency telephone travel information department managers. Discussions among the MTA operating agencies should take place more formally, on an annual basis, so as to stimulate problem solving abilities, generate new training ideas, share best practices and avoid “reinventing the wheel.”

Evaluating Performance

- **Coordinate use of standardized, formal performance evaluations.** The MTA should create an inter-agency work group to develop a formal written process to evaluate front line employees performance using MTA standardized guidelines, where possible. Require management of all the agencies to review department evaluations annually, if not already done, as a basis for identifying and refining front line employee training.

Refresher Training

- **Promote regular customer service refresher classes for front line staff.** The MTA should require all agencies to develop annual customer service refresher classes for front line staff devoted to areas, such as customer service announcements to improve announcement skills and to ensure that front line staff is comfortable and proficient at making them.

The agencies should also look to LIRR’s Roundtable training as a model for the type of refresher classes to be required. One key element of the Roundtable training is the bringing together of a diverse group of front line employees to increase their knowledge about how their positions relate to and influence aspects of the railroad. The curriculum also stresses the importance of communication, encourages inter-departmental discussion and problem solving.

- **Provide regular customer service emergency procedure refresher training.** The need for communication with the public is essential at all times

and imperative during service delays and emergencies. The MTA operating agencies should develop and require all front line employees to attend a customer service emergency procedure class on a regular basis.

Long Island Rail Road

Hiring Practices

- **Administer personality and customer service skill tests to applicants during the hiring process.** LIRR 's Department of Human Resources should require all front line job applicants to take a personality and customer service skills aptitude test, such as the Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) test used by MNR or the BOSS test administered by NYC Transit Department of Buses, to identify customer service skills.

Administering such a test, prior to the interview, can help screen out unqualified candidates, assess applicant skill levels and predict some measure of ability to perform the job.

- **Reevaluate the qualifications for Travel Information Center supervisors.** Current TIC supervisors require seniority to qualify as a supervisor. This requirement should be reexamined to focus on customer service and management skills or experience. The LIRR should also provide additional customer service skill and management training for employees interested in applying for a TIC supervisory position.

Training Practices

- **Examine the benefits of using *e-Learning* for portions of the Phase I of the assistant conductor training program.** The use of *e-Learning* could shorten the fifteen week phase I of the assistant conductor training to allow new applicants to learn portions of the course material online. A trainer could facilitate and coordinate the online learning segment, while applicants learn the material and take tests at their convenience. Shifting some of the learning online would allow LIRR to reduce staff time costs associated with the training. Phase II of the training should continue to be conducted in the classroom, but thought should be given to the use of *e-Learning* for homework assignments and tests.
- **Expand the Roundtable program to include personnel in other departments.** Expand the Roundtable program to include telephone information clerks, other front line and supervisory personnel by offering more frequent training. Develop a time frame to have all front line staff participate in the training on a regular basis. The training greatly enhances the staff's ability to interact with other front line personnel.

The Roundtable program should also be expanded to include a Train-the-Trainer program to institutionalize these practices within the agency and create new opportunities for promotion.

- **Provide Train-the-Trainer classes to TIC supervisors who train new TIC representatives.** All TIC supervisors who are involved in training new employees should be required to complete Train-the-Trainer classes. Knowledgeable supervisors can improve the training results.

Refresher Training

- **Provide annual review sessions with tests to sharpen TIC representative knowledge of the LIRR system.** Regular testing can improve and reinforce knowledge about the LIRR system. Proficient knowledge of the system will improve representatives' ability to provide customers with more informed travel choices.

Metro-North Railroad

Hiring Practices

- **Examine the benefits of conducting a portion of the new hire training during the pre-hire phase to reduce costs and increase motivation.** At LIRR a substantial portion of the conductor training program is provided prior to hiring candidates. This practice has significant cost benefits as well as motivational impacts and should be examined.

Training Practices

- **Enhance announcement training for conductors.** Enhance announcement training for conductors to improve the frequency and effectiveness of customer communication. Examine and consider adapting LIRR's Roundtable curriculum with regard to customer and intra agency communication. Customers need good communication at all times.

Evaluating Performance

- **Improve and increase monitoring of on-board announcements.** More emphasis should be placed on conductors communicating with customers. On-board announcements should be monitored monthly for frequency and quality. Even with the advent of automated announcements, the need for effective communication will remain.
- **Increase frequency of on-board and station inspections.** Station checkers at MNR provide a vital link to identifying customer service issues.

The system would benefit from increasing the frequency of the inspections particularly with regard to announcements. Station announcements should be tracked over time through a grading system to determine if conditions are improving.

New York City Transit Department of Subways

Hiring Practices

- **Administer personality and customer service skill tests to determine applicant eligibility during the hiring process for all front line positions.** NYC Transit's Department of Human Resources should require all front line job applicants to take personality and customer service skills aptitude tests, such as the HPI test used by MNR or the BOSS test administered by NYC Transit Department of Buses to determine applicant eligibility during the hiring process.

Administering a test to job applicants prior to the interview can help screen out unqualified candidates, assess applicant skill levels and predict some measure of ability.

Training Practices

- **Examine and adapt the Canadian Urban Transportation Association's (CUTA) Ambassador Program for all station agents.** The Chicago Transit Authority uses CUTA's Ambassador program for its comprehensive front line customer service training program and has found it highly effective.
- **Formalize the on-the-job training for platform conductors and passenger controllers.** Platform conductors and passenger controller's interaction with the public varies tremendously based on their knowledge and announcement ability. The current on-the-job training for these positions should address the quality, type and frequency of announcements. The training should be a defined length of time and include testing and an evaluation period. The tests should be graded according to the tasks and knowledge required and must be passed successfully.
- **Increase customer service training portion of conductor training.** Currently customer service training for NYC Transit conductors is only one day out of the 33 day training program. The one day training does not give conductors the opportunity to try out specific customer service skills in the field and to return to the classroom to discuss questions or concerns about their experience.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

- **Increase communication to station agents with text messaging devices.** Station service booths are equipped with telephone jacks and electricity; the requirements to operate simplified personal email devices at the 732 booths. The use of text messaging devices would provide an immediate improvement. Station agents could receive service diversion notices, emergency notices and service delay information in a timely manner.

Evaluating Performance

- **Adopt MNR's Customer Information Center's approach of early identification of new or infrequent users.** NYC Transit's Telephone Information Center should adopt MNR's policy of identifying callers that are new to the system. Responses to new riders may take more time and detail than for a regular user, but will reduce the barriers for new customers.
- **Institute written annual performance evaluations for station agents including a review of customer feedback.** Performance of NYC Transit's station agents is currently assessed through informal evaluations conducted by station supervisors. NYC Transit would benefit from formalizing the performance evaluation process and increasing the number of undercover spot checkers in the system to ascertain customer service quality.
- **Conduct regular station department meetings to review customer service issues.** Department managers, level one and level two station supervisors should hold monthly meetings with front line employees to document and deal with customer service issues. The issues should be forwarded to the appropriate departments for resolution. Progress should be reported on these issues at the monthly meeting. The meeting should be seen as a constructive, team based initiative to improve the department's or unit's overall customer service performance.
- **Recognize exemplary customer service.** Develop incentive programs to encourage good team-based customer service and recognize individual exemplary customer service performance.

New York City Transit Department of Buses

Evaluating Performance

- **Implement a more frequent and regular spot check mechanism to increase oversight of bus operators beyond the Passenger Environment Survey (PES) to ensure excellent customer service and ADA**

compliance. NYC Transit should examine and work with LI Bus to adopt processes LI Bus' Operations Department uses to evaluate its bus operators. LI Bus dispatchers conduct daily random passenger surveys to solicit their opinions about bus operator performance. LI Bus, through its Operations Department, also contracts with an investigative services company to spot check and monitor its bus operators. It is paramount that NYC Transit managers institute a more regular, post probationary, evaluation mechanism to ensure that operators provide consistent quality customer service and compliance with ADA.

- **Implement a more comprehensive bus operator reward system that recognizes excellent driving, operating and customer service performance.** The current performance reward system for bus operators should be expanded and redesigned to include the quality of overall job performance and exemplary customer service. The current performance reward system is too narrowly focused on specific tasks, such as announcements.

Long Island Bus

Hiring Practices

- **Develop a pre-hire examination in conjunction with the appropriate unions for pre-hire screening.** Review the civil service and BOSS examinations used at NYC Transit Department of Buses to consider its applicability for LI Bus.
- **Incorporate NYC Transit's Bus Operator Selection System (BOSS) into the training program for LI Bus operators.** LI Bus should work with NYC Transit to enable its bus operators to attend the training by NYC Transit or alternatively to adopt the BOSS training program into LI Bus' existing training program. This will ensure a high level of success as well as consistent training for all MTA agency bus operators.

Training Practices

- **Conduct pre- and post training examinations.** LI Bus Human Resources and Systems Safety and Operation Departments should devise pre- and post trainee examinations to measure the effectiveness of the training provided to telephone information agents and bus operators. The results of these tests will inform trainers on the participants grasp of the course material and help assess if participants have the required skills and knowledge to perform the job well. Participants who do not attain a certain score should be required to take additional training.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

- **Fast track incorporation of the TRIPS123 system into LI Bus operations and telephone information center.** The TRIPS123 system will give real time status reports on traffic and transit conditions and provide seamless transportation information among the many transportation agencies in the region. LI Bus should advance its plans to incorporate the TRIPS123 system into the agency operations and telephone information center departments.

Evaluating Performance

- **Establish incentive programs to encourage good customer service provision within a department or unit.** Develop incentive programs to encourage good team-based customer service performance within a department, division or unit.
- **Implement a more comprehensive bus operator reward system that recognizes excellent driving, operating and customer service performance.** The current performance reward system for bus operators should be expanded and redesigned to include the quality of overall job performance and exemplary customer service. The current performance reward system is too narrowly focused.

Refresher Training

- **Develop and require regular BOSS refresher training for bus operators.** Review the refresher training for bus operators used at NYC Transit DOB to consider its applicability for LI Bus. The BOSS refresher training could be offered in conjunction with LI Bus' current bi-annual federally mandated training.

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication and excellent customer service are paramount to running a successful transportation system. In fact, a recent report by the Public Agenda found that forty-six percent of people interviewed had walked out of a business in the past year due to bad customer service.³ Bad customer service results in lost business. This can translate into lost ridership in the transportation industry.

Front line employees, such as ticket clerks/station service agents, travel information representatives, conductors and bus operators provide a service, which necessitates customer communication and interaction yet employees don't always remember that this is an important part of their role. Front line employees, knowingly or unknowingly, function as transportation agency "ambassadors" and strongly influence riders' perception and experience. Public perceptions about transportation service play a key role in transportation use.

Effective communication and customer sensitivity require special employee skills and attitudes. Ensuring that employees are adequately prepared to fulfill their responsibilities is a recurrent process that begins during the hiring phase and continues through the initial training, monitoring and evaluation by management as well as in the ongoing provision of skills enhancement refresher training. Achieving excellent transportation customer service also requires effective communication among the employees themselves, which is grounded in the overall management philosophy, the handling of day-to-day operations and the employment of communication technology.

This report follows the Permanent Citizen Advisory Committee's 1984 report; ***Passenger Relations Training Programs, Disciplinary Procedures, and Incentive Programs: A Comparison of MTA Affiliates to Public Transit Agencies Around the United States***. The report identified important aspects of a successful passenger relations training program as requiring articulate, perceptive and sensitive instructors who are knowledgeable about behavioral modification techniques; continued managerial and supervisory staff support and reinforcement; and a skills workshop tailored to the needs of the particular transportation agency. With regard to disciplinary procedures, the report recommended that supervisory training address the supervisor's right to discipline; ways to handle disciplinary charges in a proper and timely manner; and provide the skills necessary to determine when discipline is the appropriate solution to the problem. The report further recommended that disciplinary programs be standardized to ensure consistency and that the MTA agencies implement incentive programs to improve employee morale and working conditions.

³ Public Agenda (2002) ***Aggravating Circumstances: A Status Report on Rudeness in America***.

Since that PCAC report was released, and as this report's research indicates, transportation agencies in the United States have recognized the important connection between customer service and ridership. Interest in customer service skill assessment, training and evaluation has grown over the past ten years and has led to changes in front line job descriptions and the implementation of customer service training programs.

Today's most innovative customer service training programs address the whole individual, the organizational culture and identify customers who are internal to the agency, such as supervisors and colleagues from other departments as well as customers external to the agency, primarily the passengers the agency serves. Transportation agencies, where this type of training has been applied, show increasing communication and problem solving abilities among employees and reduced numbers of customer complaints.

This report describes, compares and evaluates the policies and practices of the MTA agencies in 2003 specifically with regard to: front line employee hiring criteria, customer service training, employee communication, performance evaluation tools, performance incentive programs and disciplinary procedures and employee refresher training. The report also examines innovative programs offered by national transportation organizations and other U.S. transportation agencies that relate to obtaining and maintaining high quality front line staff.

Finally, the report makes agency specific recommendations for the MTA and its operating agencies. Additional agency specific recommendations for Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Railroad, New York City Transit (bus and subway) and Long Island Bus are included in Appendix B. Recommendations include: creating opportunities for sharing programs among MTA operating agencies, developing e-learning opportunities, standardizing job titles across agencies when possible, increasing relationships with local area schools for developing a transportation customer service based curriculum, increasing training testing, measuring training efficiencies, developing emergency training plans for front line employees and increasing the use of performance evaluations.

STUDY DESCRIPTION

This study examines railroad, subway and bus service front line employees who have or are in contact with the public. Front line railroad positions include: ticket clerks and/or sellers, telephone travel information personnel (known as customer service representatives/information clerks), assistant conductors and conductors. Front line subway service positions include: station agents, telephone travel information personnel (called transit customer service specialists), train and platform conductors and crowd control personnel (known as passenger

controllers). Front line bus service positions include: telephone travel information personnel (known as travel information agents) and bus operators.

The purpose of the study is to examine the processes by which front line personnel are hired, trained, and interact with one another and the public they serve. Methods used by agencies to monitor and evaluate the quality and provision of front line customer service are considered along with ways agencies seek to maintain and improve customer service and relations through refresher or enhancement skill training. Customer service training programs at several transportation agencies across the country are examined to identify innovative programs and strategies that could be adapted for use by the MTA operating agencies.

In the hiring process, the study focuses on who the pool of job applicants are and where they come from, what customer service qualifications or skills are required for the various positions and how agencies determine that trainees have acquired the people interaction skills needed during agency training to perform the job. In some cases, applicants are required to take tests to determine personality preferences and abilities in addition to having specific certification and job experience.

For the training programs, the study examines what customer service skills are taught and how they are integrated into the overall training. Also included is the role of training within the agency, how the instructors themselves are trained and ways in which management is assured that trainees have acquired the new skills.

The practical day-to-day process by which communication takes place between employees as well as with customers is also explored. This includes the role technology plays in enabling and transmitting information among employees as well as communicating to customers.

Another important aspect of the study is how management evaluates and monitors the quality of front line employee customer service. This includes the tools management uses to evaluate employee customer service performance, the frequency of employee evaluation, how information is communicated to front line employees to affect change and ways in which excellent employee performance is recognized. The study also considers ways agency management provides ongoing or regular employee refresher or skill enhancement training to maintain and improve customer service quality.

Study information was collected through telephone interviews, meetings and correspondence with agency staff, participation in training courses and a review of written materials provided by all the agencies including job descriptions, customer service training materials and evaluation forms. A comparative analysis of all the agency data was undertaken to identify elements of customer service training that lead to successful customer service results. Innovative

practices used by transportation agencies around the country were also reviewed and evaluated for their applicability to MTA operating agencies. MTA and operating agency specific recommendations were devised based upon the agency findings and the review of innovative practices.

TICKET CLERKS AND STATION AGENTS

Long Island Rail Road ticket clerks, Metro-North Railroad ticket sellers and NYC Transit subway station service agents are often the first employees a customer encounters when they enter an MTA railroad or subway station. Customers purchase tickets, ask system travel or local area directions, ask for help or how to contact lost and found from these employees.

While the responsibilities of these front line positions are generally similar, there are differences among the MTA operating agencies. There are also variations in the processes the agencies use to hire and train applicants, access customer service information, evaluate employee performance and refresher training. This section describes the processes used by the LIRR, MNR and NYC Transit pertaining to ticket clerks, ticket sellers and station agents.

Long Island Rail Road

As of August 2003, fifty-five of LIRR's 124 stations have staffed ticket offices. Most of the station ticket offices are open Monday – Friday from 6:00 am to 2:00 pm daily. Western terminal ticket offices are open seven days a week and close as follows: Jamaica (9:00 pm), Flatbush Avenue (9:50 pm) and Penn Station (open 24 hours). Several Island ticket offices also provide extended daily ticket selling hours. These are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Extended LIRR ticket selling hours.

6:00pm	6:45pm	7:00pm	7:15pm	7:30pm	8:30pm	8:45pm
Mineola	Ronkonkoma Hempstead	Great Neck Long Beach	Port Jefferson	Huntington	Babylon	Hicksville Port Washington

Hiring Practices

LIRR ticket clerk and station agent positions are filled both internally and externally. Ticket clerks and station agent positions are essentially the same; station agent positions are a product of a historical need for some ticket offices to employ personnel knowledgeable about track switches and block operations. While these specialized skills are no longer needed at the ticket offices, the position of station agent still exists and is considered a more senior ticket clerk position.

Ticket clerks and station agents are represented positions within the Transportation Communications Union (TCU). A vacant ticket clerk position is filled by the acceptance of bids on an advertised vacant position from within the TCU roster. TCU members hold various positions at the LIRR including station appearance maintainers, ticket clerks, clerical, train information clerks,

stenographers and warehouse personnel. When headcount falls below authorized levels and positions can not be filled via the bid process, the Passenger Services Department works together with Human Resources to interview and hire candidates from outside the agency. LIRR hired 61 new ticket clerks in 2001, 62 in 2002 and 42 as of October 2003. Of these new hires, 27 were hired from within LIRR in 2001, 42 in 2002 and 42 as of October 2003. Fifty-five of the 111 LIRR employees hired as ticket clerks were station appearance maintainers (cleaners). Typically five or six new ticket clerks are hired to start work at the same time.

Outside applicants are recruited through advertisements in newspapers, trade publications, job fairs and unsolicited resumes. Minimum qualifications for personnel who apply for a ticket clerk position through a union bid process and outside applicants are summarized in

Table 2. Minimum Hiring Requirements for LIRR Ticket Clerks

In-House Union Job Applicants	Outside Agency Job Applicants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High School Diploma or GED. • Effective writing, oral and interpersonal skills. • Strong customer service skills. • Basic math skills. • Ability to operate cash registers and other office equipment. • A bondable credit background. • 12 months of employment at LIRR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High School Diploma or GED. • LIRR math skills and data entry tests. • Banking or cash handling experience. • Experience interacting with customers. • A bondable credit background. • Effective writing, oral and interpersonal skills. • Ability to operate cash registers and other office equipment.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

Ticket clerks and station agents are supervised by station managers. Station agents must have at least three years of LIRR ticket selling experience to be promoted. Station agents, because of their experience, tend to play a more supervisory role than ticket clerks when on site situations arise. Ticket clerks and station agents report directly to station managers, assistant terminal, terminal and branch line managers, who are responsible for one branch or segments of branches of the railroad. The station managers supervise the ticket clerks, station agents and station cleaners who work at the various stations within their purview. The supervisory structure and responsibilities of these personnel within the Passenger Services Department are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3. LIRR Ticket Clerk Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

	Ticket Clerks /Station Agents Report to 	Station Managers Report to 	Asst General Managers- Stations
Positions (as of August 2003)	150 Ticket Clerks 55 Station Agents	10 Managers	1 Assistant GM –Stations
Job Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sale and accounting of tickets, MetroCards and revenue. • Deliver bank deposits daily. • Make public announcements and handle customer service issues. • Work with automated ticket selling machines. • Provide train and fare information. • Assist public and management during service disruptions. • Station agents assist with some supervisory station operation tasks as needed (such as ticket stock and safety monitoring). • Process conductor and trainmen on-train fare revenues and dispense duplex ticket stock. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 assistant terminal, 3 terminal and 4 branch line managers. • Manage station agents, ticket clerks, and station cleaners. • Inspect stations and coordinate repairs. • Resolve customer service problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directs the activities of ticket sellers and station agents, station cleaners and station managers. • Coordinates other activities that impact station environments.

Training Practices

Much of the customer service related training for ticket clerks is learned on the job, by mentoring with other ticket clerks and experience on the job over time. Station agents also provide guidance on customer service as part of ticket clerk training.

Once hired, LIRR ticket clerks together with all new LIRR employees attend a two day orientation program run by the Department of Human Resources. The program provides a corporate overview of the operations of the Long Island Rail Road, railroad safety and sensitivity to diversity issues in the workplace. After this two day orientation program, all new LIRR employees go to their respective departments for job specific training.

Ticket clerks attend a three day ticket training program held at the Copiague ticket office, which is conducted by an experienced ticket clerk or station agent. The instructors who conduct the training have no formal training, but are selected by department managers because of the way they handle themselves at the ticket office, their knowledge, technical skills and customer service attitudes. The three day program provides an overview of the daily ticket office operations, which includes book work, tariff review, station and zone training, banking and security. Customer service skills are emphasized through courteous, informative and polite responses as well as ways to interact with customers. Role playing techniques are used to reinforce skills learned.

After this three day training, ticket clerks participate in a three week on the job training segment to reinforce their technical and people skills. They spend a full week working in the ticket office at one station, followed by a rotation through the different clerk positions at Penn Station, Flatbush Avenue, Jamaica Station,

additional line stations, ticket receiver, Lost and Found and Penn Station Information Center.⁴ The Copiague course instructor follows the progress of the trainees with site visits during the three week training program.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

The LIRR is in the process of establishing computer connections at their stations; only ten percent of the 55 ticket offices had computer e-mail access as of June 2003. The goal is to have e-mail available at all staffed stations so that information received for any type of service disruption can flow to the stations from Passenger Services managers. The e-mail system will also provide a method of updating the ticket clerk and agents on information/procedures they need to best serve the customer.

Approximately eighty percent of all staffed LIRR ticket offices are outfitted with a Train Information Monitoring and Control System (TIMACS) machine that provides the office with information about late trains. Ticket clerks communicate informally by telephone between ticket offices on the same branch. Branch line managers coordinate operations between branches from the field in the event of a major service disruption.

The Train Movement Bureau (TMB) is responsible for making announcements about train service over the public address system to all stations, a specific branch or station.⁵ The TMB also contacts the ticket office personnel and Mineola Passenger Services managers by telephone with more detailed information about train service delays. Individual stations have a localized public address system that ticket clerks or station agents use to augment announcements from the Train Movement Bureau. A branch line manager, station agent, or ticket clerk tests all public address systems daily to make sure they are functioning properly.

Branch line managers and station agents are also responsible for posting the current timetables and service disruption notices. Passenger service notices with detailed changes about service are sent by mail to all the ticket offices. Branch line managers and station agents discuss them with ticket clerks and station staff.

All station ticket vending machines (TVMs) are checked every morning to make sure they are functioning properly by the Automated Ticket Sales (ATS) personnel from the Passenger Services Department. The machine repair crews, based in Farmingdale, Nassau Boulevard and Hillside, are dispatched as needed. When customers report problems with the TVMs, ticket clerks relay the information to ATS staff. A repair number is also posted on the front of every

⁴ Ticket receivers are ticket sellers who process the daily revenue generated from on-board ticket sales by the train conductors.

⁵ Stations at the East End of Long Island do not have public address systems.

machine for customers to report problems directly to the Computer Support Department.

Representatives from the Passenger Services, Engineering, Safety and Public Affairs Departments meet on a monthly basis to review issues pertaining to passenger stations and terminals. Any items found during station inspections that require repair or correction are placed in the Engineering Trouble Ticket System continuously during the month. The meeting gives all the departments an opportunity to review and discuss final solutions to any unresolved items. This meeting has been an excellent tool in promoting a customer focused teamwork effort among the operating departments.

Ticket clerks, station cleaners, station agents and branch line managers meet once a month with the Transportation and Mechanical Departments to discuss and address passenger related station issues.

Evaluating Performance

Newly hired ticket clerks have a probationary period of one year as established through a joint LIRR and TCU agreement. Both ticket clerks/agents and passenger service managers complete quarterly evaluation reports on each probationary ticket clerk employee, which is based on feedback received from other ticket clerks and employees who interact with the new clerks on a daily basis. LIRR employees with more than a year of seniority who bid for a ticket clerk position are not subject to the one year probationary period.

Another means of evaluation is derived from the results of the LIRR's annual Customer Satisfaction Survey. The survey is a comprehensive questionnaire distributed to customers on all LIRR trains asking them to rate their level of satisfaction about train service, station conditions and other LIRR related issues. The results of this survey are used to inform LIRR management about customer perceptions of service and issues of concern or encouragement. Feedback about the performance of particular ticket clerks is also provided through customer letters and telephone calls of commendation and complaint.

A third means of evaluation is obtained from the Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council's (LIRRCC) annual LIRR Report Card. The report card is an annual survey of LIRR riders to rate LIRR train service and station conditions and gauge rider perceptions, opinions and concerns about specific topics. The report card makes recommendations for service and facility improvements from the riders' point of view. LIRR management has implemented improvements based on LIRR Report Card recommendations, such as the Branch Line Manager Program.

A fourth means of customer evaluation and feedback is obtained through the periodic "Rail Talk" dinners sponsored by the Rail Road, where customers are

invited to have dinner with the LIRR President and management to discuss railroad issues in a restaurant near a local LIRR station. The LIRR President and his senior management also meet the public during the AM or PM rush hours at a selected station or terminal. At these “Meet the President” sessions, the public is again given the opportunity to discuss railroad issues.

The LIRR recognizes performance excellence annually in the form of a breakfast with the LIRR President, which is based on the results of the LIRR Customer Satisfaction Survey. The LIRR President personally recognizes individual employees with award certificates and plaques at the breakfast ceremony. All customer compliments are documented and placed in an employee’s personnel file.

In the case of poor, unsatisfactory performance from a ticket clerk, both the ticket agent and passenger service manager follow-up with the individual. Customer complaints through comment cards, letters and calls to Public Affairs or Passenger Services are investigated and documented by a Passenger Services manager in an employee’s personnel file. The manager first talks to the ticket clerk to work out a solution and to see if there is a pattern. A second complaint warrants a formal letter to the ticket clerk and a third incident may initiate a formal joint LIRR/union review process.

Refresher Training

Ticket clerks were not required to take any ongoing or refresher training until recently. The LIRR now includes ticket clerks, station agents, ushers, train movement personnel and block operators as part of a one day session held every Thursday called the Roundtable. The program was developed as a required refresher course for assistant train conductors, conductors and other Transportation Department personnel in January 2002. The day course was recently expanded to include ticket clerks, station agents, ushers, Command Center personnel and block operators to create an opportunity to share experiences across departments and provide a broader perspective of railroad operations and customer service and communication issues. The result is an increase in communication and connectivity among employees. The program is described in more detail in the railroad and subway conductors chapter (see refresher training for LIRR conductors).

Ongoing training courses on a range of skills and topics are also available on a voluntary basis for personnel who are interested in advancing their career at the LIRR. These courses are taught by LIRR staff at the Hillside facility and are open to any employee interested in promotional opportunities.

Metro-North Railroad

As of August 2003, forty-two of MNR’s 120 stations in New York and Connecticut have staffed ticket offices. None of the West of Hudson line stations have staffed ticket offices. Most of MNR’s station ticket offices are open Monday – Friday, from 6:10 am to 1:30 pm daily. Ticket offices at major stations are open seven days a week and close as follows: Grand Central Terminal (1:30 am), 125th Street (9:30 pm), White Plains (10:00 pm) and Poughkeepsie (8:45 pm). Several MNR ticket offices also provide extended daily ticket selling hours, summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Extended MNR ticket selling hours.*

6:05 pm	6:15 pm	6:35 pm	8:50 pm	9:00 pm	10:00 pm	10:10 pm
Greenwich	Rye Port Chester	Fordham	Croton Harmon	New Rochelle	New Haven	Stamford

* Ticket Hours as of October 26, 2003

Hiring Practices

Ticket clerks are called ticket sellers at MNR. Positions are filled from a pool of in-house union employees as well as outside applicants. While the ticket seller position is a promotional opportunity for custodians, in-house custodian applicants must take the same set of written tests and meet the same qualifications required of outside applicants.

