

## **METHODOLOGY:**

### **NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign Survey of Subway Car Announcements February 2006**

This survey is a follow-up to the eight past surveys on announcements released by the Straphangers Campaign between 1997 and 2004.

The survey was conducted by 75 staff and volunteers during the period from January 2 to May 9, 2005. Volunteers were instructed to complete a survey entry every time they used the subways throughout that period. The survey form was designed to measure how each subway trip conformed to the guidelines laid out for announcements by MTA New York City Transit. Surveyors noted the date and line of each trip, and noted whether the name of the upcoming station and any applicable transfer information was understandably announced:

- a. the first stop of the trip;
- b. the second stop of the trip;
- c. the final stop of the trip; and
- d. the first transfer point of the trip.

In addition, surveyors recorded whether there was a change in service or delay of two minutes or more. When such a change in service or delay occurred, surveyors noted whether an in-car announcement was made, whether any announcement made was audible and ungarbled, and the exact language of the announcement.

Station name and transfer information announcements were grouped and totaled as one category. Both types of announcements together comprise the "basic" in-car announcement, determined only by characteristics of the line and upcoming station. A basic announcement was deemed *adequate* if the upcoming station name and any applicable transfer information were announced in an audible and ungarbled manner. In our survey, we recorded 300 basic announcement opportunity observations on each of 22 lines. The Times Square, Rockaway and Franklin Avenue shuttles were not included in the survey.

Our findings then reflect exactly 6,600 basic announcement opportunity observations; of these, our surveyors noted that for the entire system, 77% of announcements (plus or minus 2%) were adequate. The by-line confidence interval in each case is plus or minus 6%. All results are significant at the .05 level.

By-line basic announcement levels measured in our 2005 survey are comparable to those reported in our 2004 and previous surveys; the campaign did not survey basic announcements in 2000.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In March 1999, transit officials changed the timing for basic subway announcements. Before March 1999, conductors were instructed that "as the train is arriving, and before it stops in the station, identify the station, and announce any transfer options." After March 1999, announcements are "made in the station with the doors open, not while the train is moving." The campaign objected to the change. As a result, we conducted a survey of only delay and disruption announcements in 2000. Transit officials have maintained the new timing.

<sup>2</sup> "We rated delay announcements which were not garbled or inaudible as "correct" or "incorrect." In the past, we had rated such delay announcements as "useful" or "useless." This changed our

Of the 22 lines we measured in 2005 for basic in-car announcements, nine showed a statistically significant improvement in performance from our 2004 survey: the 3, 4, A, C, E, G, J/Z, L and R lines. Three lines—the B, N and W—showed a significant deterioration in announcement performance. Ten lines showed no significant change: the 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, D, F, M, Q and V.

In our 2004 report, we noted that 73% of basic announcements were adequate. This improvement in system wide performance is significant at the .05 level.

Surveyors were also instructed to record whether there was a change in service or a delay between stations of two minutes or more. When such a change occurred, surveyors noted whether an in-car announcement was made, whether any announcement made was audible and ungarbled, and the exact language of the explanation given.

Straphangers Campaign staff members then examined the transcription of each announcement to determine whether the announcement was “useful” or “not useful” to riders.<sup>2</sup>

Examples of “Correct” Announcements:

fire/accident/police activity  
ahead of/behind schedule, congestion  
sick passenger  
emergency brake pulled  
track/signal work  
held by supervision/dispatcher

Examples of “Incorrect” Announcements

schedule adjustment  
fix gap in service  
red signal  
change in service with no further explanation, such as “This local is running express”

Our surveyors rated 203 delays and service changes during the survey period, of which 72 were followed by an ungarbled, audible and correct explanation for the disruption in service (35%, plus or minus 7%).

Delay and service change data was not examined on a line-by-line basis. The number of such changes would be too low to permit statistically significant comparisons among lines.

According to New York City Transit Passenger Environment Survey (PES), basic announcements remained virtually unchanged between the first half of 2004 and the same period in 2005, going from 87% adequate to 89% adequate. Differences in methodology between Transit’s survey and this one explain the discrepancy.

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methodology in two ways: 1) MTA New York City rating of delay announcements now corresponds to ours; and 2) We cannot compare our delay announcements to previous years.

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