THE RIDERS CAPITAL PLAN
How—And Why—Transit Riders Want Governor Cuomo to Fix the Subway in the MTA’s 2020–2024 Capital Plan
New Yorkers Report: Slow and Unreliable Service is the Subway’s Biggest Problem

After years of pressure from riders, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and state legislators passed congestion pricing and other new revenue to fund major transit upgrades. Soon, the governor will release the MTA’s 2020–2024 capital plan, tens of billions of dollars in transportation projects for New York and its suburbs. Riders are looking to the governor to deliver a capital plan that finally fixes the subway.

Every five years, New York’s governor presents an MTA capital plan, the budget for transit construction in New York over half a decade. The current 2015–2019 plan includes signal and track work, subway cars, and expansion projects like the Second Avenue Subway and East Side Access for the Long Island Rail Road to Grand Central Terminal. The next capital plan will be the first since the transit crisis and, unlike recent plans, will have dedicated multiple new revenue streams to help avoid saddling the MTA—and riders—with more debt.

Governor Cuomo’s next MTA capital plan should detail a series of crucial transit upgrades. But not represented in the governor’s plan are riders’ voices. There are millions of reasons why improving transit matters. That’s where we come in.

The Riders Alliance surveyed over four hundred New Yorkers at CuomosMTA.com in August and September. Participants voiced their priorities for fixing the subway in the governor’s next MTA capital plan. In what follows are riders' biggest concerns and the photos they submitted of their travails. The winner—or loser—was slow and unreliable service.

New Yorkers are tired of waiting for slow trains and being unable to depend on the subway to get places on time. Even with recent gains in on-time subway performance, the state’s persistent failure to provide reliable train service is still New York subway riders’ biggest concern. In the next MTA capital plan due out soon from Governor Andrew Cuomo, riders want the governor to put speed and reliability first:

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<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>84.1%</td>
<td>Slow, unreliable service</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.9%</td>
<td>Old stations that are flooding or falling apart</td>
<td>245</td>
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<tr>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>Inaccessible stations (new ramps, elevators, etc.)</td>
<td>214</td>
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<tr>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>Temperature control on subways and stations</td>
<td>152</td>
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<tr>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>Old Subway cars</td>
<td>105</td>
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<tr>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>Broken elevators</td>
<td>92</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>Unreliable escalators</td>
<td>75</td>
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In the pages that follow, the Riders Alliance and survey participants explain why new signals, station elevators, train cars, and station upgrades matter to New Yorkers and warrant inclusion in Governor Cuomo’s MTA capital plan.
Modern Signals

Subway signals tell train operators when they can safely move forward on subway tracks. New York’s subway system relies on train signaling based on 1930s technology. Only two subway lines have been fully upgraded to modern Communications-Based Train Control. CBTC permits trains to travel safely at higher speeds and shorter distances from one another. It also breaks down less often than older signal technology. **In 2018, signal problems delayed trains during 92% of morning rush hour commutes.**

In its 2018 Fast Forward plan, the MTA proposed resignaling five subway lines in the next five years, and another five after that. Riders suffering slow and unreliable service need new signals to top the governor’s agenda for the 2020-2024 MTA capital plan:

“**I used to leave 50 minutes to get to work just to be safe. It’s a 30-minute commute door to door. I now leave 70 minutes and am still occasionally late. I cannot trust the system.”** — Michael H. from Queens

“**I’ve had to leave an hour earlier just to make sure I’d get to work or a special event on time, because I didn’t know if I would be stranded underground with no cell service, or for how long.”** — Cat I. from Brooklyn

“**The nonfunctional subway system is the direct reason for lost wages, I had to change my job to one that pays me much less because it’s easier to travel to.”** — Carina C. from Brooklyn

“**I’ve had to take days off of work after seeing that I’d either have to pay for a rush hour taxi ride or walk because all buses/subways were delayed or at capacity (because of the other lines delays).”** — Julia F. from Queens
Accessible Stations

A whopping 93.1% of respondents surveyed listed some form of accessibility concerns (accessible stations, broken elevators, unreliable escalators) as a priority for the capital plan. Many respondents who spoke out on this issue were parents of small children or experienced difficulties during pregnancy. Others were simply expressed concern for those around them.