As at LIRR, ticket seller positions are considered clerical positions. An average of two to three MNR custodians a year successfully bid into ticket seller positions. Interviews are not required. Other in-house union job applicants (coach cleaners, trackworkers, laborers, etc.) can submit an “Application to Transfer to Another Craft/Occupation.” They take the same set of written tests and meet the same qualifications as outside applicants, including an interview, physical abilities test if applicable and background check. Approximately one to two ticket sellers are promoted to assistant conductor or engineer on a yearly basis. About eighty-three percent of MNR’s ticket sellers remain in their positions over the long-term.

MNR recruits outside applicants through job postings on the agency’s official website, advertisements in newspapers, trade magazines and at college and university career offices, professional job fairs and unsolicited resumes.

All applicants for ticket seller positions submit their resume to the Human Resources Department for consideration. Minimum qualifications for personnel who apply for a ticket seller position through the union bid process and outside applicants are summarized below in Table 5.

Table 5. Minimum Hiring Requirements for MNR Ticket Sellers

In-House Union Job Applicants	Outside Agency Job Applicants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TCU Written test (Language, computation, ability to follow written directions, and coding skills). • Hogan personality test.⁶ • General and credit background checks. • Seniority where applicable. • Interview where applicable. 	<p>Same as In-House Job Requirements.</p> <p>Two years customer service and/or cash handling experience strongly preferred.</p>

The Human Resources Department invites applicants, whose test scores fall within a defined range, for a personal interview conducted by the department recruiter and a hiring department representative. MNR conducts general and credit background checks prior to the interview. All new hires begin either as part-time employees (no benefits) or full-time employees (full benefits).

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

Ticket sellers report to district managers. District managers, a management, non-represented position, are required to have at least five years of MNR Operations Services experience, familiarity with applicable collective bargaining agreements and two years of supervisory experience as a prerequisite for promotion to this supervisory position.

MNR district managers report to Director- Stations. The supervisory structure and responsibilities of these personnel are within the Operations Division of the Operation Services Department. They are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. MNR Ticket Seller Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

	Ticket Sellers Report to ☞	District Managers Report to ☞	Director- Stations
Positions (August 2003)	100-125 ticket sellers	7 district managers	1 director-stations
Job Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sell MNR tickets. • Dispense Amtrak and MNR information. • Complete remittance reports. • Notify authorities of safety violations or hazards to passengers or employees. • Follow prescribed accounting procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the daily operation of 12-28 staffed and unstaffed stations on more than one line. • Supervise ticket sellers and cleaners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directs the activities of ticket seller, station custodians, district managers and employees in the Commissary.

⁶ The Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) test is used to measure the presence of five personality traits. The HPI test contains statements that refer to personal preferences, values, and ethics. Respondents choose the response that best reflects their preferences. The test has a specific rating for preferences and skills related to customer service. To advance to the next level of consideration, applicants are required to pass the tests at a level determined by MNR Human Resources department.

	in the Stations Procedures Manual. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct the ticket office in a business like manner. 		
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Training Practices

MNR ticket sellers do not currently receive any formalized customer service training due to the logistical difficulty of reconciling class scheduling and adequate station ticket office coverage. Training is also costly and has not been included in MNR's budget for the past few years. The last formal customer service related training for all ticket sellers was a one day course offered in 1998.

Similar to the LIRR, newly hired MNR ticket sellers participate in a two day orientation program administered by the Employment Unit of the Human Resources Department. The two day program is attended by all new MNR employees and provides an overview of Metro-North Railroad operations, mission and vision, employee benefits and practical information, safety and payroll issues. The program also includes a tour of Grand Central Terminal.

The orientation curriculum was developed by MNR's Employment Unit and is conducted by an analyst and four other Human Resources Department professionals who have expertise in training, recruitment and employee relations.

Much of the customer service related training ticket sellers receive, as at LIRR, is learned on the job through a 30 day mentoring period with an experienced ticket seller. Ticket sellers are provided with a manual, which includes a section on interaction with customers. An initiative was undertaken this past year to attract ticket sellers to serve as formal mentors with the offer of a small stipend, but the program received no interest from employees and was subsequently discontinued.

A new four day formalized pre-qualification training program for ticket sellers, mentioned earlier, has been developed by the Training Department and is expected to begin in the fall 2003. The four day training will include general information about MNR, the MNR service territory, how to read timetables, MNR ticket types and tariffs, instruction on ticket office machines (TOM), customer service skills and interaction with MTA agencies and other transit services, such as Westchester County's Beeline Buses and the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT). The mainly interactive style classroom based training will be required for all ticket sellers prior to the start of their job. Ticket sellers will be compensated for the training and required to pass successfully before being formally qualified for the ticket seller position.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

After the blizzard of 1995, in response to ticket sellers' suggestions and an audit of MNR's performance during the snowstorm, MNR examined ways to improve communication to ticket sellers and to customers about service delays. At that time, MNR station ticket offices had telephones, but no computers or fax machines.

MNR created a stations communications network three years ago connecting station ticket offices to the Railroad's Rail Traffic Controller Operations Center's public address system, the visual liquid electronic display (LED) signs at thirteen ADA key stations⁷ and the telephone Customer Information Center. Ticket offices were outfitted with a small computer screen so that in cases of service delays or emergencies, public address announcers would relay the problem in a brief text message.

It is expected that seven ticket offices will be networked to MNR's Intranet by the end of 2003, which will include a Visual Train Tracking System (VTTS). VTTS will convey train time and track number information. VTTS is a system that is tied into the Automatic Train Control System (ATCS) used by the Rail Traffic Controllers Operations Center. The ATCS shows when the train passes certain points along the route based on a computer record.

VTTS is accessible currently only to customer service representatives at MNR's telephone Customer Information Center and other authorized staff members. It is anticipated that access to this system will be expanded to ticket sellers. A pilot program is now in progress at MNR's Fordham station in the Bronx. The system gives employees access to 95 percent of all train delay information. The customer service representatives in MNR's telephone Customer Information Center use this system successfully.

The PA operator located in the Operations Control Center, like the Transportation Movement Bureau at the LIRR, is responsible for announcements over the public address system to all stations, a specific branch or a particular station. When centralized announcements are made by the Operations Center, they are also generated in an abbreviated text format, which can be displayed on LED signs that are located at designated station platforms or waiting areas. The new VTTS system will allow ticket sellers to determine the location of a train so that they can augment the electronically generated station announcements with announcements over the localized public address system.

When ticket sellers report to work and log into the computer, they will be able to view a "hot sheet", which contains a list of service advisories and other timely employee information.

⁷ Electronically digitalized signs on station platforms or station areas.

MNR district managers meet monthly with the Track and Structures Department to go over station maintenance issues. Ticket sellers and custodial staff report any station problems to the district manager and the Track and Structures Department. All items are recorded in a log by the Track and Structures Department and are reported at the monthly meetings.

Evaluating Performance

District managers visit all the stations under their responsibility at least once a week. MNR ticket sellers are informally monitored and evaluated by the district managers. New ticket sellers hired from outside MNR are probationary employees for the first ninety days, which includes a thirty day on the job training period. All non-union employees become union members after sixty days. New ticket seller employees, who are already union members, have thirty days to “qualify” to determine that they have the necessary skills to do the job. This thirty day trial can be extended at the discretion of management. If they do not qualify, the union employee’s application for employment is not approved.

The ticket seller mentor does informal evaluations of the trainee and reports to the district manager during the thirty day training period. District managers also spend time observing the operations at their stations to evaluate employee performance. Ticket sellers are observed closely during the first thirty day period and can be dismissed, if deemed necessary. If problems arise after the thirty day period, additional, focused on-the-job training is provided to the employee. If ticket sellers are dismissed in the thirty-one to ninety day probationary period, they are entitled to union representation.

Other means of evaluation, similar to LIRR, come from customer satisfaction surveys (done quarterly at MNR and annually at LIRR) as well as customer letters and telephone calls of commendation and complaint. Customer compliments and complaints are documented by the chief of operations and forwarded to the district manager. The district manager investigates the situation and is required to report the findings to the chief of Operations Services. All investigations are documented and placed in an employee’s personnel file.

Three full-time service quality inspectors also monitor station and on-board conditions and operations. These inspectors travel unannounced on all MNR lines and evaluate station and on-board conditions according to an itemized checklist. These inspectors report to the Customer Service Department and the evaluation results are provided to individual managers on a daily basis and to the executive staff, in summary format, on a monthly basis.

Metro-North Railroad recognizes excellence annually with a President’s Award. All positions are eligible for this award; MNR employees nominate other deserving employees. The number of employees honored annually varies. Two

of the seven employees who received awards in 2002 were ticket sellers. Awardees receive a plaque and a watch at an awards ceremony.

In the case of poor or unsatisfactory performance of a ticket seller, district managers speak with the individual. In the case of a second incident, the district manager will give the employee a letter of warning. The last recourse is a disciplinary investigation. On-the-job training is provided on a one-to-one basis, if necessary.

Refresher Training

Refresher training for MNR ticket sellers, who have been identified as lacking skills in a particular area, is offered on a one-to-one basis. All current ticket sellers will be required to take the new hire training course as refresher training.

New York City Transit

As of September 2003, NYC Transit's 468 subway stations have 661 staffed station service booths. There are 520 booths in full-time, 24 hour, seven days a week operation and 141 that are open part-time hours at various times between 5:00 am and 1:30 am.

Station agents, formerly called railroad clerks or station booth clerks, have traditionally functioned similarly to railroad ticket clerks or sellers, but their role is undergoing a transition with the elimination of NYC Transit subway tokens and the prevalence of MetroCard vending machines (MVMs). Currently, station agents remain within an enclosed station service booth. Their new role, in the process of being developed, will be to walk around the station and assist customers with a range of subway transit activities.⁸

Hiring Practices

Station agent positions are filled from a pool of in-house employees and outside applicants. The station agent position, an entry-level union position, is paid on an hourly basis. Since the station cleaner position⁹ is the entry-level non-union position, many of the in-house applicants are station cleaners. An average of 400 station cleaners apply to take the civil service promotional examination for station agent on a yearly basis. Approximately twenty-five station cleaners are promoted to station agent per year.

Station agents are eligible to take promotional examinations for station supervisor level-one, train conductor, train operator and tower operator positions. Candidates on the lists resulting from the examinations are promoted to station

⁸ The new position, when implemented, will be known as station service agent.

⁹ Station cleaner positions eligible to apply for station agent include cleaner TA and labor class cleaner.

supervisor level-one and other positions when approved, budgeted positions become available. The turnover rate for station agents was four percent between June 2002 and May 2003.

NYC Transit's Human Resources Department recruits applicants by posting job notices on their internal website, the official agency public website, on internet career advertisement sites, in local newspapers and at professional job fairs. Exam information is placed each week in the Job Vacancy Notice package and sent as an internal agency e-mail broadcast notice. Exam information is updated monthly on the Exam Information Hotline phone number (212-712-JOBS). The exam schedule is also advertised on NYC Transit station posters, subway and bus cards and in "take-ones" distributed in subway stations.

The station agent and conductor positions are selected through the civil service examination process. All applicants must file for an examination and take the test. They are placed on a list in order of score received. Minimum qualifications for personnel who apply for a station agent position through the union bid process and outside applicants are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Minimum Hiring Requirements for NYC Transit Station Agents

In-House Union Job Applicants	Outside Agency Job Applicants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High School Diploma or GED. • Civil Service Examination designed for the position. • 18 months full-time experience in resolving customer problems and complaints, providing guidance and directions. • Retail and banking experience preferred. • Successful completion of a drug screening test. 	<p>Same as In-House Job Requirements.</p>

NYC Transit selects applicants in list order and conducts a drug test for all applicants. Applicants who pass the drug test are placed in the station service agent induction training program. The Human Resources Department does not conduct in person interviews.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

Station agents report to level-one and level-two station supervisors depending upon the station and subdivision in which they work. Level-one supervisors are responsible for a designated group of stations and the assignment and supervision of station agents and cleaners. Level-one supervisors are also responsible for the assignment and management of station cleaning, station conditions and equipment and the manning of station controls. Level-two supervisors are in charge of a group of stations in a major subdivision within the Division of Station Operations and, in addition to the responsibilities of level-one supervisors, plan and administer the revenue record system, analyze records, conduct investigations and write reports.

Level-one and level-two supervisors are union represented positions and promotion to and between supervisor positions is on an as needed basis. No promotional examination is required for promotion from station supervisor level-one to level-two.

Many of the level-one and level-two station supervisors are former station agents. Station supervisors report to field superintendents, who oversee multiple station operations and handle communication with the public about station conditions. The supervisory structure and responsibilities of these personnel within the Division of Stations Operations is summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. NYC Transit Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

	Station Agents Report to 	Level I and II Station Supervisors Report to 	Field Superintendents
Positions (as of August 2003)	3325 station agents	227 level-one station supervisors 252 level-two station supervisors	50 field superintendents
Job Responsibilities (August 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide direct customer service. • Listen and provide customer solutions with travel and transit system related information. • Help customers with the purchase and use of fare cards and observe overall station conditions 	<p><u>Levels-one and two:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage the daily operation of ten adjacent stations. • Supervise station agents and cleaners. • Manage station cleaning, conditions, equipment and the manning of station controls. <p><u>Level-one:</u> Supervise refuse pick-up, track tile cleaning, track maintenance and mobile wash teams.</p> <p><u>Level-two:</u> Plan and administer the revenue record system, analyze records, conduct investigations and write reports.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage ten consecutive stations on a line and respond to customer concerns • Manage station managers, station agents, and station cleaners.

Training Practices

NYC Transit station agents receive a nineteen day induction training program, which includes a customer service component covering the procedural duties and responsibilities of the agent as they relate to customers. Classes are limited to twenty station agents and incorporate videos and role playing exercises to underscore the importance of customer relations. Three to four of the nineteen days are spent in the field undertaking station agent duties at a station and include a full day working under the supervision of another station agent. Trainees are also required to take over full operation of a station service booth under observation. A checklist of items must be performed satisfactorily before the agent is permitted to work without direct supervision.

A two day customer service training program addressing the new role of the station agent outside of the station service booth was pilot tested in August 2003. The two day training program will be required, in addition to the nineteen day training, for new employees and as a refresher course for current station agents.

Field superintendents will also be required to take the course. Plans were to start implementation of the training program with a select number of station agents during the fall 2003. As of August 2003, NYC Transit's preliminary 2004 Budget has delayed the implementation of the two day customer service workshop until 2005.

The objective of the two day training program is to change the attitude and manner of existing station agents to that of being more communicative and approachable to customers as well as taking a proactive approach to problem solving. A fifteen minute video, developed and produced by NYC Transit, focuses on different ways people communicate and interact, communication skills, how to deal with confrontational situations and what it takes to provide remarkable customer service. Role playing exercises are also part of the two day training.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

In their new capacity, station agents will more actively assist customers. Station service booths will be used for communication purposes and station agents will spend their time walking through the station to assist customers in activities such as purchasing MetroCards from the MVMs, giving directions and subway service information and general problem solving.

NYC Transit is upgrading its communication technology to facilitate the shifting role of station agents through its Capital Improvement Program with the installation of a Communication Network System (CNS) and a Communication Based Train Control (CBTC). The CNS is an electronic telecommunication system that carries voice, video and data signals throughout the subway system and the CBTC system provides real time train location and delay information to the RTO Control Center. The CNS and CBTC systems will tremendously improve subway communication in the future. Only Phase I of this large improvement project has been funded to date. NYC Transit hopes to fund the remainder of the project in its 2005-2009 capital program.¹⁰

NYC Transit is also upgrading the Portable Panic Transmitter (PPT) communication system, which allows an agent to activate the emergency call system located in the station booth, known as the Emergency Booth Communication System (EBCS), to communicate with the Division of Station Operations' Command Center. The upgraded PPT system will enable the station agent to activate the EBCS from any area of the station and allow them to talk to the Division of Station Operations. The present system is limited in range and is without voice capability. The range of the PPT will be extended at selected stations in a pilot program scheduled to begin the end of 2003. The audio capabilities will not be available during the pilot program.

¹⁰ Capital Program Oversight Committee Report February 19, 2003

Station agents are responsible for “fingertip maintenance” of the turnstile, MetroCard readers, and MVMs in the immediate control area surrounding the booth. They report any problems with MVMs to the Station Operations Command Center, which forwards them to the Revenue Department. Agents are also required to report any mechanical problems with booth machines, booth microphones, public address systems, the mass call system, an intercom system inside the booth that connects them with both the Stations Operations Command Center and RTO Control Center, or other station problems to one of the five District Offices. Each district office is under the direction of a General Superintendent. Repairs are supposed to be made within eight hours.

Station agents are routinely informed about planned service diversions through a weekly two page synopsis “Bulletin of Order,” a list of weekend service diversions and posters that are distributed throughout the station to notify customers of service changes. Field superintendents are typically responsible for posting the service diversion notices and posters throughout the station and on platforms. The Station Operations Command Center is also responsible for mass calling all planned service diversions to affected station service booths.

Agents learn about major unplanned service delays through an announcement sent from the RTO Control Center to the mass call system in the booths at the affected stations. Station agents are instructed via mass call to put service delay information on the station service booth, service information board.

Agents usually hear about smaller, unplanned service diversions directly from customers. The agent is directed to call the RTO Control Center to find out the cause of these delays. As at the LIRR and MNR, all major service delay announcements over the public address system are controlled by the RTO Control Center. Agents in the station booth are able to hear the announcements that are made over the public address system. Agents are notified by telephone to put up service delay information on the station booth’s information board at stations that do not have public address systems. Field supervisors, and any available personnel, are dispatched to help clear station platforms, assist and direct customers.

Evaluating Performance

Station agent performance is monitored and evaluated regularly on an informal basis by station supervisors. Agents are probationary employees during their first year on the job. Station supervisors observe how agents handle cash transactions, determine their daily knowledge about service diversions, monitor customer compliments and complaints, record attendance and observe interaction with customers.

NYC Transit recognizes station agents as well as other NYC Transit employee performance excellence in the form of commendation letters and an Employee of the Month program. Commendation letters are generated from positive customer correspondence. The Employee of the Month program acknowledges station agents who have maintained outstanding performance on the job. Station supervisors or field superintendents nominate a candidate for Employee of the Month based upon an agent's attendance, commendation letters and overall work attitude. Employees receive a certificate at a formal luncheon. The awards are made six times a year.

In the case of poor or unsatisfactory performance by a station agent, the station supervisor will speak with the agent and re-instruct them in the proper procedure. If there is no improvement, the Division of Stations will recommend formal disciplinary action pursuant to the disciplinary grievance procedure agreed upon under union contract. NYC Transit's Office of Labor Relations will draft the charges and process them. For minor violations, NYC Transit will recommend a series of progressive penalties in an attempt to modify the agent's behavior. NYC Transit will seek a major suspension or dismissal if the violation is serious.

Refresher Training

Refresher training for station agents is offered on a one-to-one basis with a focus on particular skills, as needed.

NYC Transit has developed relationships with a number of educational institutions offering ongoing training courses in a range of skills. The Transportation Management Certificate Program at John Jay College is transportation based, but does not include customer service skills. The 15 week, one day a week program, offers undergraduate credits and is open to a mix of front line employees nominated by their department. Nominated employees must have a High School Diploma or GED to be eligible to take the courses. The program consists of six courses: operations management; labor relations; computer applications for management; organizational behavior; planning and budget development and metropolitan transportation systems.

The program began with a few courses for operating managers and supervisors. In 1989, NYC Transit's Employee Development and Training Department took over supervision of the program and asked the College to develop additional credit courses related to transportation. After the number of courses increased to six, John Jay obtained approval toward a Certificate for employees who successfully completed all six courses. Courses may be taken individually for those employees not interested in obtaining the certificate.

The classes are offered in the evening and seats are assigned in the order of departmental priority. Departmental priority is given to employees who have not earned a Bachelor Degree. The certificate is not tied directly to promotion, but it

is an additional educational credential that can add to an employee's resume. NYC Transit pays the tuition, but the employee contributes by paying an activity fee each semester. The certificate program has produced 66 graduates to date.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND TRAVEL INFORMATION AGENTS

Customers who require information about the LIRR and MNR railroads, NYC Transit subway and bus, or LI Bus system can call agency telephone travel information centers for which branch, line or route to take to reach their destination, fare and schedule information, station or stop locations, or other concerns about using the service. A conversation with agency telephone information personnel may be a periodic or first encounter with the transit agency. Regular customers may call for specific information about service delays or service changes.

The MTA operating agencies refer to telephone travel information personnel by different titles. At LIRR, personnel in these front line positions are called travel information representatives (TIC representatives), while MNR refers to its personnel as customer service representatives. NYC Transit titles its telephone employees transit customer service specialists. LI Bus refers to its personnel as travel information agents.

This section focuses on the hiring, training, employee access to customer service information, performance evaluation and refresher training practices for telephone travel information employees.

Long Island Rail Road

Customers obtain telephone travel information from TIC representatives at the Travel Information Center (TIC). The TIC handles five million customer telephone inquiries annually and 13,000 daily. Daily call volumes increase to 25-30,000 during the summer months (peak period), service disruptions, on holidays and during snowstorms. A twenty-four hour, seven day a week operation, LIRR's TIC has the heaviest volume of all the MTA agencies and is among the top three busiest call centers in the country. The LIRR is the first transit system in the nation to utilize a natural voice recognition system to handle incoming calls. The state-of-the-art natural voice recognition system handles 75 percent of incoming calls on average, while 25 percent of incoming callers request assistance from a live representative.

Hiring Practices

TIC representative positions are typically filled from a pool of in-house clerical represented employees through a union bid process. From time to time other LIRR clerical personnel, who for medical reasons require a desk position, fill information clerk positions on a temporary basis.

While there are no specific qualifications required for TIC representatives, a High School Diploma or Associates Degree as well as customer service experience are preferred. Minimum qualifications for personnel who apply for an information clerk position through a union bid process and outside applicants are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Minimum (Preferred) Hiring Qualifications for LIRR TIC Representatives

In-House Union Job Applicants	Outside Agency Job Applicants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High School Diploma or Associates degree • Customer service experience. • Ability to answer telephone inquiries. • Ability to solicit mailing and survey information by telephone. • Ability to read timetables and other railroad information. • Ability to operate and retrieve information from a computer. • Ability to provide information in a clear and pleasant manner. 	<p>Outside Job Applicants Not Accepted.</p>

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

The LIRR employs 19 TIC representatives, who report to four supervisors. There is always a supervisor on duty 24 hours a day covering (3) eight hour shifts. The shifts are 7am to 3pm, 3pm to 11pm and 11pm to 7am. All TIC supervisors report to the TIC manager, providing the manager with relevant job/task related data and keeping the manager informed of service disruptions during off hours. Supervisor positions are filled from a pool of in-house clerical employees through a seniority-based bid process. Once an employee accepts a bid there are 30 days to qualify while on the job. There are no other prerequisite qualifications for supervisor positions.

Training Practices

Since all TIC positions are filled internally, employees new to the department have already completed the two day orientation conducted by the Human Resources Department.¹¹ Most new TIC employees have had some previous LIRR experience as a ticket clerk, usher or station cleaner or other clerical position. This experience gives them basic knowledge of the LIRR system.

Job training for TIC representatives at LIRR is provided in the TIC on a one-to-one basis by a supervisor or an experienced information clerk. Instruction is also provided through a series of 16 videos called the “Telephone Doctor,” a Customer Service Training program, “...to improve efficiency, productivity,

¹¹ This program is described in the Ticket Clerks and Station Agents chapter under LIRR ticket clerks Training Practices.

customer service skills and overall approach.”¹² Each 20-30 minute video highlights an area of customer service and the necessary skills to improve performance. A maximum of two people watch a video, then meet with the TIC manager, who asks questions regarding what they have learned and how to apply the information to real situations. Everyone watches one video per month, specially selected for the individual and attends a one-on-one meeting with the manager to review what was learned.

The new one-on-one training program was launched in mid 2002. This two to five day training program continues to be developed by the TIC manager, supervisors and TIC representatives. The instructors use a checklist of the items to be covered in the training to ensure training consistency among instructors. A regularly updated TIC Customer Service Training & Development Manual is used as the training guide for new TIC representatives along with other materials. Recent changes in the training program emphasize the quality of information provided, information consistency and reliability and the use of customer friendly service tactics, such as opening and closing greetings. Representatives are encouraged to attain high call volumes and 60 second or less call duration times.

New employees listen to live calls to understand the telephone information response process as part of the training. A new employee begins taking test calls after the initial training, which are closely monitored and critiqued by a supervisor, experienced clerk and/or the TIC manager. The manager ultimately determines when the new information clerk is ready to undertake regular telephone customer service information duties.

As part of the LIRR training and development education curriculum, TIC supervisors are required to take classes. These classes must be completed within a specified time frame and include specialty courses for LIRR supervisors. There are 11 programs offered including Quality Management: Internal Customer and Process Improvement, Managing Diversity, and Identifying and Helping the Troubled Employee.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

TIC representatives are trained to use the Agent Interface Unit (AIU), a computer software program that involves moving through a series of screens to retrieve information. Representatives can access information about train delays, cancellations and schedules; specific station-related details (such as directions, telephone numbers, waiting room and ticket office hours, special needs accessibility, connecting bus and taxi information); topic specific telephone numbers; promotional tours; towns and landmarks within the LIRR service area; and fare information. The automated voice response system shares the same database as the AIU system ensuring information consistency.

¹² Memo from Chris Papandreou, Manager, LIRR Travel Information Center to Brian Dolan, Vice-President, Market Development and Public Affairs, April 16, 2003.

TIC representatives can also retrieve daily service advisories and employee information through the automatically updated AIU screens. Supervisors receive service updates from Transportation Department message pages, checking TMB announcements and direct telephone contact with the TMB. Although most information is retrieved using the AIU screens, specific train information is also available from the TIMACS located on the LIRR intranet site. The TIMACS system allows the TIC representatives to provide real-time train status to the customer. This is the same system that ticket clerks have access to at the station ticket offices.

The TIC representatives provide feedback to the TIC computer administrator about needed improvements or information inaccuracies they encounter with the AIU systems to ensure information accuracy and quality. The process to identify and change incorrect information in the systems is on-going.

The LIRR, MNR, NYC Transit and LI Bus are all participating in the Transportation Intelligent Planning System 123 project (TRIPS123) initiated by the MTA in cooperation with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and Transportation Operations Coordinating Committee (TRANSCOM). TRIPS123 is a regional travel information database that will include NYCT, LIRR, MNR, LI Bus, New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) private bus lines, New Jersey Transit (NJT), Port Authority Trans Hudson (PATH) and local Connecticut carriers. TRIPS123 will also be available on the internet for use by the general public beginning in fall 2003.

The LIRR TIC has plans to integrate the TRIPS123 system. While telephone information representatives will continue to use the AIU system, they will also have the advantage of using the TRIPS123 system through the internet to provide additional regional travel information to customers.

Evaluating Performance

Since all new TIC representatives are union members, they have 30 days to acquire the necessary skills to qualify for the position. If they do not qualify, union employee bids are not approved.

TIC supervisors monitor the quality of customer service and telephone etiquette provided by TIC representatives on a daily and monthly basis. One key tool used by management is the Daily Matrix. The Daily Matrix provides a daily breakdown of information on call volume, telephone call length and unavailable time of individual staff members. All telephone calls are recorded or posted so that they can be played back or monitored live to evaluate customer and clerk responses and to provide real time coaching and feedback.

Supervisors audit ten random telephone calls handled by every information clerk on a monthly basis. A telephone call audit form or "Quality Control Form" is used

to evaluate a representative's quality of customer service according to the following categories: introductory and closing greetings, call handling, attitude, talk-time/content and professionalism. The form also includes space for supervisor recommendations and an overall grade. Supervisors meet with TIC representatives on an individual basis to review these documented audits and to discuss techniques for improvement. The meetings are considered opportunities to exchange information and to offer positive reinforcement and constructive evaluation.

