



NYPIRG's
Straphangers Campaign

KEEP THE BOOTHS OPEN!

the facts:

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority is proposing to close 164 subway station booths in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens — 49 full-time booths and 115 part-time. This comes on the heels of the MTA's closing 62 booths in 2003. The NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign has prepared this fact sheet to explain why the booths should stay open for the safety and convenience of the riders — and to let riders know what they can do to speak out against the closings.

Fact: Booth clerks are key to rider safety.

Booth clerks—known as station agents—are the subway's eyes and ears. Riders know where to go in emergencies and station agents can summon help. Every year, station agents activate their "emergency booth communication system" more than 60,000 times, obtaining police or emergency medical technicians. Station agents also deter fare evasion, vandalism and graffiti, as well as summon help for the homeless. In the past, the MTA has admitted what riders know today more than ever in an era of terrorist threats: "A human presence is especially important to reassure and protect riders in a time of great concern about security and safety." (From an MTA New York City Transit memo, April 14, 1989, rejecting installing an exit wheel at an unstaffed location and noting: "Installing an exit wheel at this location is not recommended as it will leave the area subject to additional vandalism and crime problems.")

Fact: Station Agents are key to rider convenience.

As riders, we receive many basic customer services from staff at station booths—services which cannot fully be replaced by MetroCard vending machines and High Entry/Exit Turnstiles. We can ask directions and obtain maps. If we misswipe our MetroCards, station agents can let us in—as they can if we are traveling with packages or children with strollers or a bicycle or have a disability that makes navigating the HEET's difficult or impossible. Seniors and the disabled can get their reduced-fare one-way return ticket at staffed booths. Station agents can tell us how serious a delay may be, can put up timely information on the grease boards in their booths and can dispense "block tickets," which allow riders to re-enter the system if there is a major delay or system blockage.

Fact: The booth closings would hurt many neighborhoods.

Many of the proposed booth closings are at entrances along

"First and foremost, our customers said [at public hearings in 2003] that they did not want any service cuts. They also did not want to lose a physical presence in station booths. As a direct result of their input, the Board and I asked the staff to revisit the original list of 49 full-time and 128 part-time station booth closures [with 112 of 177 booths remaining open]."

*—MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow,
March 2003*

KEY THINGS TO KNOW:

Number of booths currently in operation:
660

Number of booths slated for closure or hours reduction in 2004: 164

Percent of booths slated for closure: 25%

Number of times station agents activate emergency buttons in 2000: 60,186

active commercial strips and community centers. Many riders will shun these unstaffed locations, hurting business and neighborhood life. These entrances will go from being community hubs to a drag on those areas. In many cases, riders would also lose convenient connections to buses and safer street crossings. The MTA did not consult about these kinds of impacts with community boards and neighborhoods in preparing the booth closings. Community Boards across the city are speaking out against the closings.

Fact: The MTA claims that its plan will enhance service — and give riders at least one workable staffed location to enter at all stations. Both are untrue.

The MTA says it is enhancing service by replacing station agents with HEET's and MetroCard vending machines. Its officials argue that the HEET's will be open 24/7 while some booths slated for closing operate only part-time. But this "increase" in service is not true. It's not true for the full-time booths it proposes to close. And it's not true for many riders, such as those with disabilities, the elderly and people with strollers. The MTA could still install HEET's and keep the booths open. The MTA has also said that, "there will be at least one booth open at all stations at all times." But for several of the stations there will effectively be no accessible clerk 24/7 in one direction. (See box, at right.)

GOING THE WRONG WAY

For some of the proposed closings, the only remaining 24-hour booth does not serve trains going in both directions. For example, at the 110th Street station on the 1 & 9 lines, the uptown booth is slated for closing. Uptown riders who need a station agent to enter the station will have to cross busy Broadway, take the next downtown train to 96th Street, and then catch an uptown train.

Riders: Speak up to Mayor Bloomberg (311), Governor Pataki (212-681-4580) and your state legislators!

For information on how, contact the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign:
www.straphangers.org • 212-349-6460

"Transit officials plan to close a whopping 164 token booths will leave riders to walk hundreds of feet below ground or dodge traffic aboveground to get to the nearest clerk. Mothers with strollers and passengers with suitcases who need to be buzzed through gates may have to trek up and down stairs and through underground mazes to get to the right platform. In some cases, riders — including the elderly and disabled - will be forced to cross major thoroughfares like Broadway or Brooklyn's Fourth Ave. to get to a staffed entrance. In other instances, people who need to be buzzed through gates may have to take a train one stop in the opposite direction and double back — wasting time and energy."

—NY DAILY NEWS, October 20, 2004