New York’s subway is largely inaccessible to people in wheelchairs or who otherwise need stair-free access to trains. **Given how common strollers, suitcases, bad knees, and back problems are, chances are that every New Yorker will have trouble climbing stairs at some point. A 21st century transit system needs to become accessible.**

The MTA’s Fast Forward plan proposed making at least 50 stations newly accessible in its first five years, after which no rider would be more than two stations away from an accessible station. Riders from across the city voiced strong support for accessibility in the next capital plan:

“I had a leg cast a couple years ago and could not commute to work since most subways do not have elevators. I have become extremely aware at how our aging system is inaccessible for people with disabilities and making changes to make the subway accessible for EVERYONE is extremely important.” — Edwina E from Brooklyn

“The subway should be accessible for all New Yorkers, including those with disabilities, kids, etc. It shouldn’t be a special privilege.” — Anonymous from Brooklyn

“As mother to an infant in Astoria, I’ve spent the entire first year of my child’s life practically stuck in our neighborhood because it is impossible to safely get my child to the subway platform due to the lack of elevators in our ENTIRE neighborhood. Not one elevator for the disabled, elderly or families with stroller aged children. Every other subway system in the Western world has accessible public transportation for these needy citizens, but not the most densely populated & diverse city in the world. Please make New York easier to live in before this city forces us out.” — Carly B from Queens

“The lack of accessibility creates a major—and sometimes frightening—obstacle for daily travel with my toddler and stroller.” — Sarah S. from Manhattan
Subway Cars

62.9% of respondents listed subway cars as a major concern. With some train cars from the 1960s still running (barely), New York’s subway fleet badly needs an overhaul. Old cars break down more frequently than newer ones, forcing trains out of service and spending more time in the shop. Certain subway lines with particular car models suffer frequent “hot cars” during the warmer months. Riders know New York needs new subway cars:

“The #hotcar problem is absolutely miserable, and it’s a health hazard. In the summer, it creates unsafe, unhealthy conditions for the many elderly, very young, and pregnant New Yorkers who ride the trains every day. It causes overcrowding in the adjacent cars, and it creates additional safety hazards via people switching train cars while the subway is moving. There is not enough attention to this problem, and while there are critical issues that need to be addressed first, we need a specific plan + commitment for when #hotcar fixes will happen. It is not acceptable for us to wait for years for this to be resolved.”
— Natalie U. from Manhattan

“When there is no air conditioning in the train cars it makes my asthma worse, broken elevators mean I have to go up the stairs stress my lungs and go on steroids.”
— Maria S. from Manhattan

“Older cars like those on the A trains break down too often causing delays plus they are uncomfortable with poor heating and A/C.”
— Lawrence F. from Queens
Station Upgrades

Besides being largely inaccessible to people who have trouble climbing stairs, New York’s subway stations are also notorious for extreme temperatures and overall decrepitude. The Fast Forward plan proposed more than 150 station upgrades in its first five years. While most riders don’t expect climate-controlled luxury, stations should certainly be safe. And of course, trains should be reliable and frequent enough that waits are consistent and short.

“I get deeply anxious in crowded spaces and about running late and it gets exacerbated in overstimulating spaces where everyone else is aggravated and stations are too hot or too cold.” — Francis H. from Brooklyn

“Fixing the temperature controls would mean a lot because once I almost fainted in the train station.” — Kaina G. from Brooklyn

“Lack of ventilation in the stations and temperature control means almost fainting while waiting for a delayed train.” — Jenny P. from Brooklyn
Conclusion:  
A Capital Plan To #FixTheSubway

The Riders Capital Plan demonstrates New Yorkers’ clear priorities for the next five years and tens of billions of dollars of transit upgrades. New York’s subway system should deliver prompt, reliable service for millions of daily riders. Like so much else about our city, it should be the envy of the world.

A visionary MTA capital plan can put us on track toward where our transit system should be. Governor Cuomo’s capital plan must reflect New Yorkers’ needs for signal upgrades, station elevators, new train cars, and stations that are safe and resilient.

The Riders Alliance is committed to working with our members and leaders and the people who represent us in government to win a capital plan that delivers for New Yorkers.