Performance excellence is recognized through "TIC Representative Appreciation Days", special days when representatives are offered light refreshments and a small token of the agency's appreciation. Representatives were presented with TIC monogrammed golf shirts for a "TIC Representative Appreciation Day" held this past July. Appreciation is also demonstrated throughout the year with holiday parties and the celebration of other special occasions, such as birthdays. A regular program, known as "Bagel Fridays", provides bagels and cream cheese for representatives as a special treat on Fridays.

Refresher Training

The "Telephone Doctor" tapes are also used for monthly refresher training. Each month every representative is required to watch one of the videos, based on an area of weakness. The TIC manager then discusses the tape with the representative in relation to their job performance. By minimizing the tape viewing to two representatives at a time, focus on the tape is maximized and the discussion after the tape encourages representatives to retain the material.

The LIRR also provides refresher training to representatives on an as needed basis. In the fall 2003, the TIC expects to conduct a two day intensive "Quality Assurance Workshop" for staff focusing on specific areas of customer service including how to handle customer conflicts.

Every Friday, the *Weekend Report* is issued to all clerks and supervisors. This report details upcoming track work programs, schedule changes, special service advisories, upcoming tours, promotions and other relevant issues. New issues are explained and discussed on a one-to-one meeting with a supervisor or manager.

Metro-North Railroad

Customers obtain telephone travel information from customer service representatives at the Customer Information Center (CIC). The CIC handles call volumes of 2.5 million customers annually and 7,000 daily. Daily call volumes increase to 14 - 21,000 during the summer due to the increase in discretionary riders, inquiries about one day getaway packages and special promotions, on

holidays, and during snowstorms.¹³ The CIC operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Hiring Practices

CIC customer service representative positions are filled from a pool of union employees as well as outside applicants.¹⁴ As is the practice at the LIRR, applications from clerical employees are filled through a bid process. Notices of job vacancies are sent to the appropriate union for posting. If the jobs have not been filled after two weeks, through the bidding process with a current clerical employee, other MNR union employees with an “Application to Transfer to Another Craft/Occupation” may be considered. The notices are also posted for outside applicants. Outside applicants are recruited from postings on the MTA/Metro-North official public agency website, New York State Department of Labor, career offices of colleges and universities, and a variety of trade and mainstream newspapers and publications.

Applicants submit a resume to the MNR Human Resources Department. Some customer service experience is required. Applicants are required to take the Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) test to assess their preferences and customer service aptitude for the job. They must also take a TCU test (language, computation, ability to follow written directions and coding skills).

Upon successful completion of the tests and a background investigation, the applicant is invited for an interview with staff from the Human Resources Department and the manager of the Customer Information Center. The minimum hiring qualifications are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10. Minimum Hiring Qualifications for MNR Customer Service Representatives

In House Union Job Applicants	Outside Agency Job Applicants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MNR administered TCU written test (Language, computation, ability to follow written directions and coding skills). • Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) test. • Customer service experience. • Seniority where applicable. • Interview where applicable. 	<p>Same Requirements for In-House Union Job Applicants.</p> <p>Two years of customer service experience strongly preferred.</p>

¹³ Average call figures include calls to the Customer Information Center as well the automated touch-tone information line.

¹⁴ At MNR, customer service representative positions serve in different capacities in several different departments.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

As of August 2003, MNR employed 25 customer service representatives, 18 telephone information operators and seven public address operators split between 125th Street and the Operation Control Center at Grand Central Terminal. Four supervisors manage the 25 personnel. Unlike LIRR, the supervisor position at MNR is non-union. Supervisor qualifications require MNR customer service experience. Telephone operator experience is preferred, but not required. Three of the four current supervisors are former telephone operators, the fourth was previously a train conductor.

Training Practices

CIC supervisors provide the job training for newly hired customer service representatives (in-house union and outside agency). Developed by MNR's Customer Service Department management team, the training is based on a program used by Burlington-Northern Railroad, customer experience and other sources on the subject.¹⁵ Since 1999, all new CIC customer service representatives have received this training.

As part of the effort to change the culture of the Center, an automated telephone system was installed and a new intranet system was developed specifically for the Center in conjunction with MNR's Information Technology Department. The goal of the intranet and information technology, which is still evolving, is to eliminate paper and to make the massive amount of information easier for customer service representatives to access by computer. The computers also serve as training tools.

As of September 2002, customer service representatives are trained to read a large plasma screen at a glance, which indicates the status of delayed or cancelled Metro-North or Amtrak trains through the use of the Visual Train Tracking System (VTTS).¹⁶ Representatives are also taught how to access a range of train schedule, station, intermodal transfers, feeder bus lines and fare information.

Training for new customer service representatives, hired from outside the agency, involves a formal 14 day intensive course. New customer service representatives, who were awarded the positions through the in-house union bid system or transferred through the "Application to Transfer to Another Craft/Occupation" process, undertake the same training on an informal basis

¹⁵ The two key books are: ***Customer Driven Competition: Moving from Talk to Action*** by R. Whitley and ***Managing Knock Your Socks Off Service*** by C. Bell and R. Zemke.

¹⁶ Visual Train Tracking System (VTTS) is a non geographic positioning system that indicates and records train locations based upon a central computer record of route and track signals. Telephone representatives can see the specific time a train passed a particular point.

over the 30 day initial qualification period.¹⁷ The CIC supervisors who conduct the new hire training review their instruction techniques with two managers. The two managers are former trainers in MNR's Training Department and have extensive experience in the design, development and delivery of formal training programs.

The 14 day training consists of two sections: MNR facilities, stations and services training and basic telephone technique training. The training sessions are provided as new personnel are hired during the first 14 days on the job. The training familiarizes new employees with all MNR facilities, stations, lines and services by requiring them to go on scavenger hunts in Grand Central Terminal and to take written tests. Employees are taught how to handle telephone calls through specific "techniques for telephone excellence" and to give customers an "intelligent choice."

Interactive classroom sessions incorporate technique videos, personal experiences and group exercises. New employees also spend time with other employees and supervisors listening to how they handle telephone calls. At the end of the 14 day period, new employees handle a call on their own, while other employees and supervisors listen in. The handling of the call by the employee is then critiqued and suggestions are made for improvement. There is also a question and answer period.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

MNR telephone customer service representatives, as at LIRR, have access to a wide range of information to enable them to answer customer questions and concerns. The computerized CIC information system, described previously, provides telephone operators not only with information about the status of specific trains, but also information about connecting services (MNR, NYC Transit, LIRR and other transit agencies); city, town and village statistics; the locations of institutions and landmarks within the MNR service region; MNR stations; promotional packages; fares; and lost and found services. Local station information, for example, includes photographs, local maps, parking information, special needs access, station hours, transfer and bus connection information. Customer service representatives refer customer complaints and more complex questions to the Customer Relations Unit.

Many of the MNR stations are serviced by a variety of bus providers. Bus information is classified according to a three-tier system, depending upon the necessity, frequency of use, and access to and from the station. If the bus is classified as Tier I, the representative provides the customer with the bus schedule information. For Tier II buses, the representative provides the

¹⁷ The in-house union initial thirty day qualification period can be extended at the discretion of management.

telephone number and basic hours of bus service operation. For Tier III buses, the representative provides the customer with the bus service telephone number.

When customer service representatives report to work and log into the computer, they are required to read a “hot sheet”, which lists daily service advisories and employee information on the screen. Employees must acknowledge that they have read the information before they sign in.

When employees discover problems with the information provided on the system, such as an incorrect map or telephone number, they send an e-mail describing the issue to what is known as a “punch list”, which is automatically forwarded to ten supervisors. Supervisors must respond to the employee within 24 hours. The employee may call a supervisor to discuss the issue if a response is not received.

MNR plans to integrate the TRIPS123 system into the CIC as another tool for customer service representatives to use in accessing travel information for customers. Specific plans for how it will be integrated with MNR's existing systems has yet to be determined.

Evaluating Performance

Five years ago, good customer service at the CIC was measured, as it is at the LIRR, by the number of telephone calls answered. The quality of the information provided by the customer service representative to the customer was not evaluated. The Customer Service Department sought to change the culture of the Center by evaluating calls according to the quality of information provided and handling of a call. Customer service representatives are now considered salespersons for MNR service.

CIC supervisors monitor the quality of customer service and telephone etiquette provided by customer service representatives on a daily and weekly basis. Supervisors have daily coaching for employees who have consistent problems with providing adequate telephone customer service. Employees who do not improve performance within a given period of time face progressive discipline and/or disqualification.

Supervisors at MNR provide weekly coaching for employees consisting of individual meetings to review recorded telephone calls handled during the course of the week by each customer service representative. This coaching process is part of their peer review and considered part of their training. The employee is also given a written evaluation. The meetings, similar to the monthly meetings at the LIRR, are seen as a friendly exchange of information and an opportunity to provide constructive feedback. Meetings tend to last half an hour.

Employee performance excellence is recognized through an Employee of the Month program, where employee letters of commendation are posted on a bulletin board.

MNR customer service representatives meet on a monthly basis with MNR's Marketing Department to go over new promotional packages and to receive relevant training. Employees also have the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback to the Marketing Department based upon their customer experience.

Refresher Training

The CIC has developed a major refresher training effort known as "Phase Two Technique Training" for customer service representatives. "Phase Two Technique Training" is a one day, eight hour course taught by CIC supervisors to all qualified employees. MNR expects to deliver this training at least every two years. The training is offered during normal office hours; employees are paid for overtime. The course is interactive and participatory, with a focus on team building and professional and helpful telephone techniques. The training also emphasizes being proactive in probing information from customers to ensure a complete response to customer needs.

New York City Transit

At New York City Transit, customers call the Transit Information Center (TIC) general information line to get travel information, inquire about MetroCard and reduced fare issues, and file compliments and complaints. Customers also use the line to report service problems. A walk-in Customer Service Center (CSC) is also located at Transit Headquarters in Brooklyn where customers can obtain travel and transit information in person.

The TIC handles call volumes of 3.2 million annually and 8,800 daily. The staff has numerous language capabilities including Spanish, Russian, French and Mandarin. For languages outside of the staff's abilities, the TIC has a contract with Verizon to provide interpreting and translation services for 160 different languages.

The TIC is open 24 hours, seven days a week. In the August 2003, MTA-Wide Preliminary 2004 Financial Plan, NYC Transit's budget includes a proposal to reduce the hours to 6:00 am to 10:00 pm, seven days a week.

Hiring Practices

Full-time transit customer service specialist positions are unionized, but part-time positions are not. The TIC is budgeted for both full-time and part-time

employees, however, due to a hiring freeze that has been in effect since October 2001, the TIC has been limited to hiring part-time workers. Three part-timers have been hired for each full-time vacancy. NYC Transit recruits applicants for these part-time positions through their internal weekly job posting bulletin published by the Human Resources Department or from job postings on the official public MTA/NYC Transit website.

Transit customer service specialist positions require a certain level of education or combination of customer service experience, the ability to use a keyboard and computer, verbal communication and customer service skills. In addition to an in-person interview, all candidates must take a typing and grammar skills test and provide a writing sample. The minimum qualifications are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11. Minimum Hiring Qualifications for NYC Transit Customer Service Specialists

In House Union Job Applicants	Outside Agency Job Applicants
<p>NYC Transit currently only hired outside agency job applicants (for part-time positions). (August 2003)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baccalaureate degree from an accredited college; OR • Associate degree from an accredited college and one year of satisfactory full time experience in a customer service or public information capacity; OR • High School Diploma and two years of satisfactory, full-time experience in a customer service or public information capacity; OR • Education and/or experience, which is equivalent to one of the above. • Computer skills. • Excellent verbal ability and customer service skills. • NYC Transit administered typing and grammar tests. • Writing sample.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

NYC Transit employs approximately 70 full-time transit customer service specialists,¹⁸ who report to 10 to 12 customer service agent supervisors. Customer service agent positions require customer service experience. Promotional opportunities are available for customer service specialists who have excelled in their jobs.

Training Practices

New customer service specialists who work in the TIC and CSC participate in a six week training program taught by two training professionals from Transit’s Training Department. The training and materials cover: how to research travel

¹⁸ The 70 full-time positions include a mix of full- and part-time positions. One full-time position is equivalent to three part-time positions.

information, knowledge of subway and bus routes, preparing travel itineraries, how to use maps, subway and bus schedules throughout the tri-state area, customer sensitivity techniques and MetroCard policy. Customer service specialists also receive training in how to handle calls from foreign language customers and from customers with disabilities.

The training is conducted through a mix of lectures, videos, PowerPoint presentations, workbook exercises, role-playing, field trips and written documents, such as scripts to guide the telephone conversation. Trainees are also shown a video about New York City neighborhoods and the history of NYC Transit.

The customer sensitivity training focuses on cultural and language awareness, assisting people with disabilities, handling threatening telephone calls and dealing with difficult or irate callers.

The subway route map training provides customer service specialist trainees with knowledge of both the subway and bus transit system, which is a prerequisite for training on the automated travel information system, known as the Transportation Itinerary Planning System (TRIPS123). The examination of route maps and schedules focuses on learning how each bus and train line runs during a 24 hour period, identifying the names of transfer stations and bus stops, learning the transfer options for each individual train and bus, ways to identify stations with cross street names, and how to read and interpret bus and subway schedules.

As part of a “hands-on” approach to solidify textbook study with practical application, trainees take a simulated ride through the entire subway system with one fare using all of the information learned from the subway map.

Bus route map training further dissects and evaluates each bus route. Most bus routes are studied from end to end to further instill familiarity with the layout and technical structure of bus maps. Express Bus routes are taught in similar fashion and compared to local routes.

Once trainees have completed the manual system review, they are taught how to use the computer to generate schedules and itineraries. Since the current computer system, known as the On-line Transit Information System (OTIS), will be replaced by the TRIPS123 in fall 2003, trainees are taught how to use both systems. Trainees are also taught how to incorporate the information provided by TRIPS123 with hard-copy customer service data, which may not be included in the TRIPS123 system. This combination of computer and hard-copy material assists agents in giving proper travel directions. Trainees also learn to read planned bus diversions and subway service diversions, known as General Orders.

After trainees are assigned to their work location, they may be required to take other department specific training, focusing on: MetroCard, the Complaint Line and the switchboard. The MetroCard training covers the MetroCard product, the reduced fare policy and how to resolve customer issues. The Complaint Line training focuses on how to accept customer telephone complaints, how to manage a conversation under difficult circumstances, how to deal with irate customers and how to communicate effectively by improving voice quality. The switchboard training includes using the telephone directory and call switching procedures.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

OTIS is an information database used by phone agents to provide NYC bus and subway travel directions to callers on 718-330-1234. Agents enter origin and destination points into their desktop computers to obtain scheduling and route information. It is a UNIX based operating system that relies on multiple servers to protect against failures.

The system uses a geographical database to plot itineraries and display service in an area. The software interprets electronic files that contain route and scheduling information, which is updated as schedules change. Phone specialists access the information by logging into the system using a login and password. The system will be replaced by the new TRIPS123 system.

The RTO Control Center or Bus Command Center relay customer service delays to call center supervisors who then advise phone specialists of the delays. Specialists can also hear the supervisor's recorded delay notifications on the TIC's voice messaging system without leaving their workstations and can receive written notification alerts from management. The Marketing Department provides the call center with written information on General Orders. These are also posted on the MTA website.

Evaluating Performance

Non-union employees have a 90 day probation period in which managers evaluate their performance. The employee enters the union after 60 days. The performance of an employee is rigorously documented and discussed with the employee within the 90 day period. Union employees have a one year probationary period to determine or "qualify" that they have the necessary skills for the job. If they do not qualify, the union employee bid is not approved.

NYC Transit uses a number of evaluation tools to measure the effectiveness of their training and customer service specialist ability. Each training section tests the trainee's retention of the material. Trainees are also required to sit with an experienced agent for 21 hours and observe their performance in "live" situations. A 25 question final examination completes the training. A score of

ninety percent or better is required to pass the test. One re-test is permitted. Those who fail the re-test are released from employment.

Customer service agents audit customer service specialists on an ongoing basis after the training. The audits are remote monitoring of live calls, which are evaluated according to a hundred percent scale. A grade of 85 percent is required to pass.

Further training is administered if an employee does not meet the requirements of the audits. If problems persist after training, disciplinary actions are taken. "Side by Side" monitoring, where a supervisor sits with the specialist is also conducted. Calls are also monitored by tape and extensive test calls on every topic are made monthly.

Specialists with the best performance are recognized weekly and monthly. To qualify, the specialists must meet performance criteria and have no disciplinary action within six months.

Refresher Training

Customer service agents may recommend refresher training in stress management, telephone tips, computer basics and writing techniques for customer service specialists. NYC Transit provides refresher training both in-house as well as external training seminars by outside professionals.

Long Island Bus

At Long Island Bus (LI Bus) customers receive telephone travel information from travel information agents at the Call Center. The LI Bus Call Center receives 172,000 calls annually and 600 calls daily. The Call Center operates Monday through Saturday from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm. The Center is closed on Sundays. A pre-recorded message regarding service changes and general LI Bus information is available when the Center is closed.

LI Bus travel information agents facilitate trip planning, respond to fare and MetroCard questions, send out mailers with bus schedules upon request, system maps, record service advisories on the answering system, report complaints and commendations, and help recover lost and found items.

Hiring Practices

Travel information agent positions at the Call Center are filled from a pool of in-house union employees as well as outside applicants. Travel information agents are considered clerical employees and are represented by the Transit Workers Union (TWU). Similar to the LIRR, applications from clerical union employees

are filled through a bid process. Outside applicants are recruited through the official public agency and MTA website as well as through advertisements in newspapers. Travel information agents may also transfer from the paratransit reservation agent position.

Minimum qualifications for personnel who apply for travel information agent positions are a High School Diploma or equivalent and one year of customer service experience. Other minimum and preferred qualifications for the travel information agent position are summarized in Table 12.

Table 12. Minimum and Preferred Qualifications for LI Bus Travel Information Agents.

In House Union Job Applicants	Outside Agency Job Applicants
<p><u>Required Qualifications:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High School Diploma and/or equivalent experience. • Minimum of one year of customer service experience. • Ability to function well under the close supervision of an immediate supervisor. • Ability to provide accurate information in a clear, concise, courteous and quick manner. • Ability to think clearly and objectively under pressure and deal with difficult customers and situations in a professional manner. • Ability to follow oral and written instructions. • Ability to process new information quickly and correctly. • Ability to read maps. • Have a solid knowledge of Nassau County. • Have a pleasant telephone voice and personality. <p><u>Preferred Skills:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone customer service experience. • Bi-lingual skills. 	<p>Same Requirements for In-House Job Applicants.</p>

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

The LI Bus Call Center employs seven full-time travel information agents, one specialist who acts as the lead agent and one supervisor. Supervisors are required to have at least one year of experience as a LI Bus travel information agent as a prerequisite for promotion. Five of the seven information travel agents have served in this position for more than 20 years.

Training Practices

Travel information agents participate in a two week training program that is conducted by the Call Center management. The first week of the ten days of training are spent with a supervisor focused on learning the computer and telephone systems, mapping, scheduling and telephone etiquette. The following

days are spent with the lead agent who serves as a mentor, practicing the skills learned.¹⁹

Topics covered in the training include: defining the customer; recognizing basic customer service skills; the importance of customer service; the skills needed to achieve good customer service; and the importance of a professional presentation. The training stresses three basic rules of customer service: provide reliable and expert service, be courteous and patient and avoid arguments.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

The Service Planning and Safety Divisions alert the Call Center by phone and through e-mail about detours and service adjustments, such as parades and bus stop changes, as they become known. Unplanned “real-time” events, e.g., accidents affecting traffic conditions, are routinely reported by the Command Center by phone.

The Call Center uses the Trapeze program, which is a state-of-the-art software application that provides curb-to-curb trip planning for Able-Ride customers. Once initial data is loaded, the system’s operation is fully automated and provides such information as addresses, maps and bus stop locations. According to LI Bus staff, Trapeze is well-suited for the needs of LI Bus customers as it provides a high level of detail about Nassau County. The Service and Planning Division employs Trapeze and updates it whenever new schedules are implemented.

Plans to integrate the Trips123 program as part of the LI Bus’ Call Center Telephone Information Center are tied in with the MTA’s overall plan for implementing the program. As of August 2003, LI Bus has provided digitized information from the Trapeze program to the consulting firm that is developing the Trips123 system.

Evaluating Performance

Supervisors conduct ten regular quality control audits per month for every travel information agent. Supervisors monitor conversations between customer and agent to ensure that LI Bus’ standards are being met and to provide immediate feedback to the travel information agent. Supervisors also monitor the number of calls and duration of calls by an agent. These statistics may generate increased audit attention of particular agents.

There are no formal incentive or recognition programs for LI Bus Call Center employees. However, once a week, breakfast is brought in for the Call Center employees.

¹⁹ Written correspondence with Long Island Bus, August 12, 2003.

Refresher Training

A four hour supplemental class on customer service was initiated in the spring 2001. All Call Center personnel, travel information agents and paratransit reservation agents receive this refresher training on an annual basis. A newly revised customer service training program will be implemented during the fourth quarter of 2003. The program is being developed and will be administered by LI Bus' Division of Human Resources - Training and Development. The course includes role playing scenarios, sharing of experiences and resolutions, conflict resolution and stress management techniques. A review of the material covered is provided at the end of the course. Students are also asked for their feedback on the course structure and material.

RAILROAD AND SUBWAY CONDUCTORS

Railroad conductors are a key and immediate link between transit passengers and the other personnel directly involved in the provision of train service: train engineers, tower operators and train movement personnel. Railroad customers often question railroad conductors about schedules, stop locations, connecting service and local station and town information.

Subway train and platform conductors and passenger controllers have similar roles. They all can respond to customers' questions about subway service and connections to specific trains. At busy key stations, platform conductors and controllers help passengers to safely board and alight from crowded trains and ensure trains leave the station in a timely fashion.

The responsibilities of these positions are similar in that all conductors are responsible for safe operation of the train over the road, doors and announcements. Subway conductors, however, do not collect or inspect transportation fare media, handle cash or walk the aisles of the cars.

Due to the varied train operations and responsibilities of these positions, the MTA operating agencies use different processes to hire and train applicants, access customer service information, evaluate employee performance and provide ongoing refresher training.

Long Island Rail Road

Hiring Practices

The hiring of LIRR assistant conductors and conductors is carried out through an extensive assistant conductor pre-hire qualification process and training program. The conductor position is a promotional opportunity from the LIRR assistant conductor position. Applicants from outside the agency must apply for and serve as LIRR assistant conductors prior to promotion to conductor.

Individuals, who have conductor experience from other railroads, are hired as assistant conductors and are required to go through the assistant conductor training program. This is due to the information that is unique to the LIRR equipment, revenue, operating rules and physical characteristics. There are also union requirements regarding conductor seniority and roster position.

The minimum qualifications for assistant conductors and conductors are the same, the most definitive being a High School Diploma. Additionally, conductors must have a minimum of two years of LIRR assistant conductor experience prior to appointment. Based upon need, the LIRR management requires assistant

conductors to qualify as conductors. Conductors are required to pass additional written and practical tests. The minimum hiring requirements are summarized in Table 13.²⁰

Table 13. Minimum Hiring Requirements for LIRR Assistant Conductors and Conductors.

In-House and Outside Agency Job Applicants (for Assistant Conductor)	In-House Applicants (for Conductor)
<p><u>Required Qualifications:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High School Diploma. • Ability to demonstrate effective communication and interpersonal skills. • Prior customer service experience (including handling of cash transactions) (Preferred). • College credits (Preferred). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same qualifications, preferred skills, written and practical qualifying exams as required for outside job applicants for assistant conductor positions. • Minimum of two years of LIRR assistant conductor experience.

The LIRR Human Resources and Transportation Departments generally hold two or three open house meetings for assistant conductor applicants every year. Applicants are recruited through notices in local metropolitan area newspapers, the MTA and LIRR websites and other LIRR employees. Approximately 40 percent of those eventually hired are LIRR employee referrals.

The three hour open house sessions provide an overview of the responsibilities and training required of an assistant conductor. A video, “Miracle on 34th Street”, is shown to applicants to introduce the totality of railroad operations. LIRR staff conducts fifteen minute exploratory interviews with applicants to go over individual resumes and applications as well as experience with customer service and cash handling. The staff also administers math and vocabulary tests. Of the 400 invitations sent to attend the open house, approximately 260 people attend. Of those attendees, roughly two hundred pass the pre-qualification requirements.

The second step of the application process is a general background check to verify application information, determine employment reliability and credit worthiness. About 100 of the applicants usually make it through this step.

For the third step, applicants are invited to a formal interview with a panel of two LIRR managers, one from Human Resources and one from the Transportation Department. Real life scenarios are presented to applicants to see how they would handle certain situations. Applicants are also asked to write an essay about how they would relate to customers. Roughly 60 out of the 100 applicants are invited to proceed.

The fourth step is a one day course, held on a Saturday, which includes signal and railroad rules. Applicants are asked to return a month later to take a test on

²⁰ LIRR Career Opportunity Bulletin for Assistant Conductor, CO-03-009, February 24, 2003.

the material. 30 to 40 of the applicants are usually invited to continue with the application process after this step.

The fifth step begins the first phase of the formal assistant conductor training program, administered jointly by the Human Resources and Transportation Departments. Human Resources Department staff present the material and Transportation Department staff administer tests and regularly evaluate the trainees. Applicants are not paid to take the course, which is held two weekday evenings and a full day on Saturdays over 15 or 16 weeks. The course covers ticket selling, the book of rules, the air brake and information required under federal and state government regulations, such as CPR training and emergency preparation. The importance of customer service is stressed throughout the course.

Finally, trainees are required to pass a physical exam in addition to tests and satisfactory evaluations.

The LIRR assistant conductor hiring process is summarized in Table 14.

Table 14. LIRR Assistant Conductor Hiring Process

Step	Process
1.	Open house information session for potential applicants, initial interview and testing.
2.	Background check.
3.	Formal applicant interview with a panel of LIRR personnel.
4.	One day seminar on signal and railroad rules followed by a test on the material a month later.
5.	15 to 16 weeks assistant conductor training course (which applicants are required to pass before they are formally hired).
6.	Physical exam.

Trainees who have completed the course successfully are hired by LIRR and continue with phase two of the training (four weeks).

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

As of August 2003, there are approximately 305 assistant conductors and 755 conductors working at the LIRR. Assistant conductors and conductors are directly supervised by 28 transportation managers.

On-train personnel, exclusive of the engineer, always include a qualified conductor and an assistant conductor as a minimum. The assistant conductor on-train position may be filled by an assistant conductor or qualified conductor. Assistant conductors and qualified conductors may also be assigned to work as ticket collectors on specific trains or specific trip segments, as needed. In this capacity, assistant conductors or conductors collect passenger tickets and do not function as conductors. All three train service personnel positions are directly supervised by the 28 transportation managers. The transportation managers, a first level non-union management position, are responsible for the day to day

transportation operations. In that capacity, the transportation managers supervise a range of personnel who are involved in these operations including: on-train personnel, assistant conductors, conductors, ticket collectors and engineers, in addition to assistant station masters, ushers and yardmasters. Each manager is typically responsible for 38 employees.

Transportation managers must have successfully completed a one year Transportation Department Management Development - Transportation Supervisor Training Program. This program is open to most Transportation Department operating personnel, but spaces in the program are available only as the need to replace transportation managers arises. This mentor type program prepares trainees for management and includes a rotation through different terminals and departments.

The Transportation Department managers report to nine lead field, functional or terminal managers, who manage a combination of field activities, key terminal locations and functional areas, such as the following of railroad rules. The nine lead transportation managers report to ten superintendents.

The supervisory structure and job responsibilities for assistant conductors, conductors and transportation managers are summarized in Table 15.

