

Can The MTA Do Access & Infrastructure?

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The New York City Subway system is falling apart. The signal system that controls train traffic was built in the 1940s and needs to be replaced.

Many of the track beds need to be rebuilt; there are persistent service outages; the trains rarely run on time; and we won't even talk about broken elevators.

The situation is bad. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), the state agency that runs the subway, is talking about ending 24 hour train service and shutting down the "L" line, in order to do much needed maintenance and upgrades. The MTA is also talking about raising the fare in order to pay for the enormous amount of work that needs to be done.

Resources to improve and modernize the subway are hard to consider when the system needs a load of money to just fix what's broken. As a disabled person, I worry about asking for new subway elevators to be installed when the signals don't work.

Should we be asking to modify station platforms for wheelchair users when the track beds need to be replaced? Should we be asking for our needs to be met before fixing the basic system infrastructure? I don't think it is an either/or situation. I think the MTA can and must do both.

In a Dec. 28, 2017 article in the New York Times entitled "The Most Expensive Mile of Subway Track on Earth," Brian Rosenthal explained that the MTA pays up to 700 percent more for subway construction than any other train system in the world. According to the article, an accountant found exorbitant overspending problems in 2010 but the public was never informed.

The article describes a problem that stems from cozy relationships between politicians, well connected contractors, labor unions and lots of campaign donations to lubricate the process. While getting rid of this wasteful spending will not fix all the subway's problems, it allows disability advocates to say that access and infrastructure should be addressed hand-in-hand.

If the MTA was managed properly, there would be enough money to upgrade, modernize and build access into the system. That is another reason why Disabled In Action (DIA) has signed onto a lawsuit opposing the shutdown of the "L" train.

The 14th Street subway tunnel was badly damaged during Super Storm Sandy. The MTA was debating whether to stop service on the "L" line, at night, for several years or completely shutdown service and get the repairs done in an estimated 15 months. More than 200,000 people use the "L" train every day and many of them opposed the complete shutdown.

DIA signed onto the case because the project includes station upgrades along the "L" line. However many of the proposed station upgrades don't provide access for people with mobility impairments. The lawsuit contends that since federal dollars are being used, access must be included in the design.

When is the MTA going to realize that universal design is an imperative, not just for disabled people but for older folks, young folks with big pieces of luggage and moms & dads pushing strollers.

There is enough money to upgrade the aging subway system and provide access if the MTA would only focus on their mission of providing transportation. Instead the MTA has become a vehicle for politicians to buy the votes of union members and barter campaign contributions. It is time for the MTA to clean house and do the right thing.