



PERMANENT CITIZENS  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE MTA

2 Broadway, 16th Floor, New York, NY 10004  
(212) 878-7087 • [mail@pcac.org](mailto:mail@pcac.org)

ANDREW ALBERT CHAIR and MTA BOARD MEMBER  
RANDOLPH GLUCKSMAN FIRST VICE CHAIR and MTA BOARD MEMBER  
MARILYN N. POTERSON SECOND VICE CHAIR

LISA DAGLIAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
BRADLEY BRASHEARS PLANNING MANAGER  
SHEILA BINESH TRANSPORTATION PLANNER

Contact: Lisa Daglian  
917-612-2292  
[LDaglian@mtahq.org](mailto:LDaglian@mtahq.org)

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## **HOW THE MTA CAN TRANSITION INTO THE NEW NORMAL: GETTING RIDERS BACK ON BOARD**

*New White Paper Details Measures the MTA Can Take to Make Riders More Comfortable on Transit*

January 22, 2021 – More than ten months after COVID-19 forced stay-at-home orders for all but essential workers in New York State, the region is beginning to reopen—yet transit ridership remains at historic lows, and is likely to remain depressed for several years to come. Even with the promise of expanded vaccinations, the work-from-home dynamic and an overarching fear of contracting the virus continue to change ridership patterns.

While the MTA has taken numerous steps to address rider safety, and studies have shown that transit in and of itself does not cause the virus to spread, many riders still fear getting back on-board. A new white paper released by the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC) entitled [How the MTA can transition into the New Normal: Getting Riders Back On-Board](#), includes recommended measures the MTA should take to increase rider confidence. Based on research into best practices currently being used in transit systems nationally and globally, the ultimate goal is to encourage riders to return to subways, buses, and commuter rail by making them feel safe and comfortable while riding. Doing so will maintain equitable public transit options and allow the MTA — and the economy — to rebound.

However, the financial damage from the pandemic is profound and the MTA's ability to continue its efforts and implement additional best practices rests on an infusion of adequate federal funding. Sufficient and sustained funding is essential to the agency's ability to maintain a safe, clean and disinfected system; run enough service to reduce crowding; and continue improvements that improve reliability.

Andrew Albert, MTA Board member and PCAC's Chair, said, "The pandemic has dramatically changed the way people use transit, and will continue to affect ridership for years to come. The MTA continues to take steps to protect riders and workers, but for too many there is still a sense of fear about getting back on-board. If realized, the best practice recommendations in this white paper would provide riders with additional reassurances that it's safe to use transit, but more funding is critical to implementing many of them. We are heartened by the responsiveness the new Administration has shown to the MTA's needs and are hopeful that additional financial support will come to the region soon to aid in our recovery."

"Economic recovery in New York and across the country is dependent upon restoring confidence in public transit," said Rachel Haot, Executive Director of the Transit Innovation Partnership. "The MTA's heroic workforce has already enacted unprecedented cleaning, disinfection and public information initiatives, and we look forward to continuing to support the region's transit agencies as they leverage technology to implement more of the best practices in PCAC's timely report."

Following an extensive examination of actions the MTA and other systems have taken to respond to the COVID-19 emergency, combined with an in-depth literature review and the understanding that federal assistance will be essential to enactment, following is an overview of PCAC's recommendations the MTA consider the following (with a complete list available in the report):

- Using technology, such as turnstile counts, cameras, LiDAR or WiFi usage, to monitor station and on-board crowding, and making the information available to riders in real-time both online and on electronic signage at mezzanines and street level;



# PCAC

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- Visualizing daily ridership numbers on the NYC Transit dashboard with breakdowns by route/line, time of day, and stations/stops available online and in apps, and creating a similar dashboard for Metro-North Railroad and Long Island Rail Road to allow riders to determine the best time of day to travel;
- Creating an online cleaning dashboard with real-time and historical data of cleaning history by station and line to reassure riders of cleanliness, and posting schedules in stations with actual date and time last cleaned;
- Developing publicly available metrics and milestones for reopening overnight subway service;
- Reviewing subway stations to determine where it's feasible to designate separate exit and entrances and opening existing closed entrances to better control foot traffic and improve flow;
- Accelerating accessibility improvements, such as elevators and escalators, to increase passenger flow;
- Expanding vending machines across the system that sell masks, gloves, hand sanitizer and PPE;
- Educating riders how not speaking can reduce the spread – especially in closed spaces – and asking them to keep their masks on if speaking and to refrain from speaking if possible;
- Instituting time-of-day fare discounts, including expanding LIRR's Atlantic Ticket program, to incentivize travel during off-peak periods;
- Quickly adding more dedicated bus lanes in all boroughs and expediting expansion of bus lane camera enforcement.

The PCAC categorized each of its recommendations from the perspective of increasing riders' comfort level to encourage them to return to transit in the following buckets:

1. Transparency and Communication
2. Make the Cleaning and Disinfecting Regime Public
3. Capacity Control and Social Distancing
4. Enhanced Mask Distribution
5. Rider Return Campaign
6. Encourage Spread Out Ridership
7. Improving Bus Service

Sheila Binesh, PCAC Transportation Planner and report author, said, "Safe, reliable, and efficient public transit is critical to our region's recovery. Our recommendations are designed to instill rider confidence in returning to the system. Ensuring that the MTA is prepared and able to meet ongoing COVID-19-related challenges as the vaccine is being distributed will be vital to those efforts and will help prepare for future emergency disruptions."