



NYPIRG

Straphangers Campaign

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NEWS RELEASE

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Straphangers Campaign Releases Survey of Subway Car Announcements for 2013

Majority of Subway Car Announcements of Delays Were Found to Be Clear and Correct For Third Year in a Row

Basic Informational Subway Car Announcements Are Made About 86% of the Time in 2013, Surveys Finds

Perfect Score For Basic Announcements in 2013: L and Q Lines Worst Line in 2013: R

(New York, New York) – For the third year in a row the Straphangers Campaign found that a majority of subway car announcements of delays and disruptions were clear and accurate, according to a survey released today by the group.

In another finding, some 86% of basic informational announcements made on subway cars are clear and accurate. (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).)

"For the third year in a row, the majority of subway announcements were clear and accurate during delays or disruptions," said Straphangers Campaign Field Organizer Jason Chin-Fatt. "We hope Transit officials continue this positive trend, giving riders the information they need when regular service is affected."

— more, more, more —

The survey was conducted by 79 volunteers between January 5 and May 16, 2013. In the survey, volunteers made 6,000 observations of in-car announcement opportunities on 20 subway lines. In 2013, our surveyors experienced and rated 98 delay and service change announcement opportunities during the survey period.

In the 2013 survey, some 52% of delays and disruptions experienced by our raters on all lines had clear and accurate announcements.

Official transit guidelines give conductors a list of 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."

Prior to the 2011 survey, in a majority of delays and disruptions experienced by our raters, there was either no announcement—or an inaudible, garbled or incorrect one.

In contrast, in 2013, subway car announcements of delays were correct, clear and ungarbled 52% of the time (51 out of 98 delays). Of the remaining 48%, delay announcements were not made at all 13% of the time (13 out of 98 delays); 9% were inaudible or garbled (9 out of 98) and 26% (25 out of 98) 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."

In another finding, some 86% of basic informational announcements made on subway cars are clear and accurate. This is largely unchanged from our last survey in 2012, which was 85%. (See Tables One and Two.)

In the 2013 survey, the L and Q lines provided basic announcements 100% of the time and both lines had automated announcements.

The R came in last for the second year in a row, with only 56% adequate basic announcements.

This survey follows twelve similar surveys conducted between 1997 and 2012. (See Methodology.)

MTA New York City Transit does not survey delay and disruption announcements on subway cars. The Agency did survey the "percentage of cars with public address announcements" in the first half of 2013. Some 91% of cars are rated as having public address announcements. This is broken down by cars with automated announcements (99%) and conductor announcements (81%).

**Table One:
Best to Worst Percentages of Clear and Accurate Basic
In-Car Announcements, 2010-2013***

Line	2013	2012**	2011	2010
L	100%	99%	99%	99%
Q	100%	99%	99%	85%
2	99%	98%	98%	99%
4	99%	100%	98%	99%
6	99%	99%	100%	100%
5	98%	96%	98%	100%
E	98%	98%	97%	98%
N	98%	99%	92%	99%
J	98%	97%	95%	96%
M	97%	98%	98%	99%***
F	96%	96%	99%	92%
A	85%	79%	75%	76%
7	79%	64%	76%	63%
B	78%	67%	70%	55%
3	72%	67%	65%	67%
D	72%	69%	76%	60%
1	68%	78%	77%	64%
G	67%	71%	73%	79%
C	65%	69%	66%	60%
R	56%	56%	70%	62%
System	86%	85%	86%	83%***

* System results significant within +/- 2%. Line results significant within +/- 6%.

** 2012 survey conducted between January 17 and April 29, 2012. 2011 survey conducted between January 3 and April 30, 2011. 2010 survey conducted between January 26 and June 25, 2010.

*** Results reflect old routing of M line prior to June 2010; system number includes results of V and W lines which were discontinued in June 2010.

**Table Two:
Breakdown of Basic In-Car Announcements
by Line, 2013**

Line	Clear and Accurate Announcement Made	Clear but Inaccurate Announcement Made	Announcement Garbled or Inaudible	No Announcement Made
1	68%	1%	17%	14%
2	99%	0%	0%	1%
3	72%	1%	12%	15%
4	99%	0%	0%	0%
5	98%	0%	0%	1%
6	99%	0%	1%	1%
7	79%	0%	10%	11%
A	85%	0%	5%	10%
B	78%	0%	13%	9%
C	65%	0%	21%	14%
D	72%	0%	13%	15%
E	98%	0%	1%	1%
F	96%	0%	1%	3%
G	67%	0%	14%	19%
J	98%	0%	0%	2%
L	100%	0%	0%	0%
M	97%	0%	1%	2%
N	98%	0%	0%	1%
Q	100%	0%	0%	0%
R	56%	1%	20%	23%
System	86%	0%	6%	7%

**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
2013

This survey is a follow-up to twelve past surveys on announcements released by the Straphangers Campaign between 1997 and 2012.

The 2013 survey was conducted by 79 volunteers between January 5 and May 16, 2013 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 20 lines. The Times Square, Rockaway and Franklin Avenue shuttles were not included in the survey.

Our findings then reflect exactly 6,000 basic announcement opportunity observations; of these, our surveyors noted that for the entire system in 2013, 86% 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 announcements to determine whether the announcement was “correct” or “incorrect.” An incorrect announcement is one that did not offer riders a meaningful explanation for the change in service and/or delay.

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”

In 2013, surveyors rated 98 delays and service changes during the survey period, of which 85 were followed by an in-car announcement within two minutes of stoppage. Of the announcements made, 51 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 2013 the agency found some 91% of cars are rated as having public address announcements. This is broken down between lines with automated announcements (99%) and those with conductor announcements (81%).¹

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¹ MTA New York City Transit Committee Meeting Book, September 2013, p. 8.3 (PDF p. 310)