Table 15. LIRR Assistant Conductor, Conductor Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities. (August 2003)

	Assistant Conductors, Conductors, (and Ticket Collectors) Report to ☞	Transportation Managers Report to ☞	Lead Transportation Managers Report to ☞	Superintendents
Positions	305 Assistant Conductors 755 Conductors	28 Transportation Managers	9 Lead Transportation Managers	10 Superintendents
Job Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe, efficient movement of customers. • Make announcements. • Compute fares, sell tickets and make change. • Perform various freight and/or yard movement operations. • Mechanical trouble shooting. • Minor repair of equipment • Handle emergency situations, coupling and uncoupling train cars. • Throw switches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee daily terminal operations for MU, diesel and passenger operations in assigned territory-including power equipment and crew needs. • Coordinate with department superintendents to handle trial investigations and assign supervision for appropriate coverage. • Conduct engine, train crew and equipment performance checks for rule and safety compliance. • Direct operations during disruptions. • Confer with other departments for rapid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make decisions about train routing through Jamaica Station, Penn Station and Flatbush Avenue Station. • Make decisions about crew and equipment manipulation during the AM or PM to address customer needs. • Develop work schedules and areas of responsibility for Transportation Managers and other employees within assigned territory/ tour. • Coordinate matters related to trials and investigations. • Evaluate the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct, oversee and supervise the activities of transportation managers and supervisors to meet/exceed department goals. • Develop/ maintain operating procedures to focus on short- and long term customer strategies. • Oversee/ evaluate the daily performance of train operating and crew performance. • Investigate reports involving department employees, determine training

		servicing and equipment repair to meet requirements at operating terminals and maintenance of way programs.	efficiency of train schedules, crew and equipment to improve OTP and cost management. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead/guide operating personnel to promote safety and compliance. 	needs, and ensure that discipline is uniformly, fairly and equitably assessed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish/ maintain a system to measure/ assess services provided, customer needs and corporate objectives/ policy. • Direct/ oversee development and growth of front line managers and supervisors.
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Training Practices

The second course of the training for assistant conductors concentrates on the train equipment. The four week (17 day), full time program consists of three weeks of training under the auspices of the Human Resources Department and one week of on-the-job mentored field experience supervised by the Transportation Department.

The assistant conductor training program is taught by former LIRR conductors, who are certified technical trainers. The trainers are required to have been qualified LIRR conductors and have earned a technical training certificate.

While the three week training segment is mostly lecture, it is broken up with field visits, practical exercise and role playing techniques. The first two days of the training consist of the general orientation overview of LIRR given to all new Rail Road employees including diversity issues, equal employment opportunities and the federally mandated "Right to Know" safety training. Day three includes a visit to the Ticket Receiver Department (which functions as the liaison between the Finance and Transportation Departments), familiarization with Penn Station and the West Side Yard, and discussions and lectures about fare collection. Days four and five focus on tunnel evacuation and meeting with the unions, and day six is spent coupling and uncoupling the cars and engines and working the switches. Days seven and eight are spent on revenue service trains for on-the-job training with the instructors.

Assistant conductor trainees spend the next week one-on-one with a mentor. Mentors are qualified conductors who have been chosen by the Transportation Department because of their consistent outstanding performance and absence of customer complaints. Many of the mentors who participate have benefited from the mentor program themselves. The mentors are sent a letter outlining the expectations for the day and a check list of items to be covered per given day. The mentor training focuses on making announcements on board trains, learning how to provide quality customer service and practicing operating procedures. Mentors evaluate trainee performance according to a standard evaluation form.

After the week of mentoring, the trainees have four additional days of training, which cover crime intervention, familiarization with all the terminals and meeting the supervision staff, selecting job assignments and graduation. Final exams are administered to the trainees by the rules examiners for each portion of the training: the rules, air brake, ticket and passenger train emergency preparedness (PTEP). A midterm exam is also given during the rules training.

The customer service portion of the training, integrated throughout the program, makes use of videos (Mrs. Timm's "Golden Rule") and role playing techniques to focus on topics, such as making announcements and helping customers to board and alight from the train.

The final day of training concludes with a graduation ceremony and a motivational lecture about the importance of safety, communication and customer service.

All assistant conductors are required to qualify as conductors, between two and five years after initial assistant conductor qualification, as is stipulated in their labor agreement with LIRR. Failure to qualify as a conductor will result in the termination of employment.

The conductor training program consists of 21 days of training including topics, such as rules, physical characteristics, air brake and operating procedures in New York's Penn Station. An additional five days are allocated to conductors for on-the-job mentor training to allow candidates to overcome their fear of being in charge and become comfortable with their new responsibilities. The mentor uses a standard form to evaluate the trainee's performance.

Tests are given in each one of the specific topic areas. The assistant conductor trainee must pass all of the tests prior to promotion to conductor. While there is no specific customer service portion of the training, customer service issues are covered within the rules as well as during the mentor training. The importance of customer service is reinforced on the last day of training and graduation.²¹

The LIRR Human Resources and Employee Training and Development Departments look periodically at other agency training provided to compare and update their training curriculum. LIRR personnel also meet informally as a group with MNR, NYC Transit and NJ TRANSIT on an annual basis to discuss and compare training programs.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

While LIRR's M1, M3, Bi-level and M7 cars have design variations, conductors use similar processes to communicate to train engineers, LIRR Movement

²¹ Written correspondence with Donald Corkery, LIRR Director of Employee Development and Training, Department of Human Resources, August 7, 2003.

Bureau or Tower personnel and passengers to access and convey customer service information. On the M1 and M3 cars, assistant conductors, conductors and train engineers communicate with one another using radio Channel 4. This is distinct from the public address system used to speak to passengers. The Bi-level cars have computer screens in the engineer's cab to trouble shoot car, door and other mechanical problems. The screens do not identify the actual location of the problems.

The M7 cars have an additional intercom system (ICS) instead of a radio system, which allows intra-train communication to bypass the public address system. The computer screens in the engineer's cab have the added capability of identifying the location of train problem.

The train crew communicates with LIRR Train Movement Bureau (TMB) and tower personnel on three radio channels. Channel 2 is used for transmissions between train crews and the TMB, while Channels 1 or 3 are used for transmissions between train crews and the towers. The TMB does not typically monitor Channels 1 or 3 and the towers do not usually monitor Channel 2.²²

One long standing problem hampering communication between the train crew, the towers and the TMB is the periodic communication "dead spots" along segments of some of the branches at the eastern end of Long Island. The LIRR has had problems convincing some of the surrounding communities to permit them to upgrade the communication equipment with new antennae. The Rail Road is currently conducting a study on the location of and ways to reduce communication system dead spots.

The Transportation Department has recently taken a more proactive approach to communicating to customers about service delays and other issues affecting service. The new protocol focuses on increasing LIRR's ability to support the train crew with fast and accurate information to provide to customers. The Department developed a flow chart for communication between the different control centers and has begun to make intelligent predictions about the length of time it will take to restore normal service to better inform customers and facilitate their travel options. While this has always been done on an ad hoc basis, the new protocol calls for a more formalized practice.

In an effort to improve the direct communication to customers, the Transportation Department has recently created a new position of customer communication coordinator within the TMB. The customer communication coordinator monitors the activities taking place in the TMB and takes steps to notify the train crew and other appropriate personnel about up to the minute information and actions to be taken. The coordinator also prompts the train crew to update announcements.

²² August 4, 2003, MTA Office of Inspector General Report on April 25, 2002 Medical Emergency, MTA/OIG #2003-20L, p. 3.

One of the train crew is responsible for regularly monitoring the radio communications with the TMB.

Another new initiative to improve crew and agency emergency response time and techniques is a set of proper questions that assess a customer's medical problems. Issued to all train service and Transportation Department personnel in August 2003, the set of questions determines whether the emergency is life threatening and lays out a set of procedures and personnel responsibilities.

Evaluating Performance

To ensure customer service quality, the job performance of assistant conductors and conductors is evaluated in several different ways: by Transportation Department managers during and post probationary period, outside agency spot checkers, a special LIRR transportation test team, Transportation Department quarterly conferences and Transportation Department peers.

Transportation Department managers typically travel on ten quality train rides per month to observe and evaluate train crew performance. First year assistant conductor employees are on probation from the day they begin the second course of training. Employees are evaluated quarterly and jobs may be terminated without union representation. After the first year, employees may still be removed from service, but are subject to the conditions of the collective bargaining agreement.

The LIRR, in coordination with the MTA Audit Department, also contracts with a private company to conduct daily spot checks, whereby checkers pose as riders and fill out daily reports with regard to fare collection issues. The results of these reports are analyzed and provided to LIRR management on a monthly basis.

The LIRR also employs a transportation test team of train service employees (assistant conductors and conductors) to serve as train crew on select trains to assess conditions with regard to fare collection and staffing. Transportation managers select the trains on an ongoing basis from the monthly MTA Audit Department reports, cash fare reports and customer correspondence. The purpose is to assess staffing levels. Placement on the test team is considered a promotional opportunity for conductors who want to move into management positions.

The Transportation Department also organizes quarterly conferences, attended by the entire management staff including front line managers (such as assistant trainmaster, transportation managers and the test team) to discuss particular issues. The conference is particularly geared toward issues and challenges for front line managers. Personnel from other agencies, such as Amtrak often attend.

Excellent assistant conductor and conductor performance is recognized once or twice a year through the STAR program (Superior Transportation Announcement Recognition). The STAR program encourages Transportation Department colleagues to nominate employees they feel provide consistently outstanding performance. Selected individuals are invited to lunch with Transportation Department management. They are photographed, awarded a certificate and a pin.

LIRR also sends all train service personnel formal commendation letters based upon customer commendations, which highlight excellent performance by an individual.

The Transportation Department also holds an annual awards dinner to recognize those employees who have provided excellent service throughout the year. The LIRR President, senior staff, family members and guests attend the dinner.

Refresher Training

Assistant conductors and conductors are required to attend a four day refresher skills enhancement training course every two years. The four day course reviews the rules, the air brake, all new equipment and emergency preparedness.

Assistant conductors and conductors together with other LIRR front line personnel also receive the seven hour Roundtable training program, which focuses on customer service issues. As described previously,²³ the “roundtable training program was developed in January 2002 as a required refresher course for assistant train conductors, conductors, and other Transportation Department personnel to share experiences across departments and provide a broader perspective of railroad operations and customer service and communication issues. This program was so successful that it was subsequently expanded to include other front line personnel.

The morning session consists of a video providing a broad overview of the LIRR, four presentations on staff communication, safety and on-time performance, communication and railroad rules, followed by a discussion on the importance of message accuracy. The quote “the message is, the message received”, is used to focus participants on the importance of the words used to communicate. The morning session ends with an update on the Rail Road’s latest capital and special projects.

After lunch, participants discuss the concept of “situational awareness”, which refers to the importance of teamwork, focus, communication, attention to detail and safety, followed by an interactive dialogue with the general superintendent

²³ See discussion under LIRR Ticket Clerks and Station Agents, p. 10.

discussing issues and concerns raised by participants about delivering high quality customer service based on day-to-day real life experiences and situations. Senior management hears about problems that need to be resolved in the field and employees are given a broader view into railroad operations. The session also provides an opportunity to share information, where learning is not coming only from the Roundtable leaders, but the participants as well. The Roundtable program substantially contributes to changing the behavior of front line personnel. About 20 percent of Passenger Service Department employees have attended this course to date.

Metro-North Railroad

Hiring Practices

The process for hiring assistant conductors at MNR differs from that used at LIRR. While there is a pre-qualification process, it involves different tests and is not as extensive. Assistant conductor training begins after the applicant is hired. Similar to LIRR, MNR conductors are promoted from the assistant conductor position.

As is the case at LIRR, individuals who have conductor experience from other railroads are hired as assistant conductors and required to go through MNR’s assistant conductor training program. The equipment, revenue and operating procedures differ for every railroad, which requires that all personnel receive the same information and training. There are also union contractual requirements regarding conductor seniority and roster position.

The minimum qualifications for assistant conductors are the same, the most definitive being two years of work experience in customer service and/or cash handling. Assistant conductors are expected to qualify to be conductors within a year of appointment. Conductors are required to have passed the written and performance tests and comprehensive final exam as part of a conductor training program prior to promotion. Unlike LIRR, MNR applicants are not required to have a High School Diploma. The minimum hiring qualifications are summarized in Table 16.

Table 16. Minimum Hiring Requirements for MNR Assistant Conductors and Conductors.

In-House and Outside Agency Job Applicants (for Assistant Conductor)	In-House Applicants (for Conductor)
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<p>Required Qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MNR administrated written exam. • Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) test. • Two years work experience in customer service and/or cash handling. • Read and speak English fluently. • Communication skills. • Enjoy dealing with the general public. • Background investigation. • Seniority, where applicable. • Interview, where applicable. • Required to qualify as a conductor between the completion of 200 and 510 days of working as an assistant conductor. This qualification includes attendance in training sessions and the successful completion of written examinations. Failure to pass the examination(s) after three attempts will result in termination of employment. 	<p>Required Qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same qualifications, selection criteria, written and practical qualifying exams as required for outside job applicants assistant conductor positions. • Required to qualify as a conductor between the completion of 200 and 510 days of working as an assistant conductor. This qualification includes attendance in training sessions and the successful completion of written examinations. Failure to pass the examination(s) after three attempts will result in termination of employment.
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The MNR Human Resources Department requires applicants to take the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) test. Assistant conductor applicants are also tested on their math, language and mechanical comprehension skills as well as physical abilities.

Applicants who have achieved a certain score are invited for a formal panel interview. The interview is conducted with three MNR staff, one each from the Human Resources, Operation Services and Training Departments. The interview panel takes turns asking a structured set of questions about the applicant's previous work and other background experience, ability to handle different situations requiring good interpersonal skills, judgment and decision making abilities. The same three MNR staff members generally conduct all the interviews for a particular class of applicants.

Applicants also must undergo and clear a background check. The offer of a job is contingent upon passing a pre-placement medical exam.

The MNR assistant conductor hiring process is summarized in Table 17.

Table 17. MNR Assistant Conductor Hiring Process

Step	Process
1.	Review of resume for qualifications.
2.	Written examination (Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) test, math, language and mechanical comprehension skills tests).
3.	Background check (Background check for MNR employees includes safety, attendance, discipline history and performance).
4.	Panel interview.
5.	Physical abilities test.
6.	Selection committee: To review applicants' background check and interview results.
7.	Conditional offer.
8.	Pre-placement medical examination.
9.	Final offer and confirmation of hire date.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

As of August 2003, there are approximately 50 assistant conductors and 650 conductors at MNR. Assistant conductors and conductors are supervised by 16 operations managers. These operations managers report directly to six district superintendents.

The supervisory structure and job responsibilities of assistant conductors, conductors, operations managers, district superintendents and line superintendents are summarized in Table 18.

Table 18. MNR Assistant Conductor, Conductor Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities. (August 2003)

	Assistant Conductors, Conductors Report to	Operations Managers Report to	District Superintendents Report to	Line Superintendents
Positions	50 Assistant Conductors 650 Conductors	23 Operations Managers	6 District Superintendents	3 Line Superintendents
Job Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make clear announcements and answer customers' questions. • Prepare trains for service. • Compute fares, sell tickets and make change. • Prepare and submit cash reports. • Enforce train safety rules. • Operate doors at station stops and assist customers on and off trains. • Respond to medical emergencies, equipment breakdowns and evacuate customers in emergencies. • Assist with yard switching duties and make up trains. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervise assistant conductors, conductors and engineers. • Handle employee injuries. • Respond to emergencies. • Supervise yard masters. • Ensure consist compliance. • Conduct safety audits/evaluations to ensure compliance. • Conduct testing of conductors to ensure operation compliance with FRA regulations. • Conduct radar testing of train speeds as per FRA regulations. • Ensure on-time performance (OTP). • Evaluate train service personnel (on trains). • Conduct safety counseling. • Hold formal and informal employee incident investigations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervise operations managers. • Facilitate local safety committee agenda. • Chair/coordinate district operations personnel and train service. • Conduct safety audits to ensure compliance. • Schedule work of operations managers. • Interview assistant conductor job applicants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct departmental safety initiatives and support interdepartmental safety goals and objectives. • Manage and direct line service delivery functions affecting or time-performance, reliability, cleanliness, comfort, courtesy, communication and safety. • Lead and direct the activities of line and district management, coordinate those of interdepartmental management. • Promote communication and model respect for people. • Control line operating expenses in conformity with budget. • Coordinate the development and deployment of capital and maintenance operational work. • Support interdepartmental initiatives to protect the environment and operational compliance activities

Training Practices

Unlike LIRR, MNR training for assistant conductors is a compensated, seven week full day program, which includes one week of supervised on-the-job training. The average assistant conductor class size at MNR is ten. The drop out rate between the beginning of 2002 and September 2003 was seven percent. Topics covered in the training include: safety rules, revenue instruction, hazardous materials, train service manual, equipment orientation, system security, policies and procedures and emergency evacuation. The customer service and relations training portion is eight hours and is taught in four hour segments. MNR hopes to expand the customer relations training beyond the

current length. There are a total of 17 tests to be passed throughout the training course.

Initially developed by the MNR Training Department in 1994, MNR's customer relations training is conducted by MNR's Training and Development Department located in the Human Resources Division. This 31 member department provides 80,000 hours of training for almost 4,000 employees annually.²⁴ The Conductor Training Team runs the new hire training in addition to other courses. (See refresher training section.) Greater flexibility is achieved for training scheduling and logistics by using MNR staff. The new hire training program continues to be revised to incorporate new information. The same philosophy about customer service experience and service as is provided to MNR's CIC telephone customer service representatives is used for conductor training.

The customer relations training presented over the seven week period consists of five lessons: the customer and customer service; service attitude; communications skills; emotional customers; and special situations. The course curriculum incorporates games, class interaction and participation, videos and instruction. One game used as part of the training is the "Tone Game." The Tone Game focuses on nonverbal cues, body language, and tone of voice. Participants are handed a card with different emotions, such as sad, happy or angry and then must say the phrase "Ticket, Please" conveying that emotion. Class participants try to guess the emotion and tone that is portrayed. The point of the exercise is for trainees to think about their personal strengths and weaknesses.

The training also includes discussions about: the trainees' personal experiences and expectations about excellent service as well as the market segment of MNR customers, their differing needs and how service differences affect customer needs and objectives.

In 1995, commuters made up 57 percent of MNR's customers. Commuters tend to know the system well and often inform conductors and other MNR staff about day-to-day issues. Twenty-seven percent of MNR customers were discretionary riders, which translated into one of every four customers not being familiar with the system and requiring additional attention from conductors. The most recent figures for MNR's customer base show a higher discretionary ridership, which in turn affects the ways conductors need to relate to riders.

Promotion to the position of conductor requires assistant conductors to pass an additional ten week training program. Assistant conductors spend the first two weeks in the classroom where they review the Rulebook and Train Service Manual, which includes customer service requirements and other required documentation. There are regular tests and a few afternoons are spent on the equipment and in the yards. The second portion of the training focuses on field

²⁴ MNR Intranet website Training & Development

qualification, which includes designated walks and tours of the yards on each line. The candidate must pass both a written test on the characteristics of each of the mainline yards and a performance test that involves putting the rules together and backing-up a train.

The third and final portion of the conductor promotion training is the ride qualification. The candidates receive a ride schedule for each line and must ride and follow the study guide to learn the characteristics and speeds along the territory. Candidates are required to successfully pass a comprehensive exam at the end of the program.²⁵

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

While ACMU, M1, M2, M3, M4, M6, Comet II and Comet V cars have design variations, conductors use similar processes to communicate to train engineers, MNR Rail Traffic Controller (RTC) tower personnel and passengers to access and convey customer service information.

Communication between conductors and engineers on-board trains is usually done face to face. It is anticipated that all MNR conductors will have handheld radios by the end of 2003.²⁶ Other on-board methods are the public address system, the train intercom system or by the radio channel for the operational territory. MNR utilizes three separate road radio channels: channel 1 is dedicated to the Harlem Line territory, channel 2 for the Harlem Line territory, and channel 3 for the New Haven Line territory.

All communications between the Control Center and trains are conducted on the applicable radio road channel. All operating compartments must also have a working radio in addition to at least one other working radio on the train. In the case of service delays or emergencies, train service personnel contact the RTC for direction. Customer service information is relayed directly to conductors from the RTC. Conductors are required to make regular public address announcements as set forth in the Train Service Manual.

Evaluating Performance

Methods used to evaluate assistant conductor and conductor performance include: regular probationary period evaluations by Operations Services and Training Department managers; random MNR Customer Service Department on-board service quality inspections; regular MTA Audit Department on-board spot checks; and customer commendations and complaints received by telephone, letter or e-mail.

²⁵ Information obtained from e-mail correspondence with Delana Glenn, MNR Chief Training Officer.

²⁶ At the MNR Committee Meeting 9/17/03 it was stated that conductors would be equipped with handheld radios within the next 90 days.

Assistant conductors have a 60 day probationary period to determine if they have the skills to perform the job. Employees are observed performing their on-board duties and evaluated a minimum of four times by training instructors or managers during the sixty day period. Managers are particularly encouraged to do the evaluations. Customer service is included among the category of skills evaluated on the probation report. Conductors must receive a minimum average score of eighty-four to pass.

The MNR Customer Service Department has an inspection program whereby three full time inspectors are responsible for conducting regular audits of MNR facilities, train service and train crews. Service quality inspectors also handle a host of other customer service responsibilities.²⁷

The on-board train audits involve a sampling of stations and train rides to observe what customers experience. Train announcements are included as part of the checklist of items evaluated. The service quality inspector may instruct or re-instruct conductors on customer service issues; if the air conditioning is not working in a particular car, the inspector may ask the conductor to make an announcement. The inspector also makes recommendations on operating procedures. The information obtained from these daily inspection audits are sent back immediately upon completion and problems are forwarded via e-mail to the department manager.²⁸ These daily audits are also analyzed and reported as part of a monthly service quality report.

The MTA Audit Department contracts with a private vendor to conduct train service spot checks and evaluations to look for instances of fraud. Similar to the LIRR, the primary focus of these evaluations is on the collection of revenue, conductor customer service relations and interaction is also rated. Basic trend analysis of the data is provided to the Training Department to augment their programs.

Customer commendations and complaints received by telephone, letter or e-mail are another form of performance evaluation. Commendation letters are acknowledged by the employee's manager and placed in the employee's file. The employee's manager investigates any complaint and if it is valid, documentation is placed in the employee's file. The customer is sent a letter explaining MNR's policy and the follow-up action taken.

Excellent assistant conductor and conductor performance is recognized through the company wide annual President's Award program. While there are no recognition programs specifically designed for assistant conductors and

²⁷ See discussion under MNR Ticket Clerks and Station Agents, p. 15.

²⁸ An electronic Personal Data Assistant (PDA) system is used to relay the information back to the central computer system at headquarters and is automatically sent via e-mail to the appropriate MNR Departments.

conductors, conductors are traditionally well represented in this recognition program.

Refresher Training

MNR, like LIRR, is federally mandated to provide train crews with emergency, CPR and first aid procedural training every other year. The one day training course incorporates four hours in the classroom, two hours of equipment training and two hours in the rail yard. MNR plans to update this program with equipment familiarization to include training on the new M7 equipment. Employees receive overtime compensation for this training.

MNR has not provided any other train service refresher or skills enhancement training on a regular basis since 1997 due to budget cuts. Prior to 1998, refresher training was offered every two years.

New York City Transit

NYC Transit subway trains require different job responsibilities for conductors than LIRR and MNR. Train conductors, platform conductors, and passenger controllers work together to facilitate passenger use. Train conductors open and close train doors, make station stop announcements, and interact with the train operator (the driver) and the Rail Control Center. Platform conductors and platform controllers patrol platforms, assist passengers in entering and exiting the train, and "... assist in the timely dispatch of trains from key stations."²⁹

The two positions are very close in function. The primary goal of platform conductors is to provide customers with travel information. Platform conductors are generally found at high customer volume stations or locations with scheduled service changes. They also assist at terminal stations to make sure that no customers remain on the train before it turns around.³⁰ Platform controllers focus on reducing the time a train remains in the station by regulating the flow of customers as they enter and exit the train. When not involved in passenger volume movement, platform controllers provide service information to customers.³¹

Hiring Practices

Train and platform conductor and passenger controller positions are represented by the Transport Workers Union (TWU). The NYS Civil Service Law requires a

²⁹ Conductor position posting, C-X. The Rapid Transit Railroad Service Group 1-per diem and per hour positions. Code No. 91207.

³⁰ Technically referred to as going to the relay position.

³¹ Correspondence in response to PCAC request, from N. Ford, Chief of Service Delivery-Subways to M. Lombardi, Senior Vice President-Subways, August 13, 2003.

civil service exam to be taken prior to hiring. These conductor positions are considered promotional opportunities for in-house employees, such as station agent and station cleaner.

In-house applicants are required to take a civil service promotional exam. The score on the test is used to determine the placement of eligible applicants on a list. Applicants must receive a score of at least 70 percent to pass the test. The multiple choice test for conductors includes questions pertaining to:

... understanding and applying written and verbal instructions; using good judgment and taking proper action in emergencies or stressful situations; relating courteously and informatively to the public; the locations of major points of interest in New York City; and understanding military time...³²

The minimum qualifications required for train and platform conductors and passenger controllers are the same, the most definitive being a four year High School Diploma or equivalent. The minimum hiring qualifications are summarized in Table 19.

Table 19. Minimum Hiring Requirements for NYC Transit Train and Platform Conductors and Passenger Controllers.

In-House Applicants (for Train and Platform Conductors and Passenger Controllers)	Outside Agency Job Applicants (for Train and Platform Conductors and Passenger Controllers)
<u>Required Qualifications:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same qualifications as for outside job applicants. • Civil service promotional exam. 	<u>Required Qualifications:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High School Diploma or educational equivalent. • Ability to understand and effectively communicate in English. • Civil service open competitive exam.

After an interview, NYC Transit conducts a background check. Applicants are also required to take physical abilities, medical, drug and alcohol screening tests. The NYC Transit train and platform conductor and passenger controller hiring process is summarized in Table 20.

Table 20. NYC Transit Train and Platform Conductor and Passenger Controller Hiring Process.

Step	Process
1.	Interview.
2.	Background check.
3.	Physical abilities test.
4.	Medical exam.
5.	Drug and alcohol screening tests.

³² Notice of Examination, Conductor Exam No. 9003, NYC Transit Authority, March 1999.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

NYC Transit employs 2,978 conductors, 2,839 train assistant conductors, 70 platform conductors, and 14 passenger controllers.

Train and platform conductors and passenger controllers are supervised by 338 train service supervisors, 282 assistant train dispatchers and 407 train dispatchers. Train conductors and some platform conductors are supervised by train service supervisors.³³ Similarly, assistant train dispatchers and train dispatchers supervise platform conductors at key terminal locations. Assistant train dispatchers and train dispatchers are also responsible for platform conductors assigned to locations in support of scheduled service diversions. Assistant train dispatchers and train dispatchers supervise passenger controllers assigned to the Platform Controllers Unit. Passenger controller supervisors supervise passenger controllers.

Train service supervisors, assistant train and train dispatchers report directly to 20 line superintendents. Train service supervisors, assistant train and train dispatchers must pass a promotional civil service exam, have excellent attendance and operating records to qualify for these supervisory positions. Train service supervisors must also have at least two years as road train operators. Each line superintendent is responsible for managing a subway service line. Two superintendents of transportation operations, one for each subdivision, manage special projects, crew work assignments and timekeeping functions for each subdivision.

Line superintendents evaluate the train service supervisors quarterly and assistant train dispatchers and train dispatchers twice a year. Passenger controller supervisors are evaluated by one of the two superintendents of transportation operations bi-annually due to the nature of their work on multiple lines.

The supervisory structure and job responsibilities of train and platform conductors and passenger controllers and train service supervisors are summarized in Table 21.

³³ Train service supervisors oversee some platform conductors if platform conductors are placed under their jurisdiction due to the nature of a scheduled service diversion.

Table 21. NYC Transit Train and Platform Conductors and Passenger Controllers Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities. (August 2003)

	Train Conductors/ Platform Conductors/ Passenger Controllers Report to ②	Train Service Supervisors/ Assistant Train Dispatchers/ Train Dispatchers/ Platform Controller Supervisors Report to ②	Line Superintendents Report to ②	Supervisors of Transportation Operations
Position	2,978 train conductors 70 platform conductors 14 passenger controllers	338 train service supervisors 282 assistant train dispatchers 407 train dispatchers	20 line supervisors	2 supervisors of transportation operations
Job Responsibilities	<p>Train conductors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and close train doors. • Make station stop announcements. • Interact with the train operator. • Communicate with the Command Center as needed. <p>Platform conductors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in high volume key stations. • Provide train service and station/line direction information to customers. <p>Passenger Controllers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in high volume key stations. • Ensure customers enter and exit trains safely and expeditiously. 	<p>Train service supervisors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to emergencies to keep service moving. • Monitor and evaluate the performance of operators and conductors. <p>Assistant train dispatchers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulate the flow of train traffic through their respective service areas. • Maintain register sheets. • Note the arrival and departure and leading car number of all trains, when possible. • Make sure employees are fit for duty when reporting to work. <p>Train dispatchers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expeditious and correct dispatching, preparation and safe movement of trains. • Make sure employees are fit for duty when reporting to work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the train service supervisors, assistant train dispatchers and train dispatchers assigned to the line. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage special projects. • Provide crew work assignments. • Oversee timekeeping.

