



NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign

A project of the New York Public Interest Research Group Fund

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NEWS RELEASE

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Basic Subway Car Announcement Made 83% of the Time, Survey Finds

Best Are Lines 5, 6, and Discontinued W; Worst: B

**In 60% of Delays,
No Announcement or an Inaudible or Incorrect One**

(New York, New York) – Some 83% of basic announcements made on subway cars are clear and accurate, according to a survey of 2010 subway car announcement released today by the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign.

The 5, 6, and discontinued W performed best in making basic announcements, with the 5 and 6 getting top honors for the second year in a row. Raters heard basic announcements that were clear, ungarbled and correct 100% of the time. (See Table One.) All the top-ranking lines had automated announcements. The W was terminated in June 2010.

The B performed worst in our survey, with adequate basic announcements made 55% of the time.

Overall performance remained largely unchanged between 2009 and 2010. A basic announcement—made at or between stops—includes the name of the station, destination or direction, train letter or number, and transfer opportunities (if any).

“Transit gets good marks for subway car announcements of basic information,” said Cate Contino, the Campaign coordinator who oversaw the survey.

At the same time, in 60% of delays and disruptions experienced by our raters on all lines, there was either no announcement—or an inaudible, garbled or incorrect one. Transit’s performance announcing delays has grown worse since our last survey of subway car announcements in 2009, where good delay announcements were made 55% of the time.

—more, more, more—

Official transit guidelines require conductors to make basic, in-car announcements including the line, station name and any transfer points. The guidelines also list 18 possible delay announcements with detailed reasons.

These announcements range from: “unruly person on the train” to “waiting for connecting train.” The policy says, “If there is a delay, [the conductor] must make an announcement immediately [and again] within 2 minutes after that.”

“A failure to make delay announcement means more stress and confusion for riders,” said Jason Chin-Fatt, Campaign field organizer.

In the delays and disruptions experienced by our raters, 60% of the time (78 out of 132) there was either no announcement—or an inaudible, garbled or incorrect one.

Announcements were not made at all 22% of the time (29 out of 132); 11% were inaudible or garbled (14 out of 132) and 27% (35 out of 132) were rated “incorrect.” These were meaningless announcements that “we have a red signal,” ones lacking key information such as, “This local is now an express” (with no explanation), or ones with jargon such as, “We have a schedule adjustment.”

The survey was conducted by 51 volunteers between January 26 and June 25, 2010. They made 6,600 observations of in-car announcement opportunities on 22 subway lines. Our surveyors experienced and rated 132 delay and service change announcement opportunities during the same survey period.

The survey follows nine similar surveys conducted between 1997 and 2010. (See methodology.)

MTA New York City Transit does not survey delay and disruption delays on subway cars. The agency did survey the “percentage of cars with public address announcements” in the first half of 2010.

Some 92% of cars are rated as having public address announcements. This is broken down by cars with automated announcements (99%) and conductor announcements (84%).

The survey can also be found online at www.straphangers.org.

Table One:
Breakdown of Basic In-Car Announcements by Line, 2010*

Line	Clear and Accurate Announcement Made	Clear but Inaccurate Announcement Made	No Announcement Made	Announcement Garbled or Inaudible
1	64%	0%	23%	12%
2	99%	0%	1%	0%
3	67%	1%	13%	19%
4	99%	0%	1%	0%
5	100%	0%	0%	0%
6	100%	0%	0%	0%
7	63%	1%	24%	11%
A	76%	0%	13%	11%
B	55%	1%	18%	26%
C	60%	0%	22%	19%
D	60%	0%	16%	23%
E	98%	0%	2%	0%
F	92%	0%	7%	1%
G	79%	0%	11%	10%
J&Z	96%	0%	3%	0%
L	99%	0%	1%	0%
M	99%	0%	1%	0%
N	99%	0%	1%	0%
Q	85%	0%	8%	7%
R	62%	1%	22%	15%
V	64%	1%	12%	23%
W	100%	0%	0%	0%
System	83%	0%	9%	8%

*'Clear and Accurate Announcement Made' results significant for system within +/- 2%. Line results significant within +/- 6%. Some percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

METHODOLOGY:

NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign Survey of Subway Car Announcements Spring 2011

This survey is a follow-up to nine past surveys on announcements released by the Straphangers Campaign between 1997 and 2010.

The survey was conducted by 51 staff and volunteers during the period January 26 to June 25 2010, 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. The W was included; the line was terminated by the MTA in June 2010¹.

Our findings then reflect exactly 6,600 basic announcement opportunity observations; of these, our surveyors noted that for the entire system, 83% 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

¹ In June 2010 W service was discontinued and V service was restructured into the new orange M.

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 132 delays and service changes during the survey period, of which 103 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 2010. They found some 92% of cars as having “public address announcements.” This is broken down between lines with automated announcements (99%) and those with conductor announcements (84%)².

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² MTA New York City Transit Committee Meeting Book, September 2010, p. 207