

METHODOLOGY:
NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign Survey of Subway Car Announcements
Spring 2010

This survey is a follow-up to eight past surveys on announcements released by the Straphangers Campaign between 1997 and 2006. The Straphangers Campaign conducted a similar survey in 2007, and privately released our findings in 2007 to New York City Transit officials in deference to the start of a new transit administration.

The survey was conducted by 51 staff and volunteers during the period February 3 to July 11, 2009, and is based on data collected during actual subway rides taken during that period. Volunteers were instructed to complete a survey entry every time they used the subway system throughout that period. The survey form was designed to measure how each subway trip conformed to the guidelines laid out for in-car announcements by MTA New York City Transit. During survey rides, volunteers recorded announcement data for the first three stops of their trip. Specifically, surveyors noted the date and line of each trip, and monitored the following routine in-car announcements made at or between stops:

- a. station name;
- b. route designation (number or letter);
- c. route destination (borough or terminal);
- d. transfer options (if applicable);
- e. upcoming station name; and
- f. "stand clear of the closing doors" announcement.

Surveyors noted whether each appropriate item was announced, and whether any announcement made was understandable and accurate.

Announcements (a) through (f) above were grouped and totaled as the "basic" in-car announcement, determined only by characteristics of the line and upcoming station. A basic announcement was deemed *adequate* if all appropriate announcements were made understandably and accurately. In this 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, 82% of announcements were adequate. This system result is accurate within plus or minus 2% (.05 level); confidence for by-line results is plus or minus 6%.

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 understandable and accurate, and the exact language of the announcement.

Official transit guidelines require that conductors announce changes in service and/or delays. The guidelines also list 18 possible announcements with detailed reasons for the delay ranging from "unruly person on the train" to "waiting for connecting train." The policy states: "If there is a delay, [the conductor] must make an announcement immediately [and again] within 2 minutes after that."

Straphangers Campaign staff members examined the transcription of all recorded service change and delay announcement to determine whether the announcement was "correct" or "incorrect."

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”

Surveyors rated 121 delays and service changes during the survey period, of which 90 were followed by an in-car announcement within two minutes of stoppage. Of the announcements made, 54 provided an understandable and correct explanation for the disruption in service.

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.

MTA New York City Transit does not survey service change and delay announcements on subway cars. The agency did survey the “percentage of cars with public address announcement” in the first half of 2009. They found some 90% of cars as having “public address announcements.” This is broken down between lines with automated announcements (99%) and those with conductor announcements (84%).ⁱ

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ⁱ MTA New York City Transit Committee Meeting Agenda, September 2009, Book 2, p. 193