Training Practices

The NYC Transit Operations Training Department handles the induction and refresher training for train and platform conductors and passenger controllers. Two full-time trainers, a former conductor and train operator, provide the Departmental training.³⁴ Induction training for conductors consists of 31 or 33 days, depending upon the car division (A or B) to which the employee is assigned. Train conductors on A Division cars, the numbered lines (1-7, and 9) and the Grand Central Shuttle, require 31 days of training. Employees on the B Division cars, the lettered lines, require 33 days of training.

Train and platform conductors and passenger controllers receive the same induction training, which consists of administration and orientation, security, ADA regulations and customer relations, duties and responsibilities and car equipment familiarization. Platform conductors receive additional training in customer service. Platform controllers receive additional training in regulating customer movement and additional customer service training.

The customer service portion of the induction training for conductors consists of one day of training provided by the Customer Communications Division of the Department of Subways and includes lectures, role-playing activities and a five minute video. The training stresses: professionalism between co-workers; customers are allies, not enemies; ways to diffuse conflict; and the proper method for delivering announcements (text, speed, volume, and voice tone); and the importance of communicating with the train operator.

Under the union contract, conductors have the right to pick any job within the title that their seniority allows. Conductor positions are assigned first to passenger train service. Once all passenger train service positions are filled, platform conductor and passenger controller positions are filled. Some platform conductors are assigned from the pool of train service conductors to support scheduled service changes.

Once conductors are assigned to a particular job (train, platform, or passenger controller) they receive on-the-job and field training from supervisors and/or managers. Platform controllers receive training in the role of a platform controller, the importance of uniform appearance and behavior on the platform. Train, or "road" conductors "break-in" on each line within their subdivision with a senior conductor. Platform conductors and passenger controllers receive instructions from supervisors and/or managers within the passenger controller unit. Platform conductors, assigned to a location in support of a scheduled service diversion, are briefed on the changes to regular service by a supervisor

³⁴ Approximately 45 full-time instructors are qualified to train conductors at any given time. Instructors are assigned to provide training on a revolving basis.

prior to beginning their work. Platform conductors are critiqued by a supervisor on the nature of the service changes before beginning the assignment.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

While the R32/R38, R33/R36, R40/R42, R68/R68A, R46, R44, R62/R62A, R110A/R110B, R142/R142A, and R143 cars have design variations, train conductors use similar processes to communicate to train operators, Rapid Transit Control Center (RTCC) personnel and passengers to access and convey customer service information.

Train conductors communicate by two-way radio with the RTCC to learn the nature of a service delay and how long the disruption is expected to last, if known. The train operator and conductor can also contact the local tower or gap station³⁵ to find out why there is a delay. The crew uses the train's public address system to communicate with customers when they receive delay information.

In addition, when a delay occurs and is anticipated to last more than 20 minutes, the RTCC notifies station agents at affected locations, NYC Transit's Travel Information Center, TRANSCOM, Shadow Traffic, the Department of Subways senior management and the Department of Buses and other MTA operating agencies, as necessary.

NYC Transit currently has two projects underway: Automatic Train Supervision (ATS) and Communication Based Train Control (CBTC), a real time train information system that identifies exact train locations. For the first time Transit personnel will see a dynamic display of all train movements. The ATS and CBTC system will centralize control and monitoring of train service at the Rail Control Center enabling the generation of real time train arrival information to customers.

Evaluating Performance

To ensure service quality, conductor, platform conductor and passenger controller job performance is evaluated in several different ways: regular probationary period evaluations by management, bi-annual supervisory evaluations, on-train spot checks, customer letters, telephone calls and e-mail, and quarterly and annual departmental reports on the conditions of the subway passenger environment (Passenger Environment Surveys and Citywide Survey).

Train and platform conductors and passenger controllers have a one year probationary period. After the probationary year, a panel comprised of

³⁵ A gap station is a location with a supervisor (assistant train dispatcher or train dispatcher) that is responsible for monitoring and regulating the flow of train service through their service area. For example, Jay Street-Borough Hall on the A, C and F lines and 59th Street-Columbus Circle on the A, B, C and D lines are gap stations.

representatives from Rapid Transit Operations (RTO), Human Resources and Subway Operations Training evaluates each employee's record to determine that they have the necessary skills to perform the job. During this one year period, probationary conductors are also observed performing their on-board and platform duties and are evaluated four times by train service supervisors to ensure that they are performing their duties in a safe and proper manner.

Train service supervisors (TSS) evaluate post probationary train and platform conductors twice a year on operation procedures as well as the type and quality of public address announcements. Customer Communications Department staff also use trains regularly to evaluate the quality of on-board public address announcements. After the evaluation, Customer Communications staff provides immediate feedback to the train conductors and operators. Train service supervisors and Customer Communications staff may recommend that particular conductors receive refresher training.

All customer complaints received by letter, telephone, or e-mail are investigated by supervisors or managers and employees are brought in for refresher training, reassigned or disciplined according to the guidelines identified in the union contract agreement.

NYC Transit conducts quarterly Passenger Environment Surveys (PES) of the environmental conditions passengers experience on subway cars, in subway stations and on buses. Administered by the System Data and Research Division of Operations Planning, the PES includes over 50 indicators. Data is collected 60 to 65 weekdays every quarter³⁶ by trained survey teams who rate a checklist of items according to a set scale. Passengers are not interviewed as part of the survey.

Indicators measuring subway system customer service include the percentages of clear and accurate subway car announcements, conductors in proper uniform, clear and accurate station delay announcements and station agents with badges on display. The results from these surveys inform the divisions responsible for the provision of services, such as Station Operations and Car Equipment to identify, monitor and track conditions over time.

The MTA conducts an annual Citywide Survey by telephone to assess NYC residents' satisfaction with and perception of NYC Transit subway service, subway station environment and local bus service. The telephone survey is conducted among a representative sample (approximately 1,200 adults) from the five boroughs. Some of the attributes pertaining to customer service include: courtesy of conductors, clarity of announcements in subway cars, announcements on trains regarding delays, knowing which station is next and crowding on platforms.

³⁶ Under the Proposed 2004 Budget, the PES will be conducted twice yearly.

Excellent conductor, platform conductor, and passenger controller performance is formally recognized through a bi-monthly Transit Ambassador program and a bi-monthly Employee of the Month program.

NYC Transit's Ambassador Program recognizes employees with a formal induction ceremony including the presentation of a certificate and lapel pin. Employees are recommended to the Customer Communications Division by a supervisor or manager. Public address announcements are included as a category for recognition as are customer commendation letters. Employees are eligible to receive this award only once in a lifetime.

The Employee of the Month program recognizes excellent employee interpersonal communication skills and customer service among all NYC Transit employees. Employees are nominated for the award by a supervisor or manager. Honorees receive a certificate and plaque at a bi-monthly formal ceremony with invited family members.

All customer commendation and complaint letters about employees are placed in their employment file. Commendation letters are often posted on a bulletin board for co-workers to read.

Refresher Training

Train and platform conductors and passenger controllers are required to take a three day refresher training course every three and a half years, which covers basic train operations and includes one full day of customer service issues. Similar to the induction training conductors receive when first hired, the refresher training reminds conductors of their role on the train and provides re-instruction on proper announcement techniques.

Conductors are specifically instructed to keep to the train schedule during rush hour service and not to wait for across platform train connections. During non-rush hour service, conductors are required to wait to allow across platform connections. Proper announcement techniques include appropriate announcement language, proper volume and speed to provide clarity. The course also reviews information and regulations required by law under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and the list of systemwide ADA accessible stations. Conductors are also given pads of paper to facilitate written communications with customers in a variety of situations.

As described previously for station agents, NYC Transit has developed relationships with a number of educational institutions offering ongoing training courses in a range of skills. The Transportation Management Certificate program at John Jay College best addresses customer service skills and management.³⁷

³⁷ See NYC Transit Station Service Agents, p. 40-1.

BUS OPERATORS

Bus operators have a dual role: to safely drive a public transit vehicle along a determined route and to help customers navigate the public transit system. Bus operators must be safe, competent drivers and meet all Article 19A requirements. They must also have customer service skills to inform customers of coming stops and connecting bus routes for transfers and be sensitive to customer concerns and special needs.

The position of bus operator is physically demanding; an operator must work in all types of weather, sit in the same position for an extended period of time and may be required to climb in and out of their seat to operate a wheelchair lift numerous times per shift.

MTA LI Bus and NYC Transit bus systems differ significantly in size. They use varied practices for hiring and evaluating bus operators. Although they have separate operations and training programs, LI Bus employees participate in NYC Transit's supervisory training programs and have adapted some of NYC Transit's technologies. Bus operator performance evaluation tools and refresher training programs differ between the agencies.

Long Island Bus

Long Island Bus' mission statement reflects the sentiments this report addresses: to provide customers with safe, efficient and courteous service. LI Bus operations are divided between fixed route service and Able-Ride, the paratransit service for people with disabilities who aren't able to use the fixed route service. This report focuses primarily on LI Bus' fixed route bus service.

Hiring Practices

LI Bus employs both full-time, fixed route and part-time, limited assignment bus operators (LABOs). The LI Bus operator is a TWU represented position. Full-time bus operator positions are typically filled from a pool of in-house paratransit operators and LABOs.

Paratransit operators commonly apply for promotion to a fixed route position after they have driven in the Paratransit Division a minimum of three years. Paratransit operators must have a thousand hours of driving time and a near perfect attendance record to advance to fixed route service. Paratransit operators must remain in the Paratransit Division for another year if they have been involved in a preventable accident.

LABOs are promoted to full-time fixed route service based on performance criteria. Nearly all LABOs are hired from outside the agency as are paratransit operators.

The minimum qualifications for all bus operators, LABOs and paratransit bus operators are the same. All operator hiring is governed by New York State Motor Vehicle and Traffic Law, Article 19A. Fixed route bus operators must additionally have LI Bus operator experience. There are no education or residency requirements for any of the positions. The minimum hiring requirements are summarized in Table 22.

Table 22. Minimum Hiring Requirements for LI Bus Operators

In-House Union Applicants (Fixed Route Bus Operator)	Outside Job Applicants (Paratransit, LABO and Bus Operator)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LI Bus operator experience. • Same requirements as outside agency, LABO and paratransit bus operator applicants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A New York State Commercial Class A or B license with passenger endorsement. • Qualification to operate a bus in accordance with local, state and federal vehicle and traffic laws. • Must have ability to demonstrate effective communication skills. • Must be able to understand and be understood in English.

LI Bus targets its job recruitment to local newspapers including ethnic papers. The last job advertisement, run in March 2003 in the *New York Daily News*, resulted in three hundred applications for three positions.

The Human Resources Division reviews all submitted applications and invites those selected for an interview. Applicants are required to take a drug test and a pre-employment physical. The Human Resources Department also verifies the applicant’s employment history and references.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

LI Bus employs 502 full-time, fixed route bus operators and 32 limited assignment bus operators, who are supervised by 35 dispatchers. Dispatchers report directly to the assistant depot manager.

Dispatchers are promoted from the full-time, fixed route bus operator ranks and must have been working for more than one year. Applicants for the dispatcher position must take a LI Bus administered written test and achieve a score of seventy-five percent or better to be eligible for promotion. The test measures applicants’ abilities to supervise operators, knowledge of surface transportation operations and agency rules, ability to do computations related to bus schedules and knowledge of pay and allowance rules. Dispatchers must attend a two week supervisory training program shortly after their promotion, which is administered by NYC Transit at their facilities. This program includes a four hour module on

customer service. The content of this supervisory course is discussed in the next section. The supervisory structure and job responsibilities of bus operators and dispatchers are summarized in Table 23.

Table 23. LI Bus Operator Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

	Bus Operators and LABOs Report to 	Dispatchers
Positions (August 2003)	502 Fixed Route Operators 32 Limited Assignment Bus Operators (LABOs)	35 Dispatchers
Job Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate bus in revenue service. • Board and alight passengers. • Conduct pre-trip/post-trip inspections. • Transport customers safely in accordance with NYS laws, rules and regulations. • Have a working knowledge of Nassau County and LIB route structure. • Display customer sensitivity. • Provide required information to customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor bus operators including on the road supervision. • Respond to accident scenes and to emergencies. • Make service adjustments to scheduled routes, as necessary. • Verify operator run sheets, assign buses to operators for scheduled work, maintain operator attendance log. • Ensure operator compliance to LI Bus regulations. • Supervise maintenance personnel. • Supervise parking of fleet. • Assist with operator training and retraining. • Use vehicle locator system to monitor buses in service.

Training Practices

Bus operator training is conducted by the Division of System Safety and Training. LABOs must complete a four week program comprised of two weeks in the classroom and two weeks of road training. The trainees are taught how to operate a 40 foot bus and are instructed on the Smith System Defensive Driving method of driving, which stresses real-life safety situations. The training focuses on learning the routes, how to log into the farebox, safety issues and customer service procedures, including an emphasis on the proper way to assist customers with disabilities.

Fixed route operators receive the same two weeks of classroom training as LABOs, but must complete three additional weeks of road training. LABOs must take the full five week course once they have been promoted to full-time fixed route service. Since many bus operators have been promoted from paratransit operator positions, they have already received sensitivity training and have experience working with a diverse special needs population.

By the end of 2004, LI Bus will move into a state-of-the-art training center within their Rockville Centre facility. This facility, funded through a federal grant, will be home to a newly purchased bus simulator system.

The bus simulator will be used in bus operator training to demonstrate those portions of road training that are difficult to standardize because of different

geography and route structure. Currently, the training has accommodated these differences by using a handful of experienced operators who ride with new operators. The mentors are also used to work with operators who change routes because of their familiarity with the nuances of certain routes. When an operator picks a new route, they have the option of riding the bus route with an operator or driving in their car behind the bus. In either case, the operator receives two hours of pay to learn the new route. Four times a year, full-time, fixed route operators pick their routes, hours of work and days off based on seniority.

Customer service training for bus operators is conducted by the Human Resources Training and Development Division of the Administration Department. The LI Bus training manual summarizes the overall theme of the four hour training by stating: “the way you {the operator} handle your customers will have the most influence on your job and the future of the service.” The training focuses on the skills needed to fulfill the LI Bus mission, who its internal and external customers are and the need to communicate effectively. The training highlights the three rules of practicing professional customer service: provide safe, reliable and expert service; be courteous and patient; and avoid arguments. Many of these same topics are covered in LI Bus’ training for its travel information agents. Role playing is an integral part of LI Bus’ training programs. LI Bus is in the process of developing a four hour comprehensive customer relations training program for all its paratransit operators.

The bus operator training also covers the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the importance of following its regulations, such as making bus stop announcements at major intersections, transfer points and destinations, at any stop requested by a passenger and at stops that are served by more than one route.

LI Bus managers meet monthly with the Accessible Transportation Oversight Committee (ATOC) to help facilitate and stress the importance of ADA. The ATOC members include people with disabilities who use LI Bus’ fixed route and Able-Ride services and interested professionals, such as social workers. The ATOC meets with every LI Bus graduating class of paratransit and fixed route bus operators to discuss customer service issues and to engage in role playing to illustrate the best way for bus operators to assist people with special needs in boarding and alighting.

LI Bus also provides training for dispatchers, paratransit coordinators and other bus operations personnel by participating in NYC Transit’s two week Supervisory Core Curriculum program coordinated by LI Bus’ Human Resources Division. This two week supervisory training program, while not required, is typically scheduled for new employees within a month of hiring or promotion. The four hour customer service module covers topics that include: defining what customer service is; recognizing who the customers are; learning skills for achieving

customer service; learning how to deal with difficult behavior; and recognizing the benefits of effective customer service.

Accessing Customer Service Information

The LI Bus fleet is a hundred percent wheelchair accessible and each bus can accommodate two wheelchair passengers. The bus operator calls the Command Center notifying it that they are picking up a wheelchair user. Eighty-three percent of the buses are equipped with voice annunciator systems that provide pre-recorded announcements for all stops on the route. All buses will be outfitted with annunciators by the end of 2004. Bus operators have a telescopic microphone they can use to modify the pre-recorded announcements. Buses without voice annunciator systems also are equipped with telescopic microphones. Operators are trained and instructed to use their voices for announcements in case the microphone equipment malfunctions.

Real time emergency information is communicated by radio to the bus operators from the LI Bus Command Center as well as through sector dispatchers. Planned route diversions are communicated by memo to all bus operators, dispatchers and Command Center personnel from the Safety Division. The Operations and Customer Communications Divisions prepare the public notices that are posted on buses, at bus stops and designated locations, such as public institutions.

By the end of 2003, full implementation of an Automatic Vehicle Location Communication System (AVLCS) will be completed. Currently, LI Bus Command Center staff have been trained as part of the initial pilot project. LI Bus is in the process of securing funding in order to incorporate AVLCS into the LIRR's Train Information Monitoring and Control System (TIMACS). The integration of AVLCS into the TIMACS will help LI Bus Command Center staff ensure that LI Bus service will meet arriving LIRR trains at the 46 stations served.

Evaluating Performance

Paratransit operators have a one year probationary period and bus operators have a six month probationary period to determine job ability before becoming fully benefited LI Bus employees. Paratransit and fixed route dispatchers track paratransit and bus operator performance daily during the probationary period. Any late or unexcused absences result in an extension of the probationary period by one month. Dispatchers follow bus operators along routes to assess safe driving practices and forward findings of all preventable and non-preventable accidents to the Safety Department. As mentioned previously, paratransit operators, who have been involved in a preventable accident, must remain in the Paratransit Division for another year.

Full time bus operators and LABOs receive formal retraining by Safety division staff when they are involved in preventable accidents. They receive counseling by their depot managers after non-preventable accidents. Per 19-A law, any three preventable accidents within an 18-month period that meet DMV criteria require that the offender be removed from service without pay until he or she takes and passes a road test administered by the DMV.

Dispatchers also conduct daily, random passenger surveys to solicit customers' opinions about bus operator performance. Special emphasis is placed on operator adherence to ADA regulations. These on-the-spot interviews have helped to improve LI Bus' overall compliance with the ADA requirements.

Regular evaluations of bus operators are conducted during the 19A certification process and by random spot checks. LI Bus, through its Operations Department, contracts with an investigative services company to spot check and monitor its bus operators. The results of the spot check surveys are used by Operations Department management as a tool for positive reinforcement or to identify a problem. When a customer registers a complaint about a specific operator, a spot checker will ride that operator's bus and file a report. When problems with an operator persist, the depot manager or assistant manager will meet with the bus operator to discuss the issues at hand and may request retraining. Disciplinary action may also be taken based on the outside investigative report.

LI Bus receives feedback on performance from a number of sources. Annual surveys conducted by the Communications Department provide feedback to LI Bus through a report card rating system on bus announcements or monthly reports on bus operator problems that have occurred. ATOC provides verbal feedback at community meetings focusing on transit issues impacting the disabled community. Relevant issues are referred back to the LI Bus Administration or System Safety Divisions. Another source of customer feedback is the Nassau County Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). It meets twice a year.

LI Bus also evaluates how its bus operators are performing from customer commendation and complaint letters. A sampling of commendation letters is published in a quarterly employee newsletter for all employees to read. Complaint letters are routed to the appropriate department and are fully investigated. A letter is sent to the customer regarding the actions LI Bus has taken regarding the complaint.

The new MTA email/website is also used as a tool for feedback from customers. Any correspondence is addressed within seven days of receipt; however, letters from elected officials and those expressing safety concerns are investigated and answered within five days. LI Bus has installed an automatic system to track customer correspondence response time.

LI Bus has no specific award program to recognize excellent customer service because the agency expects that all operators are "committed to its goal of providing excellent customer service."³⁸ Bus operators receive safety award pins for each year of accident-free driving. Operators with outstanding records (twenty or thirty years) are awarded plaques by the president and are featured in *En Route*, the LI Bus house publication which is mailed to all employees.

Refresher Training

Refresher training is provided for individual bus operators who have had preventable accidents and for bus operators upon the request of a dispatcher or supervisor. The preventable accident refresher training is eight hours long. It includes reviewing defensive driving techniques, discussing the circumstances of the preventable accident and revisiting the scene. Other refresher training is focused on particular issues relevant to the bus operator as per the dispatcher's or supervisor's request.

Bus operators receive federally mandated refresher training every two years. The training is split into two segments of an eight hour day. The first two hour classroom training reviews traffic laws and regulations, safety issues, ADA compliance and procedures for working with the equipment. The remaining portion of the training is spent on the road and is focused on driving and bus operating techniques. The classes are run with up to five persons where each individual receives an hour of instruction while driving the bus. The instructor provides continuous feedback to bus operators on their driving techniques. Customer service is not specifically addressed as part of this training.

New York City Transit

The Department of Buses (DOB) has undertaken sweeping changes to its hiring and training practices over the past ten years. In 1995, the Department of Buses participated in an initiative sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the American Public Transit Association (APTA) and officials from transit properties across the country "to develop an innovative, comprehensive and validated bus operator hiring process designed for the Transit Industry."³⁹

As part of the research, the study team identified three key characteristics that bus operators possess, irrespective of the part of the country where they work:

....being safe - driving a bus in a manner that maximizes the safety and comfort of passengers and others with whom they share the road, being courteous – treating the public with respect and courtesy

³⁸ Written correspondence from Richard Motycka, LI Bus Assistant Vice President of System Safety and Training July 29, 2003.

³⁹ Making Score, NYC Transit Department of Buses, Fall, 2002.

while on duty and being reliable – arriving on time, both to their work location and on route.⁴⁰

A process was designed to attract candidates with these traits while “simultaneously reducing costs associated with accidents, absenteeism and worker compensation.”⁴¹ The initiative resulted in the creation of the Bus Operator Selection System (BOSS), which has been used at NYC Transit since 1997 for hiring bus operators. This program has brought about significant changes in the hiring requirements for bus operators.

Hiring Process

Similar to the stipulations for the position of bus operator at LI Bus, there are no education or city residency requirements. Unlike LI Bus’ fixed-route operators, there are no prior bus operating job experience requirements. NYC Transit’s minimum requirements which are listed on the Notice of Examination for bus operator applicants⁴² are summarized in Table 24.

Table 24. Minimum Hiring Requirements for NYC Transit Bus Operators.

In-House Union Applicants	Outside Agency Job Applicants
Same Requirements as Outside Agency Bus Operator Applicants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must take a civil service multiple-choice examination. • Must take a multiple-choice NYC Transit BOSS examination. • Must have a valid N.Y. State motor vehicle license. • Must have a learner’s permit for a Class B commercial driver’s license. The license must be obtained by the time the applicant is in the bus operations training program. • Must pass a medical exam to determine that they can perform the essential functions of a bus operator. • Must pass a drug/alcohol screening test. • Must be able to understand and be understood in English. • Must be able to prove identity and the right to obtain employment in the United States before seeking employment with NYC Transit (under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986).

The revised civil service exam includes questions on: rules of the road; safe driving techniques; understanding schedules and bulletins; courtesy to passengers; procedures in the event of accidents, injuries, crimes or other unusual occurrences; points of interest in New York City; and other related areas. A score of at least seventy percent is required to pass the test.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Notice of Examination-Bus Operator, Department of Citywide Administrative Services Applications Center, NY, January 2002.

Once the applicant passes the civil service exam they are placed, based on score, on an eligible list. If all the other requirements and conditions are met, an applicant will be considered when their name is reached on the eligible list. The eligible list from each examination is valid for one year from the date it is established, unless extended by the Civil Service Commissioner.⁴³

NYC Transit's Human Resources Department uses a similar process to recruit all job applicants, as noted in the previous chapters.⁴⁴ NYC Transit invites eligible candidates from the civil service list to take NYC Transit's BOSS examination, which provides the agency with information about personality traits and how potential bus operators would respond to hypothetical situations, such as adhering to schedules.

NYC Transit hires approximately 800 bus operators a year from the eligible list. New hires are required to successfully complete a six week training program in bus operations, developed under the BOSS guidelines. Those who do not successfully complete this program are terminated from agency employment. No correlation could be made between how an applicant scored on the civil service exam and how they performed as a bus operator prior to the implementation of the BOSS program. The new civil service exam provides a direct correlation between the exam score and performance. There has been a ninety-two percent decline in accident rates for first year bus operators since the institution of the BOSS program. Since 1996, NYC Transit has hired 6,580 bus operators under the BOSS program.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

NYC Transit's 9,300 bus operators are supervised by 782 dispatchers that operate out of 18 bus depots. The dispatchers are first-line supervisors who report to 96 superintendents. In order for a bus operator to be eligible for promotion to dispatcher, they must complete three years as an operator, pass a performance evaluation, undergo a medical exam and pass a written examination.

It is important to recognize that the job responsibilities of a dispatcher may vary depending on the specific location/assignment. The supervisory structure and job responsibilities of bus operators, dispatchers and superintendents are summarized in Table 25.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ NYC Transit recruits job applicants by posting job notices on their internal website, the official agency public website, on Internet career advertisement sites, in local newspapers, and professional job fairs. Exam information is placed each week in the Job Vacancy Notice package and sent as an internal agency e-mail broadcast notice. Exam information is updated monthly on the Exam Information Hotline phone number (212-712-JOBS). The exam schedule is also advertised on NYC Transit station posters, subway and bus cards and in "take-ones" distributed in subway stations.

Table 25. NYC Transit Bus Operator Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

	Bus Operators Report to 	Dispatchers Report to 	Superintendents
Positions (August 2003)	9,300 Bus Operators	782 Dispatchers	96 Superintendents
Job Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operate a bus carrying passengers in accordance with the rules, regulations, and laws of NYC Transit, New York State and the City of New York traffic regulations. Ensure the proper payment of fares. Issue and collect transfers. Look out for the safety of passengers. Protect the assigned vehicle. Write revenue, accident, and faulty equipment reports.⁴⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign bus operators to their runs. Direct the dispatch and movement of buses within the assigned territory. Handle unusual occurrences in service and determine ways to minimize delays. See to observance of bus rules and procedures. Make computations relative to bus schedules, pay hours and leave allowances. Investigate accidents, unusual occurrences and operational equipment failures. Keep time records. Prepare reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage transportation functions of Division Command Center. Responsibility for meeting daily service requirements. Manage labor relations activities. Administer labor agreements. Implement discipline. Address grievances. Define depot objectives for labor negotiations. Manage the preparation of annual resource requirements. Review budget control adherence. Identify and implement cost control and other productivity measures. Participate in policy formulation for Division/Command Center operations. Manage the development and implementation of equipment quality control, safety and employee training programs to ensure that equipment and personnel operate safely and effectively.

Training Practices

In 1991, the MTA Inspector General issued a comprehensive report (I G 90-23) on bus operator training. The report addressed the deficiencies of the training and compliance with 19-A regulations. The findings concluded that for decades there had been “a lack of a standardized curriculum that made it impossible to determine what was being instructed during the training.”⁴⁶ At the time, there were eighteen training instructors with eighteen different training programs. The evaluation found that the training did not include any post training evaluation or

⁴⁵ Notice of Examination, City-Wide Department of Administrative Services, New York, N.Y. 2002

⁴⁶ Making Score, NYC Transit Department of Buses, Fall, 2002

measures of accountability for student performance. In essence, anyone who went through the training program became a bus operator.

As a result of this investigation, NYC Transit's employee development and training staff in cooperation with the Department of Buses training staff, developed a new criteria-based training program. The new program incorporates tests at the end of each module to ensure the presented material is retained. With this new criteria in place, results of ongoing research has found a direct correlation between the length of time it takes a student to pass the performance standard requirements and their "post training" safety record. The training is structured for a student to complete in seven days; three additional days, are provided if the student needs more time. The post training accident rate was found to climb significantly for students who took more than ten days to complete the training. As a result, students who do not master the material within ten days are terminated from NYC Transit employment.

Nineteen in-house trainers conduct the 19-A safety training and are certified to teach the BOSS training program. They are selected from a pool of former dispatchers. They have all successfully completed a BOSS "Train-the-Trainers" program taught by one of the department managers.

Feeling safe in a transit system is fundamental to achieving good customer service and is a key element provided in the six week BOSS training program. The Department of Buses uses a bus simulator as a tool to teach safe driving. The simulators "utilize state-of-the-art technology to simulate limitless bus driving conditions" in a controlled environment that does not put the employee, the public or expensive equipment at risk.

The results of a pilot program, which compared the safety performance of students who had been trained with the simulator and those who had not, shows positive results. Accident reduction rates have declined and the operators themselves feel that the simulator has been very helpful. Encouraged by the preliminary simulator results, NYC Transit has begun to use the simulator "as a component of the annual retraining for seasoned operators." NYC Transit anticipates that it will eventually incorporate use of the simulator into every aspect of its bus operator training.

The customer service training for NYC Transit bus operators includes lessons on the importance of customer service, communication and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. The lessons cover the three rules of customer service, which are to provide safe, reliable, and expert service, to be courteous and patient and to avoid arguments. The course also teaches skills and techniques for achieving good customer service, effective communication, culture and language awareness and the proper way to interact with people with disabilities. Throughout the course, the trainer cites examples of best practices, such as how to greet a customer, and case studies of real-life situations with

questions as to how the student operator would handle these occurrences. Each lesson is followed by a quiz.

Bus announcements as required by ADA, enacted by the United States Congress in 1991, are a cornerstone of customer service training for bus operators. The law requires that bus operators make bus stop announcements at certain stops and crossings, where customers are able to transfer to other buses or subway lines, and at major public institutions, such as hospitals, government buildings and cultural institutions.

As with bus announcements, lowering the front step and deploying the wheelchair lift became routine actions for all operators in 1995. A customer may ask the operator to use the lift to board and exit the bus. Bus operators are considered in violation of NYC Transit rules if they do not comply with a customer's request.

Bus operators, who were on the job prior to the adoption of the ADA laws and the NYC Transit rules, have been instructed that compliance in making announcements, deploying the wheelchair lift and lowering the front step is mandatory. Newly hired bus operators learn about these requirements as part of the training program.

Bus operators, who are promoted to dispatcher, receive four weeks of training that include classroom, accident investigation and road operations training.

Accessing Customer Information

All buses are equipped with a "Speakeasy," a hands free microphone that allows an operator to speak into the microphone without having to disrupt the operation of the bus. This hands free system allows the operator to make interior and exterior announcements through a Motorola radio system, but bus operators must use a telephone handset to contact the Bus Command Center (BCC) in East New York about road congestion and other transit related issues.

NYC Transit feels strongly that bus operators should interact with their customers. Making announcements is one way to ensure this. This is the rationale behind NYC Transit's decision not to retrofit its buses with pre-recorded announcement technology as LI Bus has done.

NYC Transit is instituting bus operator and customer educational programs to further stress the importance of making announcements and to demonstrate its commitment to requiring bus operators to do so. NYC Transit Bus Customer Relations staff recently invited visually impaired customers to meet informally with bus operators at the depots. Customers discussed why making announcements is important for all bus customers. Customers also provided feedback about problems they have encountered when announcements are not

made. NYC Transit has installed posters on buses and bus shelters to heighten customer awareness about the importance of making bus stop announcements. The campaign is also to send a clear message to NYC Transit bus operators that it is serious about complying with the law.

NYC Transit has been seeking to enhance its communication capabilities between the Bus Command Center (BCC) and bus operators. To do this, NYC Transit has been in the process of developing a bus tracking system that relies on satellites to communicate bus locations to the BCC and provide customers with real time service information.

The Service Management Customer Information System (SMCIS) will have the capability to transmit text information about road congestion, bus conditions and locations between NYC Transit bus operators and the BCC via a system of bus antennas, satellite signals and computer data processors. SMCIS has the capability to provide real time information about when the next bus is coming. The system will also allow the BCC to respond more quickly to mechanical failures, buses that are behind schedule or emergency conditions. Currently the BCC relies upon an array of paper maps, schedules, bus stop locations and time point data. The upgrade will permit electronic retrieval of the data. Funding has been allocated for the first portion of the project to be completed in 2005. Funding has not been allocated for the second phase of the project.

To improve the provision of bus service information to customers, NYC Transit is designing a more user-friendly Customer Information Center area in the bus to post service announcements and bus schedule information.

Evaluating Performance

The length of the probationary period for a graduated bus operator trainee's employment depends upon their affiliation: Manhattan and Bronx Surface Transit Operating Authority (MaBSTOA) trainees have a one year probationary period while a NYC Transit trainee's probationary period is six months.

NYC Transit's Division of Safety and Training administers a Probationary Review Program to ensure that performance standards are measured consistently and separately from operational procedures. Probationary bus operator employees are evaluated on a number of skills including their interaction with customers and the number and substance of customer complaints. The trainee operator must obtain "an overall satisfactory evaluation rating" before they are appointed as permanent employees.

Dispatchers conduct a minimum of two onboard rides for at least thirty minutes each during the trainee's probationary period and provide immediate feedback to the bus operators. Supervisors may request that the bus operator attend retraining.

Supervisors review probationary employees' performance at monthly management meetings. If an employee's performance is considered unsatisfactory, the probationary period is extended until supervision feels that the performance is satisfactory enough to bestow permanent employment. Failure to make bus announcements can extend a bus operator employee's probationary period by as much as two months.

As previously discussed in the NYC Transit section on train conductors, "Making Understandable and Correct Announcements" is one of more than fifty indicators compiled for the Passenger Environment Survey (PES). This announcement indicator has not risen above 42 percent over the past five quarters.

To increase the number of announcements bus operators make and to stress the importance of adhering to the ADA law, NYC Transit initiated an incentive program in 1997 to recognize bus depots where bus operators make over 60 percent of the required announcements. The higher the percentage of announcements made, the larger the monetary award, which can be as high as \$10,000. Depots that qualify for the monetary award spend it on something for the depot. The 126th Depot in Manhattan is the one and only depot to attain a 60 percent level on the PES, they received a \$2,000 award.

Excellent bus operator customer service performance for bus announcements is recognized through customer letters of commendation. NYC Transit presents bus operators who receive a customer commendation letter with a red apple lapel pin. NYC Transit rewards bus operators with a gold lapel pin when they receive more than one commendation.

Another program to recognize excellent performance by bus operators is run by the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association (EPVA), a veterans advocacy organization. Instituted in 1995 when the bus fleet became one hundred percent accessible, the EPVA program gives certificates and t-shirts to operators who provide excellent customer assistance to passengers. The EPVA award program, which is independent of NYC Transit, identifies specific bus operators who they feel provide excellent service. Bus operators are identified based on customer recommendations. The bus operator awardees receive a pin the first three times they are honored and are presented with a plaque for the fourth time. The EPVA awards are given annually.

Customer complaints submitted by letter, e-mail or telephone are another method for monitoring bus operator customer service performance. It is a constant challenge for NYC Transit management to have bus operators comply with the bus announcement portion of the ADA law as well as the requirement to deploy the wheelchair lift or lower the front step upon customer request. Lack of customer courtesy is a frequent customer complaint. The depot general superintendent meets with a bus operator if customers or surveyors report that a

bus operator is not in compliance. If problems persist, the depot's assistant general manager will meet and discuss the problems directly with the operator.

NYC Transit has developed a "Performance Monitoring" Program for operators with the worst safety records. The program is designed to closely monitor "the two percent of operators who were responsible for a disproportionate number of all bus accidents." Approximately 50 operators were in the program in 2002.

Refresher Training

Operators receive one day of refresher training annually. Every two years bus operators attend two different refresher training programs: one evaluates their driving abilities and the other program focuses on customer relations. Training includes classes on fatigue and stress management, customer service and conflict resolution or other timely topics. Refresher training is given to individual operators on specific subjects on an as needed basis.

Bus operators, who are out of work for thirty days, must take a road test prior to their return to operating a bus in passenger service. If a bus operator's performance is unsatisfactory, the operator is given remedial training and required to take the road test again.

In the past three years, all bus operators have participated in a Fatigue and Stress Awareness program, which highlights the signs of driver fatigue, the causes and steps to alleviate the condition and the need to adhere to an eight hour day rule. The day long program also addresses how to identify and manage stress in all aspects of life.

A COMPARISON OF MTA FRONT LINE PERSONNEL CUSTOMER SERVICE PRACTICES

MTA operating agency hiring practices, supervisory structure and job responsibilities, training practices, access to customer service information, performance evaluation and refresher training were compared to identify areas of strength and weakness to bolster the provision of quality customer service.

A number of MTA agency practices stood out as beneficial to ensuring front line employees have the skills to provide the best customer service possible. In the area of hiring practices, MNR uses the Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) to assess an applicant's customer service skills and aptitude prior to the job interview. LIRR requires its assistant conductor applicants to take one of two phases of the training on their own time prior to their employment to ensure that applicants are self-motivated and dedicated. NYC Transit Department of Buses requires bus operator applicants to take a specially developed civil service test, which assesses aptitude prior to employment.

In the area of training practices, NYC Transit requires its customer service specialists to learn the extent of the NYC subway and bus systems prior to learning how to operate the telephone customer information systems. New employees are expected to successfully complete bus operator training within a specified period of time. MNR uses the Tone Game to train assistant conductors in the importance of attitude and tone of voice in customer communication.

MNR's visual train tracking system for its telephone customer service representatives in the Customer Information Center (CIC) helps facilitate easy access to a range of train and customer information. LIRR has created the position of customer communication coordinator to improve the frequency and quality of on-board train and customer service announcements in an effort to improve and streamline communication between the Movement Bureau and train service personnel.

MNR's CIC uses content quality over quantity of telephone calls handled to evaluate customer service quality and customer service representative job performance. The CIC also has weekly one-on-one meetings with individuals to evaluate and discuss their weekly calls. MNR uses three full-time service quality inspectors to evaluate customer service conditions on trains and in stations, providing immediate feedback to conductors and management about customer service conditions and issues. LI Bus uses an advisory committee of LI Bus riders to provide feedback on customer service experienced by special needs customers on LI Bus service to inform management about bus operator performance and agency policies.

LIRR has developed the Roundtable refresher training program for conductors and other front line employees to reinforce inter-departmental, employee and customer communication techniques and procedures.

Ticket Clerks and Station Agents

Hiring Practices

The Human Resources Departments for Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Railroad and NYC Transit make use of similar methods for recruiting job applicants for their ticket clerk, seller and station agent positions. All three agencies accept job applications from agency employees as well as outside applicants recruited from the MTA website and newspaper advertisements.

All three agencies use test scores, interviews and background information as indicators to determine customer service ability and job aptitude.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

LIRR, MNR and NYC Transit ticket sellers' responsibilities are similar: to sell tickets, provide the public with travel information, process ticket sales revenue and work with automated ticket selling machines. There are some differences in the specific duties. LIRR ticket clerks handle public complaints and assist the public and LIRR management during service disruptions. MNR ticket sellers dispense Amtrak service information and sell tickets, perform basic maintenance on ticket vending machines (TVMs) and notify authorities of safety violations or hazards to passengers or employees. NYC Transit station agents are required to provide basic maintenance to the MetroCard Vending Machines (MVMs). Table 26 shows the total number of stations, staffed stations and ticket seller to supervisor ratio at the three agencies.

Table 26. MTA Operating Agency Ticket Clerk/Station Agent Supervisory Structures and Ratios.

	Long Island Rail Road	Metro-North Railroad	New York City Transit
Stations in System	124	120	468
Ticket Booths (Sept. 2003)	55	42	732 (staffed)
Ticket Sellers*	205 Ticket Clerks (150 Ticket Clerks) (55 Station Agents)	100-125 Ticket Sellers	3,400 Station Agents
Direct Supervisors* (Level I/Level II)	10 Station Managers <u>Supervise:</u> 15-30 staffed/unstaffed stations	7 District Managers <u>Supervise:</u> 12-28 stations	227 Level I Station Supervisors 252 Level II Station Supervisors <u>Supervise:</u> 10 Consecutive stations
Ticket Seller to Supervisor Ratio	20: 1	14-17: 1	7: 1

Level II Supervisors	1 Assistant General Manager- Stations	1 Director-Stations	50 Field Superintendents
Level I Supervisor to Level II Supervisor Ratio	10:1	7: 1	7: 1

*Generic terms such as Ticket Sellers and Ticket Booths have been used in place of the specific titles for simplification purposes.

**The railroad stations have one site or station building. Most NYC Transit stations have two per station, one for each side of the track. Consecutive stations follow one another along the same subway line.

The responsibilities of ticket clerks, ticket sellers and station agents defined by the three agencies are fairly similar. The structure of how the positions are supervised are similar between the railroads, but differ in comparison with NYC Transit. At LIRR and MNR, the ratio of ticket sellers to station managers differ somewhat (20:1 and 14-17:1, respectively). MNR's seven district managers and LIRR's ten station managers supervise roughly the same number of stations. NYC Transit's ratio of station service agents to supervisors (7 to 1) is much lower than both MNR and LIRR.

Training Practices

The three agencies structure their training somewhat differently as can be seen in Table 27. NYC Transit's training is the most formal of the three with 15 days spent in the classroom (reflecting the added complexity and pressures of the job) compared with three at LIRR and none at MNR.⁴⁷ All the agencies provide on-the-job training with MNR providing the most (30 days), followed by LIRR (15 days) and NYC Transit providing the least (three to four days). Customer service is covered in the training at the three agencies, however, new ticket clerks, sellers and station agents are required to further develop these skills on the job.

Table 27. MTA Operating Agency Ticket Clerk/Station Service Agent Training Length and Trainer Experience.

	LIRR		MNR		NYC TRANSIT	
	Classroom	On the Job	Classroom	On the Job	Classroom	On the Job
Length of Training	3 days	15 days	0 days	30 days	15-16 days	3-4 days
Experience of the Trainers	Experienced Ticket Clerk	Experienced Ticket Clerk	N/A	Experienced Ticket Seller	Professional in-house NYCT trainer	Experienced Station Service Agent / Professional in-house NYCT trainer

At NYC Transit, the station agent induction training is conducted by staff who are professional trainers or have been trained, while at LIRR the instructors are exceptional ticket clerk employees not formally trained in teaching or training

⁴⁷ MNR is in the process of designing a four day classroom based training program for ticket sellers discussed in more detail below.

techniques. At MNR the anticipated new four day ticket seller training program will be conducted by professional trainers from the Training Department or supervisory staff trained specifically to teach the material.

Access to Customer Service Information

The ability to communicate planned and unplanned service changes to station agents is an important component of delivering quality customer service. All three agencies rely on a central communication system to relay information regarding unanticipated delays. There are differences in the technology, impacting the type of information received at the stations and conveyed to customers.

LIRR has the most advanced system for obtaining real time service delays. The TIMACS system informs ticket clerks and station agents about a train delay when it occurs. Agents and clerks can telephone the Movement Bureau about late trains to obtain additional information that can help customers make intelligent travel decisions. While a few station offices have the capability to receive alerts by email, most information continues to be communicated by telephone. This method requires ticket clerks to rely on notes during their conversations to further inform and update customers.

MNR's Visual Train Tracking System (VTTS) planned pilot program to station ticket offices will provide real time train delay information. Similar to LIRR's TIMACS system, it will enhance the Railroad's ability to communicate service disruptions as they occur. MNR has improved ticket seller communication by connecting the Operation Center's public address system to station ticket office computers. The network will allow ticket sellers to receive announcements and service details in the form of a text message, providing additional information about service problems and enabling them to better communicate to the customer.

The lack of station technology in the station booths at NYC Transit makes communicating to customers about planned and unplanned service changes difficult. Station agents must function with information relayed to them by the mass call system, service notice bulletins, public address announcements or telephone. Although each agent receives a paper report detailing weekend schedule changes, the system invites communication and information gaps as papers get lost, disregarded or misunderstood as one shift ends and the next begins.

Informing the public of the multitude of weekend service changes is especially challenging when paper signs are posted in stations ahead of time and are often torn down before or during the change. Unplanned service changes are also a customer service challenge for the agency. While NYC Transit is to be commended on its rapid response to emergency situations, communicating to

customers throughout the system is hampered by an antiquated public address system.

NYC Transit has a major project underway to bring its communication technology up to date. The Communications Network System is an electronic telecommunication system that will carry voice, video and data signals throughout the subway system. Once complete, it will consolidate Transit's systems for communicating with the traveling public and will also connect with operations personnel and maintenance facilities. While only phase I of this large communication technology capital improvement project has been funded to date, NYC Transit expects to fund the remainder of the project in its 2005-2009 capital program.⁴⁸

An upgraded Portable Panic Transmitter (PPT)⁴⁹ communication system will extend the range and enable the station agent to activate the Emergency Booth Communication System (EBCS) from any area of the station and allow them to talk to the Division of Station Operations. The present system is limited in range and is without voice capability. A pilot, non-audio program is scheduled to start at selected stations by the end of 2003.

Performance Evaluation

The probationary period for LIRR ticket clerk and NYC Transit station agents is one year compared to ninety days at MNR. Job performance evaluation methods and frequency vary among the agencies. At LIRR supervisors perform evaluations on a quarterly basis during the one year probationary period. Employees who obtain the position through the bid process do not have quarterly evaluations.

MNR and NYC Transit perform informal evaluations. MNR's evaluations are conducted during the initial thirty day training period and conveyed to the district manager: An inadequate performance evaluation is cause for employee dismissal. NYC Transit station level one and two supervisors evaluate aspects of station agent performance on a quarterly basis, by reviewing attendance, cash handling records and customer complaints during the probationary period.

Beyond the probationary period, both LIRR and MNR make use of customer satisfaction surveys, letters and telephone calls of commendation and complaint to inform them about the ticket clerk/station agent customer service performance. Additionally MNR uses three full time customer service inspectors to monitor station conditions. Traveling unannounced, they are able to evaluate station conditions as customers experience them, and report their findings to the MNR

⁴⁸ Capital Program Oversight Committee Report February 19, 2003

⁴⁹ A Portable Panic Transmitter allows an agent to activate the emergency call system, known as the Emergency Booth Communication System (EBCS), located in the station booth to communicate with the Division of Station Operations' Command Center.

Customer Service Department and district managers. NYC Transit relies on its station supervisors to observe station agent performance. The Passenger Environment Surveys, conducted by NYC Transit, are also used as a tool to evaluate aspects of station agent performance.

Poor performance at the three agencies is dealt with by investigating all complaints. If a second complaint is filed, the direct supervisors send ticket clerks, sellers and station agents a formal letter. A formal review process is undertaken for a third incident.

LIRR recognizes performance excellence annually at its Annual breakfast with the LIRR President. Recognition is based on information received on the results of the LIRR Customer Satisfaction Survey. MNR also recognizes excellence through its President's Award. All positions are eligible for the award. Fellow employees nominate the candidates. Awardees receive a plaque and a watch at an awards ceremony. NYC Transit recognizes excellence through commendation letters and its Employee of the Month program. NYC Transit management sends commendation letters to its employees based on customer correspondence. Station supervisors or field superintendents nominate candidates for Employee of the Month based on agent attendance, commendation letters and overall work outlook.

Refresher Training

The agencies provide relatively little ongoing refresher and skill enhancement training for ticket clerks, sellers and station agents. LIRR provides a one day skill refresher training for ticket clerks as well as station agents, ushers, conductors, assistant conductors, train movement personnel and block operators (this is discussed in the Conductors section of this report).

LIRR provides voluntary ongoing training courses on a range of skills and topics to all employees interested in promotional and career advancement opportunities at the Rail Road.

MNR and NYCT provide one-on-one refresher training for ticket sellers and station agents who have been identified as lacking skills. When MNR implements its new four day ticket seller training program, all current ticket seller employees will be required to take the training.

Customer Service and Travel Information Agents

Hiring Practices

The Human Resources Departments at LIRR, MNR and NYC Transit use the same strategies for recruiting job applicants for their telephone information center positions as they use for recruiting ticket clerks, sellers and station agents:

postings on the MTA website and advertisements in targeted newspapers. While MNR, NYC Transit and LI Bus accept job applications from both agency employees and outside applicants, the LIRR restricts the TIC representative hiring pool to agency employees. This restriction can limit the pool of available candidates.

MNR uses the most selective criteria of the agencies for determining customer service abilities and aptitude. To qualify for a job at TIC as well as all other departments, MNR applicants must attain a certain score on the Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) test. The hiring criteria are based on the HPI test score, the applicant interview and the results of the MNR administered vocabulary and math tests.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

The job responsibilities for telephone information agents are similar at all four agencies: to respond to questions from the public regarding schedule and route information, hours of service and other details. Table 28 compares agency call center volumes and the ratio of staff to supervisors.

Table 28. MTA Operating Agency Customer Service and Travel Information Agent Supervisory Structure and Ratio.

	LIRR	MNR	NYC Transit	LI Bus
Annual Calls at Telephone Information Center (August 2003)	5 million	3 million	3.2 million	172,000
Front Line Personnel	19 TIC Representatives	25 Customer Service Representatives	70 Customer Service Specialists	7 Travel Information Agents
Direct Supervisors	4 TIC Supervisors	4 CIC Supervisors	11 Customer Service Agents Supervisors	1 CIC Supervisor
Agent/ Supervisor Ratio	5	7	6	7
Average Annual Calls/Agent	277,777	103,448	45,714	24,571

MNR, unlike LIRR, NYC Transit and LI Bus, measures successful customer service by the quality of information provided to customers not by the quantity of calls answered. MNR uses the Customer Information Center as a sales center for the railroad to reduce barriers to access, encourage new ridership and serve existing ridership.

Supervisors at the LIRR, unlike at MNR and NYC Transit, are hired through the in-house union bid process giving priority to applicants with seniority over those with supervisory and customer service experience. Again, LIRR relies upon a

smaller and less skilled pool of applicants for its supervisor positions. LIRR’s reliance on a smaller pool of supervisor applicants may limit the agency’s ability to generate new ideas and create a more dynamic problem-solving environment.

While the responsibilities of telephone information agents are similar at the three agencies, the ratio of supervisors to agents differs. At LIRR, the ratio of telephone agents to supervisors is 5 to 1 compared to the higher employee-supervisor ratios of 7 to 1 at MNR and LI Bus. NYC Transit’s ratio is 6 to 1. These differences in supervisor to agent ratio should be examined further to determine if agents at one agency are able to work more independently than at others.

Training Practices

The length and quality of telephone information agent training varies among the four agencies as seen in Table 29. NYC Transit and MNR place the strongest emphasis on learning the transportation system prior to using the computer terminals to access transportation system information. The two agencies also administer tests on the material covered during the training to ensure a certain level of trainee comprehension and information retention. While all four agencies use computer terminals to access information for customers, agents who are knowledgeable about the transportation system are able to give customers more educated choices.

Table 29. MTA Operating Agency Customer Service/Travel Information Agent Length of Training and Trainer Experience.

	LIRR	MNR	NYC Transit	LI Bus
Length of Training	2-5 Days	14 Days	6 Weeks	10 Days
Experience of the Trainers	Supervisors or experienced information clerks	Trained * Supervisors	Professional NYC Transit instructors	Professional LI Bus instructors (from the Training and Development Division)

* “Trained” refers to supervisors that have been instructed in how to conduct the specific training.

MNR, NYC Transit and LI Bus conduct a substantial portion of their training away from the daily routine of the information center. This method allows the trainer to focus on teaching the new hires to learn the system without outside distractions. Once the information has been absorbed, participants are better prepared for the on-the-job portion of the training where they apply what they have learned.

Access to Customer Service Information

All four agencies use computer-based programs with a series of screens to enable customer service agents to access frequently updated information. Differences exist among the agencies when a major incident occurs. Obtaining

information about the nature and anticipated time of the delay is always difficult for all the agencies.

LIRR's real time TIMACS system conveys train status, but does not provide the level of detail needed for agents to assist customers in making informed choices. MNR's large plasma screen immediately alerts agents to an incident; information is relayed as it comes in and updates the computers quickly. NYC Transit agents obtain information regarding unplanned service delays from the Rail Control Center or Bus Command Center, where call center supervisors advise phone agents of service delays. Agents can hear the supervisor's recorded delay notifications on the call center's voice messaging system without leaving their workstations. At LI Bus, the Service Planning and Safety Divisions alert the Call Center by telephone and e-mail about detours and service adjustments, such as parades and bus stop changes. Unplanned "real-time" events, such as accidents affecting traffic conditions, are routinely reported by the Command Center by telephone.

All the agencies will have the advantage of the TRIPS123 system, which is to begin in November 2003, although the agencies are handling it differently. Both LIRR and MNR will maintain their existing PC systems and incorporate the TRIPS123 as an additional source of information. NYC Transit has decided to discontinue use of its current OTIS program in favor of TRIPS123. Long Island Bus has not yet developed a plan as to how they will make use of TRIPS123 at the Call Center, although it is expected to supplement the Trapeze system currently in place.

Performance Evaluation

Supervisors at all four agencies monitor telephone calls to evaluate customer service performance. MNR differs from LIRR, NYC Transit and LI Bus in the criteria it uses for evaluation. Until five years ago all four agencies evaluated telephone information agents based on the number and length of the telephone calls handled. MNR determined that this evaluation practice put pressure on the agents and reduced the quality of information provided to customers. MNR decided that its agents could best serve the railroad by acting as sales persons for MNR. Agents now seek to determine early in the conversation if the caller is a regular or new customer. Agents make certain that new customers have the detailed information they need for their travels, while regular customers are treated more expeditiously.

This altered approach encourages new riders to use MNR. Easing the fears of new riders at their first contact with the railroad creates the impression of a journey with helpful employees as well as a sense of security. Brief, incomplete or confusing information can discourage potential riders from using the railroad, conveying the message that "you are on your own": a message not conducive to attracting new customers.

Refresher Training

The agencies provide relatively little ongoing refresher and skill enhancement training for customer service and travel information agents. Among the three agencies, only MNR has an extensive bi-annual refresher training program. MNR's "Phase Two Technique Training" employs a team-building approach to further facilitate communication among department members and encourage proactive problem solving.

Railroad and Subway Conductors

Hiring Practices

Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Railroad and NYC Transit use the same outlets for recruiting applicants for railroad and subway conductor positions that they use for ticket clerks, station service agents and telephone information agents.

Minimum hiring requirements for assistant conductor and conductor applicants at all three agencies are the ability to communicate effectively and to be understood. LIRR and NYC require a High School Diploma, while MNR requires two years in customer service or cash handling. The LIRR strongly prefers, but doesn't require, its applicants to have some prior customer service or cash handling experience.

MNR is the only agency that specifically measures customer service ability and aptitude of its applicants for conductor positions (with the Hogan Personality Indicator test) in addition to the interview process. LIRR and NYC Transit rely upon the interview and prior job experience to determine these qualities.

LIRR, unlike MNR and NYC Transit, requires its applicants to attend and pass tests in conjunction with a one day seminar on signal and railroad rules and a fifteen to sixteen week training course prior to being hired. Both MNR and NYC Transit hire assistant conductor applicants prior to assistant conductor training.

All the agencies require a background check and medical exam. MNR and NYC Transit also require a physical abilities test.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

LIRR and MNR assistant conductors and conductors have similar responsibilities: to ensure the safe movement of customers, make announcements, and collect and sell tickets on-board trains. NYC Transit conductors have three positions under the conductor heading; conductors,

platform conductors and passenger controllers. Only the train conductor is responsible for opening and closing train doors, making announcements, interacting with the train operator and communicating with the command center, as needed. Platform conductor and passenger controllers are positioned in high volume stations. Platform conductors provide train service and station/line information to customers and passenger controllers' function is to ensure customers enter and exit safely and reduce dwell time in stations.

The structure of supervision varies among the agencies (see Table 30). At LIRR, the ratio of train service personnel positions to transportation managers is 38 to 1. LIRR transportation managers are responsible for assistant conductors, conductors, ticket collectors, engineers as well as assistant stationmasters, ushers and yardmasters. At MNR the ratio of train personnel to the operations managers who supervise them is slightly lower than LIRR at 37:1. At NYC Transit, the ratio of conductors to train service supervisors is approximately 34:1. At NYC Transit this number varies by supervisor depending upon where platform conductors and platform controllers are assigned.

At LIRR, transportation managers must have successfully completed a one year Transportation Department Management Development-Transportation Supervisor Training Program, which is a mentor type program. Required education, experience or training for operations managers at MNR include a minimum of three to five years experience in a transportation/operations capacity and one year of experience managing in an operations or service delivery function. Applicants must also be qualified on MNR's rules of the operating department, air brake, train handling and the physical characteristics of the assigned line. At NYC Transit, train service supervisors, assistant train dispatchers and train dispatchers must pass a promotional civil service exam, have excellent attendance and operating records to qualify for these supervisory positions. Train service supervisors must also have at least two years as road train operators.

LIRR transportation managers report to nine lead field, functional or terminal managers, who manage a combination of field activities, key terminal locations, and functional areas, such as following railroad rules. The nine lead transportation managers report to ten superintendents. At MNR, 19 operations managers report to four district superintendents. The district superintendents report to 3 line superintendents.

At NYC Transit, train service supervisors, assistant train dispatchers and train dispatchers report to line superintendents, who report to two transportation operations supervisors.

Table 30. Train Service Personnel Supervisory Structure and Ratios among the MTA Operating Agencies.

	Long Island Rail	Metro-North Railroad	New York City Transit
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	Road		
Assistant Conductors	305 assistant conductors	50 assistant conductors	0
Conductors	755 conductors	650 conductors	2, 978 train conductors 70 platform conductors 14 passenger controllers
Direct Supervisors	28 transportation managers	19 ⁵⁰ operations managers	338 train service supervisors 282 assistant train dispatchers 407 train dispatchers
Train Service Employee/ Supervisor Ratio	38:1	37:1	34:1

Training Practices

The three agencies structure their training somewhat differently as can be seen below in Table 31.

Table 31. Length of Train Service Personnel Training among the MTA Operating Agencies.

	Long Island Rail Road			Metro-North Railroad		New York City Transit	
	Pre-Hire	Post Hire		Post Hire		Post Hire	
	Classroom	Classroom	On the Job	Classroom	On the Job	Classroom	On the Job
Length of Training	One day seminar Phase I: 15-16 weeks (2 weekday evenings & Saturdays)	Phase II: 4 weeks	Phase II: 1 week	6 weeks (5 weekdays, full-day program)	1 week	6-7 weeks (31-33 days)	6-7 weeks training after assignment.

The benefits offered by LIRR’s pre-hire assistant conductor training include cost savings, a common skill set and knowledge of the LIRR system and highly motivated employees. All new assistant conductor hires have knowledge of ticket selling, the book of rules, the air brake, federal and state requirements, such as CPR training and emergency preparation, and the importance of customer service. The LIRR is the only operating agency that saves the cost of paying potential new hires until they pass the level of competency provided by the Phase I training.

Both LIRR and MNR provide intensive training for their assistant conductors. At LIRR, the four week (17 days) Phase II training is compensated. One week of mentored on-the-job training focuses on a checklist of tasks to be covered each day, including the reading of announcements on-board trains, providing customer service and operating procedures. The customer service portion of LIRR’s training is integrated throughout the program and includes announcements and helping customers to board and alight from the train.

⁵⁰ Breakdown of positions: 5 GCT managers, 1 Poughkeepsie, 1 Brewster, 3 Croton-Harmon, 1 North White Plains, 2 Stamford, 1 Bridgeport, 2 New Haven, 3 On-Board Services.

MNR's assistant conductor training program is compensated. It is provided to newly hired employees during a full-time, seven week program (35 days). Similar to LIRR, MNR provides a one week on-the-job training component.

While LIRR stresses customer service throughout the first phase and more formally during the second phase of training, MNR spends roughly three days out of every week on customer service training. MNR's customer service portion of the assistant conductor training focuses on five primary lessons: the customer and customer service; service attitude; communications skills; emotional customers and special situations. The Tone Game is a unique aspect of MNR's training, which is not found in the training provided at the other agencies. By focusing on non-verbal cues, body language and tone of voice, the Tone Game helps trainees to be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.

Similar to MNR, NYC Transit provides compensated conductor training for newly hired employees. The training ranges between six and six and a half weeks (31-33 days) depending upon the division. The customer service portion involves one day of training taught by the Customer Communication Division. The training focuses on co-worker and customer professionalism, the importance of providing good customer service, perceiving the customer as an ally, ways to diffuse conflict, the proper method for delivering announcements (text, speed, volume and voice tone) and the importance of communicating with the train operator.

Training to become a full conductor is a seven week program at LIRR and a ten week program at MNR. Both railroads administer tests for each section of the training that must be passed for promotion to conductor. While both programs do not include a formal customer service segment, the LIRR reinforces the importance of customer service on the last day of training and graduation.

Assistant conductor and conductor training at LIRR, MNR and NYC Transit is provided by personnel who are trainer certified. All trainers are located within a specific division of the Human Resources Departments.

Accessing Customer Service Information

LIRR, MNR and NYC Transit train/subway service personnel rely on the Transportation Movement, Central Command Center, RTO and control towers for up to the minute train service and customer information. The provision of timely customer service information depends upon well functioning information and communication technology as well as efficient employee-to-employee and employee-to-customer communication. LIRR, MNR and NYC Transit rely upon different information and communication technology systems to enable them to provide transportation service information.

At LIRR, train service personnel make use of a radio system with four channels to communicate between themselves and an on-board intercom system to communicate to customers. The M7 cars allow for intra-train communication via an additional on-board intercom system. LIRR train service personnel are hampered by the presence of communication “dead spots” along portions of the system, affecting their ability to communicate with the Movement Bureau and control tower and requiring them to use cell phones to ensure communication in these areas. The Rail Road is currently conducting a study to identify ways to improve communication capabilities and intra-agency techniques. LIRR is also working on the procedures for more timely communication to customers about service problems by developing more accurate problem solving time estimates and providing customers with information about other transportation options.

At MNR, train service personnel communicate to one another face to face. All operating compartments must also have a working radio in addition to at least one other working radio on the train. It is anticipated that all MNR conductors will have handheld radios by the end of 2003.⁵¹ Communication between conductors and engineers on-board trains is usually done face to face. Other on-board methods are by public address system, the train intercom system or by the radio channel for the operational territory. MNR utilizes three separate road radio channels: channel one is dedicated to the Harlem Line territory, channel two for the Harlem Line territory, and channel three for the New Haven Line territory.

All communications between the control center and trains is conducted on the applicable radio road channel. All operating compartments must have a working radio. In the case of service delays or emergencies, train service personnel contact the Rail Traffic Controller (RTC) for direction. Customer service information is relayed directly to conductors from the RTC. Conductors are required to make regular public address announcements as set forth in the train service manual.

Since the MTA's May 2003 institution of increased fares for on-board ticket purchases, MNR and LIRR conductors are selling fewer on-board tickets. MNR has experienced a forty percent reduction in on-board ticket sales during 2003 due to the fare increase as well as a declining trend in ridership. Less time spent selling tickets should allow conductors to communicate to customers more frequently with accurate and clear announcements. Recent improvements to on-board communication technology in the new cars, such as automated announcements, will also help MNR and LIRR train service personnel. Currently a conductor must walk through each car to identify and locate a particular problem, the M7 advanced electronic system identifies the type and location of a problem.

⁵¹ At the MNRC Committee Meeting 9/17/03 it was stated that conductors would be equipped with handheld radios within the next 90 days.

NYC Transit train service personnel make use of the on-board public address system to communicate to one another as well as to customers. NYC Transit train service personnel communicate with the Subways Control Center and the local towers through a two-way radio system to learn about the status and nature of service delays or disruptions. One key problem with the system is the limited capability the Subways Control Center has for tracking the approximate location of subway trains in the system.

As stated previously,⁵² Transit's Automatic Train Supervision (ATS) and CBTC⁵³ projects will improve all aspects of subway system communication. For the first time, Transit personnel will see a dynamic display of all train movements. The ATS and CBTC system will centralize control and monitoring of train service at the Rail Control Center enabling the generation of real time train arrival information to customers.

The communication of accurate information between employees and to customers is a critical necessity in a transportation communication system. Upgrading the communication technology to and used by train service personnel is needed at all the operating agencies. While, the LIRR has the most advanced system of communicating real time delays, the lack of detail makes it insufficient. MNR's system information technology developed for customer service representatives at MNR's Customer Information Center works extremely well, but is not available for train service personnel, MNR's Rail Traffic Controller Operations Center or customers.

Evaluating Performance

The LIRR and NYC Transit train service personnel probationary period is one year compared to sixty days for MNR train service personnel. All agencies evaluate their probationary train service personnel quarterly to ensure that they have the requisite skills needed to qualify for the position. Given the shorter probationary period, MNR managers evaluate probationary train service personnel more intensively within the given time frame. MNR also requires a minimum average score of 84 to pass. NYC Transit requires a formal panel review after the first year to evaluate the skills of train service probationary employees prior to approving qualification.

Both LIRR and MNR, in coordination with the MTA's Audit Department, contract with a private company to conduct daily train service spot checks and produce monthly reports. NYC Transit uses its own staff to conduct quarterly and annual Departmental reports on the conditions of the subway passenger environments (Passenger Environment Surveys and Citywide Survey). All three agencies also

⁵² See Ticket Clerk and Station Agent, Accessing Customer Service Information, p.19.

⁵³ Communication Based Train Control is a real time train delay information system that is used by the RTO Control Center to identify exact train locations.

employ their own teams of spot checkers to randomly check train and customer service quality.

The LIRR is the only operating agency that regularly organizes quarterly conferences for transportation department managers to discuss particular issues.

LIRR, MNR and NYC Transit acknowledge the importance of customer commendation letters to recognize excellent train service personnel performance. LIRR additionally sends its employees formal commendation letters in recognition of good service. The agencies also reward excellent performance through awards programs. LIRR and NYC Transit have two different award programs, while MNR has one annual agency-wide award program.

The agencies use customer complaint letters and a variety of spot check evaluations to identify poor customer service performance. While the agencies' procedures differ according to different union agreements, management approaches train service personnel on an individual basis for the first infraction, followed by a formal notification for a second incident and an investigation and panel review for subsequent problems.

Refresher Training Classes

LIRR, MNR and NYC Transit are federally required to provide bi-annual emergency and safety procedural training.

Only the LIRR provides a formal one day skill refresher training class for train service personnel as well as ticket clerks, station agents, ushers, Command Center personnel and block operators. The Roundtable program, January 2002, aims to share experiences across departments, provide front line employees with a broader perspective of railroad operations, and to focus on the importance of customer service and communication.

Bus Operators ⁵⁴

Hiring Practices

NYC Transit and LI Bus share some common hiring requirements for bus operator applicants, such as certain types of motor vehicle licenses, clean driving records, and the ability to understand and be understood in English.

The major difference between the two hiring practices is NYC Transit's use of the Bus Operator Selection System (BOSS) test to assess customer service and bus operator aptitude prior to employment and training. These tools have specifically sought to identify applicants who meet the agencies service quality criteria of being safe, courteous and reliable. Research demonstrates that applicants hired under this process have much better driving and safety records.

The new civil service test and BOSS training program have dramatically improved the quality of new bus operators entering the system and have strengthened NYC Transit's commitment to employee development and professional growth.

At LI Bus, paratransit operators, limited assignment bus operators (LABOs) and fixed route bus operators are not required to take pre-or post hire examinations, nor are they subject to any requirements found in the BOSS program.

Supervisory Structure and Job Responsibilities

The supervisory structure at LI Bus and NYC Transit for bus operators is very different due to the different size of the two agencies. The 534 LI Bus operators report directly to the 35 dispatchers on the street whereas the 9,300 NYC Transit bus operators report to 96 superintendents at their respective depots.

LI Bus dispatchers are usually promoted from the position of full time, fixed route bus operator. They must meet certain criteria and score seventy-five percent on a written test to be eligible for promotion. NYC Transit superintendents are promoted from the position of dispatcher and are required to have at least three years of experience.

While the required job responsibilities performed by bus operators at NYC Transit and LI Bus are very similar, the driving conditions differ according to the local topography and traffic congestion.

⁵⁴ When considering how NYC Transit and LI Bus hire, train, provide customer information, evaluate and provide refresher training to their bus operators, it is like comparing the operations of a small town general store to Macy's. Although their goals and mission are similar, NYC Transit's Department of Buses is one part of a much larger organizational structure whereas LI Bus operates independently.

Training Practices

LI Bus and NYC Transit have rigorous training programs for their bus operators, but relatively little interaction is shared between them. Training for LI Bus operators is a five week program; two weeks are spent in the classroom and three weeks are devoted to driving the bus and learning the LI Bus routes and procedures. The class is taught by trainers from the System Safety and Training Department.

NYC Transit bus operators must complete a six week program that is also split into classroom and on the road segments. The 19 trainers are former depot superintendents, who have successfully completed a Train-the-Trainer program. The classroom training for bus operators is conducted at a brand new state-of-the-art training center in the Bronx.

Over the years, both agencies have increased the time devoted to customer service issues in their training programs. The focus is on the tools needed to communicate effectively, the need to understand who their customers are and the need to know what constitutes good customer service. Both agencies have been relentless in their effort to ensure that operators comply with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and their understanding of how to properly handle customers with special needs. Both agencies employ the latest training tools and enlist class participation throughout the program.

The bus simulator, the newest training tool incorporated into NYC Transit's training process, is planned for LI Bus' new training facility. Anticipated completion of the new facility is 2005. Based on preliminary research, NYC Transit's newly trained bus operators accident rates have diminished significantly since use of the bus simulator has been implemented. The agency is considering expanding the simulator program to train seasoned operators based upon the early success it has achieved.

Accessing Customer Service Information

LI Bus and NYC Transit buses are equipped with radios so drivers can communicate directly with the Command Centers for real time information. Operators are directed to make announcements with their telescopic microphones as needed. Both agencies stress that bus operators must not rely solely upon the microphone technology and teach them how to speak properly without the aide of a microphone so they can make announcements when the microphones are not working.

NYC Transit's decision not to install automated annunciators on buses is understandable in terms of management wanting bus drivers to have "live" interaction with their customers. The use of recorded announcements for the

required stops could; however, alleviate one of the many responsibilities of driving a bus.

LI bus on the other hand has installed annunciators on eighty-three percent of their bus fleet and expects to have annunciators on all buses by the end of 2004. This technology allows all bus stops on a route to be announced.

It is unclear how long it will take to install and begin use of LI Bus's Automatic Vehicle Locator and Control System (AVLCS) as well as NYC Transit's Service Management Customer Information System (SMCIS). These bus tracking tools are essential to providing real time information to customers who are waiting at bus stops. This is the kind of information that customers want to know and greatly benefits the daily customer transit experience. It is unlikely, however, that it will be in place soon at either agency.

Evaluating Performance

Long Island Bus and NYC Transit Bus Operators have six month probationary periods, which are established through union agreements. They can be extended if management is not satisfied with an operator's performance.

Daily and random spot checks are one of many tools used by LI Bus to evaluate the performance of fixed route bus operators. Complimentary and complaint letters from customers are another means of evaluating an operator's performance.

LI Bus is strongly committed to adhering to the provisions of ADA so they contract with an outside firm to monitor compliance. NYC Transit also seeks to ensure that bus operators comply with ADA requirements, but has found this difficult to achieve. While its bus operators have perfected the use of the wheelchair lift for customers, they have fallen short in their compliance with "Making Clear and Understandable Announcements."⁵⁵

NYC Transit recognizes bus operators who make all required announcements with apple lapel pins. The Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association (EPVA), independently presents annual awards to NYC Transit bus operators who demonstrate quality customer service skills. LI Bus rewards bus operators for excellent safety performance, but does not recognize customer service or award other aspects of bus operator performance.

Refresher Training

Refresher training is useful to ensure that bus operators do their job in an efficient and safe manner. LI Bus operators receive refresher training on an as

⁵⁵ 1 See description of PES in NYC Transit Conductors, p. 62 and Bus Operators, p. 77.

needed basis, and participate in a federally mandated training program every two years to review driving regulations, procedures for working with the equipment, the ADA regulations, and other operations and customer service issues. The relatively new customer service module that is offered reflects LI Bus' commitment to enhancing the skills of their bus operators.

NYC Transit Bus operators must also complete a bi-annual refresher training program. Customer service training programs are provided in between. All NYC Transit Bus refresher programs are followed by tests to evaluate the operator's retention of the course material.

INNOVATIVE CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING AT U. S. TRANSPORTATION AGENCIES

Effective communication and excellent customer service is integral to providing professional and superior public transportation. This study examined how transit industry organizations and transit agencies across the country hire, train and maintain high quality customer service from front line personnel.

Of the ten transportation organizations and agencies reviewed for this report, three national transportation organizations, three transportation agencies and one airline stood out as having innovative programs. Some aspects of these programs have relevance for the MTA operating agencies.

National Transportation Organizations

During the 1990's, national organizations began to develop within the transportation industry to address new training needs for front line personnel. Organizations such as the National Transit Technology Career Ladder Partnership (NTTCLP), the National Transit Institute (NTI) at Rutgers University and the Canadian Urban Transportation Association (CUTA) Training Center have developed programs that have informed and guided the formation of transit agency training programs in the United States and Canada.

Formally established in 2001 with a seed grant from the National Transportation Association, the Community Transportation Development Center (CTDC) is a joint labor-management organization that addresses transit training needs on a national level. Located in Silver Spring, Maryland, the CDTC received a grant in 2001 from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to develop the National Transit Technology Career Ladder Partnership, a pilot project to train transit and transportation personnel in five cities in the United States. The five transportation union/agency partnerships selected to participate were: New York (TWU/MTA), Philadelphia (TWU/SEPTA), San Francisco (TWU/MUNI), Miami (TWU/MDT) and Houston (TWU/ Houston Metro).

The Community Transportation Development Center acts as a facilitator of the project by providing the union/agency partnerships with training materials and assistance, technical assistance and perspectives and knowledge from other transportation agencies. Each of the five partnerships identified its most pressing training needs and developed programs to address those needs. The funding is targeted toward achieving those goals.

The San Francisco TWU/MUNI partnership program is the most directed toward improving customer service training. An aspect of the TWU/ MUNI partnership program is discussed in the training section of this chapter.

Established in 1992 at Rutgers University under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), The National Transit Institute (NTI) is funded under an FTA grant. The mission of NTI is to provide training, education and to serve as a clearinghouse of training and technological information and research in support of public transportation. The Institute identifies transportation industry training needs, develops and delivers training programs and materials for the transit industry, government officials and the public at large. Topics of Institute workshops and seminars include transit management, transportation planning, advanced transit technologies, transit workplace safety and professional development for trainers. The Institute is involved in transportation policy research and serves as a catalyst for enhancing skills and performance in public transportation.

Established in 1904,⁵⁶ as a Canadian association of urban transit service providers, suppliers and transit-related organizations, the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) has developed extensive training, research programs. CUTA serves as an information exchange, and acts as an advocate for the transit industry. Association membership includes Canadian urban transit systems, government agencies, businesses involved in the sale or manufacture of transportation equipment or services and affiliates.

CUTA offers a broad range of individual training courses to transportation officials as well as training programs for transportation agency purchase through its Transit Ambassador program. Agencies purchase the Transit Ambassador program from CUTA, who trains agency in-house trainers and customizes the program according to agency needs. The agency in-house trainers implement the program at the agency. Program courses are designed with the exchange of information and ideas among participants as an integral part of the learning process. CUTA uses experiential training principles to ensure the programs are intensive, engaging and effective learning events.

CUTA also offers a fee-based on-line, e-learning training program, www.transittraining.com, which can be tailored to the needs of agencies that purchase its service. CUTA also offers specific fee-based on-line courses available to any transportation professional who would like to further their professional development. All of CUTA's transit-specific training is available anywhere, anytime through the Internet.

⁵⁶ In 1904, CUTA was called the Canadian Street Railway Association and its name has evolved over the years.

U. S. Transportation Agencies

Innovative customer service practices and relevant programs to the MTA operating agencies have been selected from the following agencies: the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), San Francisco Municipal Railway (MUNI) and Pierce Transit of Tacoma, Washington. Continental Airlines was also included since customer service has been a long established practice within the competitive airline industry. Programs are categorized according to administrative policy, hiring practices, training practices, evaluating performance and refresher training,

Administration Policy

Initiating an Agency Wide Customer Service Culture Change with Support at the Top. When George Warrington became the Executive Director of NJ TRANSIT in 2002, he stated:

“NJ TRANSIT need(s) to reexamine the way it does business, with an eye on the customer...”⁵⁷

Mr. Warrington’s priority on customer service has set the tone for top managers to improve customer service. Management’s interest in customer service improvement has resulted in a more streamlined bureaucratic process to facilitate large scale agency change. To highlight NJ TRANSIT’s commitment to customer service, Mr. Warrington keeps a highly visible profile by speaking to the press about the agency’s customer service mission and accomplishments.

One of Mr. Warrington’s first directives was to create a ten member customer service task force, consisting of managers and staff from a variety of NJ TRANSIT departments to examine the agency’s internal operations and the practices of other transit agencies and organizations with excellent customer service. The goal was to examine the customer service practices of NJ TRANSIT’s front line employees and managers and to identify opportunities for improvement. The result was 17 recommendations to improve the NJ TRANSIT customer experience in the short term and 11 initiatives to improve NJ TRANSIT customer service in the long term.

The 17 short term “Quick Hits” address many customers’ “pet peeves” and front line employees’ frustrations. Some of these recommendations, which are in the process of being implemented, include: the ability to refund unused tickets at station windows rather than through the mail; identifying off peak boarding areas on the platform to inform passengers where to stand; and authorizing operators and conductors to accept any form of official identification as proof of eligibility for senior fare discounts.

The 11 long term initiatives include the creation of a “Transit Academy” for employees offering courses in all aspects of customer service and improving

⁵⁷ “Warrington Issues Administration’s Six Month Progress Report”, NJ TRANSIT press release, November 13, 2002.

customer service during service disruptions. A separate 22-member task force, which includes representatives from the United Transportation Union and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, was created to examine customer service procedures during service disruptions. The task force made the following recommendations to improve customer care, comfort and communication:

- To stop the first available train in the vicinity of the incident to rescue passengers.
- To equip trains and stations with bullhorns to improve the audibility of customer communication.
- To establish new crew size standards for eight, ten and 12 car trains.
- To create regional six to eight member “Go Teams” consisting of NJ TRANSIT managers for immediate deployment to incidents to provide customer care to those involved in a major incident.
- To provide more immediate communication by equipping all train crews with radios to keep passengers better informed.
- To display train emergency procedures on all trains and make accompanying panel cards available at major terminals and stations.

As of October 2003, these recommendations are in various stages of implementation.

Hiring Practices

Developing an Interest in Transportation Industry Careers. Continental Airlines developed a program with local high schools where trainers would go to a school once a week with ticketing equipment and teach an introductory class in preparation for an airport internship. The program evolved into a more independent one with teachers from different schools teaching the course and members from the Continental Training Team coming in periodically to train the trainers. Continental Airlines stopped offering the program in 2001 due to budget cuts.

Recruiting Employees with Strong Customer Service Skills. San Francisco Municipal Railway’s (MUNI) Transit Information Center seeks job applicants with front line work experience in the airline industry to fill their telephone clerk positions. This airline background provides solid training in customer service and reduces the training time for newly hired positions.

Testing to Predict Public Communication Skills. Pierce Transit of Tacoma Washington requires their customer service representative applicants to take a twenty minute written examination, which requires locating key city landmarks on a map and identifying the route they would instruct a customer to take to reach designated locations.

Pre-Employment Training and Testing to Ensure Applicants Grasp Course Concepts and Techniques. At Continental Airlines, all new front line employees are required to take a five week training program with an average of fifteen participants. Participants are required to pass a number of tests during the training prior to employment.

Training Practices

Creating a Change in Agency Culture. Chicago Transit Authority uses the Canadian Urban Transit Association's Transit Ambassador program to train their front line staff. All newly hired frontline employees are required to take this program at the beginning of their employment.

The front line transit on the job training program takes place one day a week over four weeks. The training has ten components: the Fundamentals of Customer Service, Communication, Public Announcement Skills, Special Needs, Complaints or Opportunities, Difficult Situations, Stress, Review, Management Support and Internal Customers. The benefit of this type of training is that there is time to absorb and try out the material learned. Participants return to the classroom with questions that may have come up during the week.

The philosophy of the Ambassador Program is based on behavior modeling rather than learning through traditional lectures. In behavior modeling the entire individual is addressed rather than just the job related elements, emphasis is placed on changing behavior both in and out of the workplace. Although traditional training is useful, it provides only some of the ingredients required to enhance behavior.

The four week program reduces territorial behavior among different frontline positions and departments as employees develop positive relationships with one another and gain a better understanding of the role and challenges faced by each department. This improves interagency communication and can lead to increased problem solving.

Participants in the training program are eligible to become certified trainers.

Incorporating Customer Service into All Task Training. All Continental Airlines technical and non-technical courses are taught from a customer service approach. This is accomplished by explaining the importance of the task at hand and how it will impact the customer if done incorrectly. Classroom and web training require pre-and post course testing to evaluate the student's absorption of the material.

The five week new hire training includes orientation and technical information. Fifty percent of the training focuses on customer service. Participants are placed at desk stations in the airport to apply what has been learned in the

training. They return to the classroom to discuss their experience and ask questions.

Working with Local Colleges and Universities to Enhance Employee Customer Service Skills. As a participant in the Community Transportation Development Center is (CTDC) National Transit Technology Career Ladder Partnership pilot program, San Francisco's Transportation Workers Union (TWU) and Municipal Railway (MUNI) developed a curriculum of courses with the City College of San Francisco called "The Ladder Program." MUNI employees take classes at the City College of San Francisco to facilitate their promotion within the MUNI organization. The program offers college level courses. The four core courses focus on communicating effectively as the key to successful employment and are taken prior to one of the three certificate programs: Transit Supervision, Information Technology and Electronic Technology. The Transit Supervision Certificate program is most relevant for front line staff and includes courses, such as Stress Management and Well Being, Assertiveness and Control and Interpersonal Communication. The focus of the program is to develop a culture of learning and growth within the MUNI organization and to create opportunities for advancement.

Giving Managers the Tools to Build Teams. Continental's "Leading a Winning Culture" training shadows a leader, analyzing the participant's leadership and behavioral styles and team building. The training incorporates life skills through self-awareness, coaching and feedback sessions to ensure a supportive culture that encourages everyone to reach their goals. The training sessions are conducted with small work groups to achieve the most productive results.

Continental also offers courses to employees who have stressful jobs, but need to react calmly. These classes provide stress management techniques, including self-awareness training, to lead to deeper self-perception and reaction.

Increasing Training Opportunities Through the Use of e-Learning. After the events of September 11, Continental Airlines was faced with tremendous challenges. Inundated daily by the FAA with new regulations to be disseminated around the world, comprehended by airline staff and implemented correctly, Continental focused on developing the full potential of e-Learning. To date, 13,000 employees have taken the 30 courses offered via the web, which require passing examinations. Continental evaluates each course to determine if it is best taught via the web or whether the course would be best conducted by an on-site trainer.

Trainees have responded favorably to the new e-Learning opportunities. Many employee comments have focused on the convenience of taking the courses where and when time permits. The opportunity to enhance their career in a way that fits into their schedule is extremely important.

Measuring Employee Skill Retention Post Training. Continental Airlines is interested in the long-term effectiveness of its employee training. Continental administers follow-up tests to employees at thirty, sixty and ninety day intervals to evaluate retention of the course material and the value of the course. Employees can take the tests on-line.

Qualifying Agency Employees as Trainers. At the Chicago Transit Authority, employees are encouraged to apply to become trainers of the Canadian Urban Transit Association's Transit Ambassador program. Trainers go through a rigorous six day intensive certification program designed to qualify them with a solid understanding of the program's content and training techniques.

The trainer certification program requires participants to:

- Develop an understanding of the rationale behind behavior modeling versus traditional training.
- Develop the skills to facilitate the Transit Ambassador program.
- Practice delivering at least three segments of the program, receive feedback and share training ideas.
- Understand the adult learning cycle; learn a variety of platform skills including reinforcing and coaching skills and effective questioning; handle disruptive participants, and the use of instructional and audio-visual aids.
- Understand and demonstrate the successful use of various methodologies, e.g. group participation, skill demonstration, small group discussions, practice, debriefing and feedback sessions.

Certification qualifies the successful candidate to deliver all components of the program.

At Continental Airlines, all program trainers come from its own ranks providing a promotional opportunity for employees as well ensuring a practical application of the material presented. The process is achieved through targeted selection looking at motivational indicators among the applicants, who then go through a Certification Program for Instructors. "Teach Backs" are conducted to determine if a certificate can be issued for graduation from the program to enable the trainees to become full trainers. Additional support is provided to the trainee if weak areas are found. The trainees conduct training with the support of experienced trainers until they are considered competent to conduct training themselves. Continental's development team evaluates the trainers regularly to maintain a high quality of training. Trainers are also monitored on productivity to ensure they are being used to their full potential.

Evaluating Performance

Improving Performance Through Employee Recognition. Pierce Transit has a strong employee recognition program. The highest award is the annual Service Excellence Award presented to employees before the Board of Commissioners. The program is a mechanism to recognize and reward extraordinary service. It is most often presented to an employee for a life-saving act, but has also been awarded for outstanding customer service and excellent project management. The employee receives a plaque and a check for \$750. A permanent plaque with the recipient's name is displayed in Pierce Transit's Executive Office.

An Honor Roll is designed to recognize transit operators for outstanding overall performance. Those who meet the criteria in all four quarters in a calendar year get a day off with pay, a letter of appreciation, a lapel pin and lunch with the CEO, VP of Operations and Development, Senior Transportation Manager and the Transit Services Assistant Managers. The criteria for selection are: no preventable accidents; no customer complaints; no disciplinary actions; on-time attendance; no use of sick leave and no time loss on-the-job.

"Way to Go" Memos are individualized commendation memos to department employees who perform above and beyond the call of duty. In 2001, the agency formed a committee to recognize and reward employees who make Pierce Transit a better place to work. The committee presents awards to employees after a nomination and voting process. These "surprise" awards are presented to employees in front of their co-workers and usually include a "Way to Go" certificate, a "Way to Go" polo shirt that may be worn as part of a transit operators uniform and a gift certificate to the employee's favorite place.

Passenger Feedback. Many transit agencies use passenger surveys, customer complaints and compliments as a means of evaluating performance. Those agencies that have instituted proactive customer service training have stated that customer approval ratings increased in a positive correlation with the percentage of staff that continue to be trained under the newer programs.

Refresher Training

The survey of transportation agencies found none with strong refresher or enhancement training programs. This seems to be the result of the relatively new focus on customer service training. Many agencies, such as the Chicago Transit Authority, have plans for adding enhancement training once they have completed the training of all their front line staff members. The emphasis of most transportation agencies remains on the initial training process with the hope of adding programs for management and refresher training in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Twenty years ago, the PCAC recognized good customer service as an important aspect of the rider's overall travel experience in its 1984 report, ***Passenger Relations Training Programs***. Since the release of that report, the transit industry, and the MTA in particular, have made impressive strides in improving the quality of customer service.

The MTA took a giant step toward improving customer service as part of an overall strategy to create a seamless metropolitan transportation network with the introduction of the MetroCard in 1993. In the future, a customer will be able to purchase tickets for three modes of travel at a single location so that they can easily take a Metro-North Railroad train from Westchester, hop on the NYC Transit subway from Grand Central to Penn Station and ride on a Long Island Rail Road train to Montauk. A seamless transportation network presupposes a consistent quality of customer service for the duration of the trip.

In March 2003, the MTA submitted a bill to the State Legislature to amend the Public Authorities law to allow the MTA to restructure its operating agencies to "reflect(s) new regional transportation demographics, streamline(d) management and cost-efficient operation."⁵⁸ Although the PCAC does not feel that the MTA has adequately addressed the need for a legislated merger to gain the benefits it seeks, the PCAC supports the MTA's goals of coordinating and sharing best practices and programs among its subsidiaries. The recommendations proposed in this report support those MTA goals.

The recommendations are based on a comparative analysis of MTA operating agencies' customer service policies and practices and the innovative practices used by transportation agencies around the country. They are organized for implementation by the MTA and specific MTA operating agencies and focus on ways to improve the existing level, acquisition and retention of employee customer service skills within the different aspects of hiring, training, communication and access to customer service information, job performance evaluation and refresher training. Agency specific recommendations are listed in Appendix B.

Some of the recommendations may require union approval.

⁵⁸ MTA Reorganization Bill – Assembly 8904, June, 2003.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority

As the umbrella agency, the MTA has the ability to promote and support efforts to improve customer service practices among its operating agencies. The MTA should spearhead and coordinate efforts among Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Railroad, New York City Transit and Long Island Bus to share customer service practice information and resources. The following recommendations focus on MTA opportunities to improve inter-agency customer service practices and policies:

Hiring Practices

- **Increase transportation-related curriculum at educational institutions.** The MTA should increase relationships with high schools, community colleges and universities to create interest in transportation industry careers. They should promote more courses in transportation related skills and subjects to improve the qualifications of transportation industry job applicants and serve as a job recruitment source for the MTA operating agencies.
- **Standardize titles and job responsibilities for similar front line positions.** The MTA should standardize the titles of front line positions, hiring qualifications, selection process and job descriptions for comparable jobs at its operating agencies, such as ticket clerk, ticket seller and station agent, where possible. This will help to ensure a more seamless transportation system experience for customers.
- **Review and consider adapting LIRR pre-hire conductor training program.** The benefits of LIRR's pre-hire assistant conductor training include cost savings, highly motivated employees, a common skill set and knowledge of the LIRR prior to being hired. The other MTA agencies should examine this program to determine its usefulness and possible adoption.

Training Practices

- **Incorporate customer service into all task training.** At Continental Airlines technical and non-technical courses are taught from a customer service approach. This is accomplished by explaining the importance of the task at hand and how it will impact the customer if done incorrectly.
- **Require a comprehensive customer service training program for all MTA operating agency front line personnel.** The MTA should oversee and support the customer service aspect of all front line employee training programs to ensure consistency of training and standards among the operating agencies. The MTA should review the Canadian Urban Transportation Association's Transit Ambassador program used at the

Chicago Transit Authority as a guide to developing an MTA specific front line employee customer service training program.

- **Provide agency specific emergency procedure customer service training for all front line personnel.** The MTA agencies should develop and provide special emergency customer service training as part of their new hire training of front line personnel. Knowing how to handle, direct and attend to customers in emergency situations is critical to maintaining calm behavior and ensuring passenger safety.
- **Promote intra and inter-departmental “Team Building” training.** The MTA operating agencies should create team building training programs to better facilitate daily communication and problem solving abilities among managers and front line employees within and among departments. The agencies should examine the “Leading a Winning Culture” training program offered at Continental Airlines to use as a guide in developing a program specific to each agency’s needs.
- **Promote e-Learning training opportunities.** The MTA and its agencies should develop on-line *e-Learning* programs similar to those used at Continental Airlines to provide employees with a basic knowledge of the MTA’s transportation network and to facilitate more informed front line employees. *E-Learning* is convenient for employees.

The courses should be required for all front line employees beginning with each agency’s transportation routes and services. The programs should also include tests that must be passed as a prerequisite to qualify from probationary status as well as for promotions within each operating agency.

New telephone information representatives for example, as is done at NYC Transit, should learn the complexity of their agency’s transportation system prior to gaining computer access to the information. Greater knowledge of the agency’s system and how it functions will assist telephone information representatives in providing more informed choices for customers.

- **Adapt and expand MNR’s conductor training Tone Game for use in all agency front line position customer service training.** The MTA agencies should adapt the use of MNR’s Tone Game training to help front line employees learn to hear the differences in voice tone that affect how information is conveyed by employees and perceived by customers. MNR should expand their use of this training for other front line employees.
- **Share innovative training practices and agency efforts to measure training efficiencies and effectiveness.** The MTA should develop pre- and post training tests to measure agency training effectiveness. The MTA should also track the progress within each agency for developing such tools and

maintain best practices in the industry that can be adapted for use throughout the MTA.

The results of these evaluations will inform trainers on the participants' grasp of the material and help assess whether they have the required skills and knowledge to perform the job well. Participants who do not attain a certain score should be required to take additional training.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

- **Prioritize agency improvements in communication technology for front line employees and customers.** The MTA should make short and long term improvements to communication technologies for front line employees and customers a priority for all the operating agencies. The MTA should direct the operating agencies to develop plans to improve communication technology among conductors, central transportation operations, telephone information agents, ticket sellers and at stations. The agencies should detail ways the technology will improve communication and develop a schedule for system wide implementation.
- **Require all station based personnel at the operating agencies to have text messaging pagers as backup communication systems.** The MTA should require all agencies to install text-messaging pagers to all railroad ticket agent offices, buses and, if possible, NYC Transit station booths to ensure backup communication options during an emergency.
- **Promote web-based access to service change information.** The MTA should encourage and oversee the use of web-based programs to inform front line staff at all the operating agencies about service changes and the reasons for the changes. More knowledgeable front line staff will convey more accurate and credible information to the public.
- **Develop “Go Teams” to facilitate communication to customers in emergencies.** In an emergency, personnel are focused on transportation problem solving. The MTA should assemble agency “Go Teams” whose principal focus is communicating with the public and providing available options to customers. This recommendation was made recently by New Jersey Transit after experiencing a train derailment.
- **Departmental supervisors across MTA agencies should meet annually to compare notes and learn from one another.** Sharing information across agencies is done, but not as much as it should be. LIRR’s Roundtable refresher training and Transportation Department conferences bring inter- and intra-agency personnel together to discuss communication and transportation department issues. Across agency discussions also occur more informally among the MTA agency telephone travel information department managers.

Discussions among the MTA operating agencies should take place more formally, on an annual basis, so as to stimulate problem solving abilities, generate new training ideas, share best practices and avoid “reinventing the wheel.”

Evaluating Performance

- **Coordinate use of standardized, formal performance evaluations.** The MTA should create an inter-agency work group to develop a formal written process to evaluate front line employees’ performance using MTA standardized guidelines, where possible. Require management of all the agencies to review department evaluations annually, if not already done, as a basis for identifying and refining front line employee training.

Refresher Training

- **Promote regular customer service refresher classes for front line staff.** The MTA should require all agencies to develop annual customer service refresher classes for front line staff devoted to areas, such as customer service announcements to improve skills and to ensure that front line staff is comfortable and proficient at making them

The agencies should also look to LIRR’s Roundtable training as a model for the type of refresher classes to be required. One key element of the Roundtable training is the bringing together of a diverse group of front line employees to increase their knowledge about how their positions relate to and influence aspects of the railroad. The curriculum also stresses the importance of communication, encourages inter-departmental discussion and problem solving.

- **Provide regular customer service emergency procedure refresher training.** The need for communication with the public is essential at all times and imperative during service delays and emergencies. The MTA operating agencies should develop and require all front line employees to attend a customer service emergency procedure class on a regular basis.

PLEASE REFER TO APPENDIX B FOR AGENCY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS.

APPENDIX A

Overview of MTA Operating Agencies

OVERVIEW OF MTA OPERATING AGENCIES

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is the parent company of the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), Metro-North Railroad (MNR), New York City Transit (NYC Transit) and Long Island Bus (LIB), the operating agencies that are discussed in this report.

In 1965, the New York State Legislature created the Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Authority (MCTA) as a public benefit corporation giving it responsibility for the purchase, rehabilitation and operation of the Long Island Rail Road. The MCTA was expanded and renamed the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in 1968. Metro-North Railroad was formed in 1983 when the MTA assumed control of Conrail's commuter operations in New York and Connecticut.⁵⁹ The New York City Transit Authority was created in 1953 by the New York State Legislature as a separate public corporation to manage and operate the city-owned bus and subway routes. The MTA became NYC Transit Authority's parent agency in 1968. Long Island Bus previously known as the Metropolitan Suburban Bus Authority (MSBA) was taken over in 1973 by the MTA to serve suburban bus users in Nassau County as a first step toward creating a regional bus authority on Long Island.

Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), the oldest and largest commuter rail system in the United States, provides service to 11 branches at 124 stations in Manhattan, Queens, Kings, Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Over 1,000 cars were used to serve the 83.9 million riders who rode the LIRR in 2002.

Metro-North Railroad provides commuter rail service on three branches to 109 stations East of the Hudson in the Bronx, Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess Counties and Connecticut on the New Haven, Harlem, and Hudson lines. Another two branches provide MNR service under contract with New Jersey Transit, to 11 stations West of the Hudson in Rockland and Orange Counties on the Pascack Valley and Port Jervis lines.

New York City Transit (NYC Transit) provided subway service to 1.4 billion customers in 2002. The 24 hours a day, seven days a week service operates in the boroughs of Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn. Over 6,300 rail cars travel over 26 routes and 722 miles of track to 468 stations. NYC Transit also provides rail service on Staten Island.

NYC Transit's Department of Buses (NYC Transit DOB) operates 181 local and 37 express routes throughout the five boroughs of New York City, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In 2002, bus ridership reached 762,190,226 customers with 12,355 bus stops on 4,566 buses.⁶⁰ New York City Transit is also

⁵⁹ The original rail construction dates back to 1832.

⁶⁰ Insiders Guide, New York City Transit's Department of Buses.

responsible for transporting 79,000 customers through its Access-A-Ride program. In May 2003 there were 8,856 weekday trips.⁶¹

LI Bus' 54 routes provide service throughout Nassau County, western Suffolk County and eastern Queens and serve 46 LIRR stations and five New York City subway stations. LI Bus also operates Able-Ride, the paratransit service for Nassau County. In 2002, LIB ridership was 31.3 million.

⁶¹ NYC Transit Committee Agenda, July 2003.

APPENDIX B

Agency Specific Recommendations

Long Island Rail Road

Long Island Rail Road excels in its pre-hire conductor training and deserves recognition for the development of a multi-departmental customer service Roundtable refresher training program. The LIRR is also the only MTA operating agency to hold quarterly conferences for Transportation Department managers to discuss and share front line management challenges and to increase employee and departmental communication.

Customer service related improvements are needed to better assess applicant customer service aptitude and skills prior to hiring, to provide up to the minute train service information to ticket clerks and station agents, and to emphasize customer service and management skills for supervisors at the Travel Information Center. Regular reinforcement of knowledge of the LIRR transportation system was also identified for travel information representatives. Below are recommendations for specific customer service related improvements at LIRR:

Hiring Practices

- **Administer personality and customer service skill tests to applicants during the hiring process.** LIRR 's Department of Human Resources should require all front line job applicants to take a personality and customer service skills aptitude test, such as the Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) test used by MNR or the BOSS test administered by NYC Transit Department of Buses, to identify customer service skills.

Administering such a test, prior to the interview, can help screen out unqualified candidates, assess applicant skill levels and predict some measure of ability to perform the job.

- **Reevaluate the qualifications for Travel Information Center supervisors.** Current TIC supervisors require seniority to qualify as a supervisor. This requirement should be reexamined to focus on customer service and management skills or experience. The LIRR should also provide additional customer service skill and management training for employees interested in applying for a TIC supervisory position.

Training Practices

- **Examine the benefits of using e-Learning for portions of the Phase I of the assistant conductor training program.** The use of *e-Learning* could shorten the fifteen week phase I of the assistant conductor training to allow new applicants to learn portions of the course material online. A trainer could facilitate and coordinate the online learning segment, while applicants learn the material and take tests at their convenience. Shifting some of the learning

online would allow LIRR to reduce staff time costs associated with the training. Phase II of the training should continue to be conducted in the classroom, but thought should be given to the use of *e-Learning* for homework assignments and tests.

- **Expand the Roundtable program to include personnel in other departments.** Expand the Roundtable program to include telephone information clerks, other front line and supervisory personnel by offering more frequent training. Develop a time frame to have all front line staff participate in the training on a regular basis. The training greatly enhances the staff's ability to interact with other front line personnel.

The Roundtable program should also be expanded to begin a Train-the-Trainer program to institutionalize these practices within the agency and create new opportunities for promotion.

- **Provide Train-the-Trainer classes to TIC supervisors who train new TIC representatives.** All TIC supervisors who are involved in training new employees should be required to complete Train-the-Trainer classes. Knowledgeable supervisors can improve the training results.

Refresher Training

- **Provide annual review sessions with tests to sharpen TIC representative knowledge of the LIRR system.** Regular testing can improve and reinforce knowledge about the LIRR system. Proficient knowledge of the system will improve representatives' ability to provide customers with more informed travel choices.

Metro-North Railroad

All applicants for positions at MNR must take the Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) test to assess customer service skills and aptitude. MNR and NYC Transit Department of Buses are the only agencies that specifically assess customer service skills as a factor in determining applicant employment aptitude. Metro-North's telephone information center and its communication network to all stations are outstanding and should serve as a model for all of the MTA agencies.

MNR conductor training, particularly relative to on board announcements and emergency training, were found to need improvement. Below are recommendations for specific customer service related improvements at MNR.

Hiring Practices

- **Examine the benefits of conducting a portion of the new hire training during the pre-hire phase to reduce costs and increase motivation.** At LIRR a substantial portion of the conductor training program is provided prior to hiring candidates. This practice has significant cost benefits as well as motivational impacts and should be examined.

Training Practices

- **Enhance announcement training for conductors.** Enhance announcement training for conductors to improve the frequency and effectiveness of customer communication. Examine and consider adapting LIRR's Roundtable curriculum with regard to customer and intra agency communication. Customers need good communication at all times.

Evaluating Performance

- **Improve and increase monitoring of on-board announcements.** More emphasis should be placed on conductors communicating with customers. On-board announcements should be monitored monthly for frequency and quality. Even with the advent of automated announcements, the need for effective communication will remain.
- **Increase frequency of on-board and station inspections.** Station checkers at MNR provide a vital link to identifying customer service issues. The system would benefit from increasing the frequency of the inspections particularly with regard to announcements. Station announcements should be tracked over time through a grading system to determine if conditions are improving.

New York City Transit Department of Subways

New hires at the Transit Information Center (TIC) are required to learn the complexity of the NYC Transit bus and subway systems prior to learning the computer based OTIS system. The TIC training also incorporates tests to reinforce material retention and prepare transit customer service specialists with the knowledge to respond to specific customer needs.

Areas requiring customer service improvement at the Department of Subways are: accessing applicant customer service skills prior to hiring; more formalized customer service training for station agents and more formalized on-the-job customer service and announcement training for conductors. Station agents and transit customer service specialists need improved access to and provision of customer information. More regular, formalized post probationary period job performance evaluations and better intra-and inter-departmental communication about customer service issues and incentives for better customer service performance were also identified. Below are specific recommendations for improvements at NYC Transit Department of Subways:

Hiring Practices

- **Administer personality and customer service skill tests to determine applicant eligibility during the hiring process for all front line positions.** NYC Transit's Department of Human Resources should require all front line job applicants to take personality and customer service skills aptitude tests, such as the Hogan Personality Indicator (HPI) test used by MNR or the BOSS test administered by NYC Transit Department of Buses to determine applicant eligibility during the hiring process.

Administering a test to job applicants prior to the interview can help screen out unqualified candidates, assess applicant skill levels and predict some measure of ability.

Training Practices

- **Examine and adapt the Canadian Urban Transportation Association's (CUTA) Ambassador Program for all station agents.** The Chicago Transit Authority uses CUTA's Ambassador program for its comprehensive front line customer service training program and has found it highly effective.
- **Formalize the on-the-job training for platform conductors and passenger controllers.** Platform conductors and passenger controller's interaction with public varies tremendously based on their knowledge and announcement ability. The current on-the-job training for these positions

should address the quality, type and frequency of announcements. The training period should be a defined length of time and include testing and an evaluation period. The tests should be graded according to the tasks and knowledge required and must be passed successfully.

- **Increase customer service training portion of conductor training.** Currently customer service training for NYC Transit conductors is only one day out of the 31-33 day training program. The one day training does not give conductors the opportunity to try out specific customer service skills in the field and to return to the classroom to discuss questions or concerns about their experience.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

- **Increase communication to station agents with text messaging devices.** Station service booths are equipped with telephone jacks and electricity; the requirements to operate simplified personal email devices at the 732 booths. The use of text messaging devices would provide an immediate improvement. Station agents could receive service diversion notices, emergency notices and service delay information in a timely manner.

Evaluating Performance

- **Adopt MNR's Telephone Information Center's approach of early identification of new or infrequent users.** NYC Transit's telephone information center should adopt MNR's policy of identifying callers that are new to the system. Responses to new riders may take more time and detail than for a regular user, but will reduce the barriers for new customers.
- **Institute written annual performance evaluations for station agents including a review of customer feedback.** Performance of NYC Transit's station agents is currently assessed through informal evaluations conducted by station supervisors. NYC Transit would benefit from formalizing the performance evaluation process and increasing the number of undercover spot checkers in the system to ascertain customer service quality.
- **Conduct regular station department meetings to review customer service issues.** Department managers, level one and level two field supervisors should hold monthly meetings with front line employees to document and deal with customer service issues. The issues should be forwarded to the appropriate departments for resolution. Progress should be reported on these issues at the monthly meeting. The meeting should be seen as a constructive, team based initiative to improve the department's or unit's overall customer service performance.

- **Recognize exemplary customer service.** Develop incentive programs to encourage good team-based customer service and recognize individual exemplary customer service performance.

New York City Transit Department of Buses

NYC Transit's Department of Buses' participation in the development of the Bus Operator Selection System (BOSS) as part of the American Public Transit Association (APTA) has resulted in its adoption of hiring practices that have substantially reduced bus accidents and led to a better informed and qualified core of bus operators. The development of the BOSS system has been highly beneficial to the bus industry.

Areas for improvement to customer service practices at the Department of Buses are needed in evaluating the job performance of bus operators. Below are recommendations for NYC Transit's Department of Buses:

Evaluating Performance

- **Implement a more frequent and regular spot check mechanism to increase oversight of bus operators beyond the Passenger Environment Survey (PES) to ensure excellent customer service and ADA compliance.** NYC Transit should examine and work with LI Bus to adopt processes LI Bus' Operations Department uses to evaluate its bus operators. LI Bus dispatchers conduct daily random passenger surveys to solicit their opinions about bus operator performance. LI Bus, through its Operations Department, also contracts with an investigative services company to spot check and monitor its bus operators. It is paramount that managers institute a more regular, post probationary, evaluation mechanism to ensure that operators provide consistent quality customer service and compliance with ADA.
- **Implement a more comprehensive bus operator reward system that recognizes excellent driving, operating and customer service performance.** The current performance reward system for bus operators should be expanded and redesigned to include the quality of overall job performance and exemplary customer service. The current performance reward system is too narrowly focused on specific tasks, such as announcements.

Long Island Bus

LI Bus' strong connection with the ADA community has helped inform how to best meet the special needs of this community.

Areas in need of improvement at LI Bus include: better assessment of applicant customer service skills and aptitude prior to employment; better ongoing customer service job performance evaluations; a reward system to recognize good customer service; and the regular provision of refresher training. The agency also needs to fast track its plans to integrate the TRIPS123 system into operations and telephone information center to augment the provision of customer information. Below are recommendations for specific customer service related improvements at LI Bus:

Hiring Practices

- **Develop a pre-hire examination in conjunction with the appropriate unions for pre-hire screening.** Review the civil service and BOSS examinations used at NYC Transit's Department of Buses to consider its applicability for LI Bus.
- **Incorporate NYC Transit's Bus Operator Selection System (BOSS) into the training program for LI Bus operators.** LI Bus should work with NYC Transit to enable its bus operators to attend the training by NYC Transit or alternatively to adopt the BOSS training program into LI Bus' existing training program. This will ensure a high level of success as well as consistent training for all MTA agency bus operators.

Training Practices

- **Conduct pre- and post training examinations.** LI Bus Human Resources and Systems Safety and Operation Departments should devise pre- and post trainee examinations to measure the effectiveness of the training provided to telephone information agents and bus operators. The results of these tests will inform trainers on the participants grasp of the course material and help assess if participants have the required skills and knowledge to perform the job well. Participants who do not attain a certain score should be required to take additional training.

Accessing and Providing Customer Service Information

- **Fast track incorporation of the TRIPS123 system into LI Bus operations and telephone information center.** The TRIPS123 system will give real time status reports on traffic and transit conditions and provide seamless transportation information among the many transportation agencies in the

region. LI Bus should advance its plans to incorporate the TRIPS123 system into the agency operations and telephone information center departments.

Evaluating Performance

- **Establish incentive programs to encourage good customer service provision within a department or unit.** Develop incentive programs to encourage good team-based customer service performance within a department, division or unit.
- **Implement a more comprehensive bus operator reward system that recognizes excellent driving, operating and customer service performance.** The current performance reward system for bus operators should be expanded and redesigned to include the quality of overall job performance and exemplary customer service. The current performance reward system is too narrowly focused.

Refresher Training

- **Develop and require regular BOSS refresher training for bus operators.** Review the refresher training for bus operators used at NYC Transit DOB to consider its applicability for LI Bus. The BOSS refresher training could be offered in conjunction with LI Bus' current bi-annual federally mandated training.

APPENDIX C
Glossary of Terms

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACTO—Accessible Transportation Oversight Committee (LIB)

ADA—Americans With Disabilities Act

AIU Screens—Agent Interface Unit (LIRR)

ATS—Automated Ticket Sales (LIRR)

AVLCS—Automatic Vehicle Location and Control System (NYC Transit, LI Bus)

BART—Bay Area Rapid Transit

BCC—Bus Command Center (NYC Transit)

BOSS—Bus Operator Selection System (NYC Transit)

CBTC—Communication Based Train Control (NYC Transit)

CDOT—Connecticut Department of Transportation

CIC—Customer Information Center (MNR)

CPR—Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation

CSC—Customer Service Center

CTA—Chicago Transit Authority

CUTA—Canadian Urban Transportation Association

DMV—Department of Motor Vehicles (NY State)

DOB—Department of Buses (NYC Transit)

EBCS—Emergency Booth Communication System (NYC Transit)

FRA—Federal Railway Administration

FTA--Federal Transit Administration

GED—General Education Diploma

HPI Test—Hogan Personality Inventory (MNR)

ICS—Intercom System (LIRR)

ISTEA—Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991

LABO--Limited Assignment Bus Operator (LI Bus)

LED--Liquid Electronic Display

LI Bus--Long Island Bus

LIRR—Long Island Rail Road

MaBSTOA—Manhattan and Bronx Surface Transit Operating Authority (NYC Transit)

MCTA—Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Authority (now MTA)

MNR—Metro-North Railroad

MSBA—Metropolitan Suburban Bus Authority (LI Bus)

MTA—Metropolitan Transportation Authority

MUNI—San Francisco Municipal Railway

MVM--MetroCard Vending Machine

NJT--New Jersey Transit

NTI--National Transit Institute (Rutgers University).

NTTCLP--National Transit Technology Career Ladder Partnership

NYCDOT—New York City Department of Transportation

NYCTA—New York City Transit Authority

NYC Transit--New York City Transit

NYS—New York State

NYSDOT—New York State Department of Transportation

PATH—Port Authority Trans Hudson Line

PDA—Personal Data Assistant

PES—Passenger Environment Survey (NYC Transit)

PPT—Portable Panic Transmitter

PTEP—Passenger Train Emergency Preparedness (LIRR)

RTCC—Rapid Transit Control Center (NYC Transit)

RTO—Rapid Transit Operations (NYC Transit)

SEPTA--Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority

SMCIS—Service Management Customer Information System (NYC Transit)

STAR—Superior Transportation Announcement Recognition (LIRR)

TAP—Transit Ambassador Program (CTA)

TCU—Transportation Communication International Union (MNR)

TIC—Travel Information Center—(LIRR)

TIMACS—Train information Monitoring and Control System (LIRR, LI Bus)

TMB—Train Movement Bureau (LIRR)

TOM—Ticket Office Machines (MNR)

TRANSCOM—Transportation Operations Coordinating Committee

TRIPS123—Transportation Intelligent Planning System

TSS—Train Service Supervisor (NYC Transit)

TVM—Ticket Vending Machine (LIRR, MNR)

TWU—Transport Workers Union

VTTS—Visual Train Tracking System (MNR)

WMATA—Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority