



NYPIRG's

Straphangers Campaign

KEEP THE BOOTHS OPEN!

the facts:

Last November, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority said that if it raised the fare to \$2 it would not have to make service cuts. But that turned out to be untrue. In January 2003, it announced plans to close 177 token booths, more than 24% of the booths in the subway system. Booth clerks — known as station agents — would be replaced by a combination of MetroCard vending machines and HEET's. These are floor-to-ceiling "High Entry/Exit Turnstiles" activated by MetroCards. The full list of proposed closings can be found at www.mta.info.

Hearings on the closings will be held in all five boroughs between February 5th and 20th. This fact sheet explains why the booths should stay open to keep the subway system safe and convenient.

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.") These proposed closings would force a hard choice upon many riders: Either enter through an unstaffed and often scary entrance or walk to the main staffed entrance. This pits safety against having to add time to their commute.

Fact: Station Agents are key to rider convenience.

As riders, we receive many basic customer services from staff at token/MetroCard 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 miswipe 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.

"I want to tell [the Mayor] to keep the token booths open...transit people were incredible. That's why you can't get rid of the token-booth workers. They need jobs, and we need as many eyes as possible."

—Yale Leopold

21-year-old student who was slashed January 11, 2003 in a downtown Manhattan subway station.

KEY THINGS TO KNOW:

Number of booths currently in operation:
725

Number of booths slated for closure or hours reduction in 2003: 177

Percent of booths slated for closure: 24%

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

Average number of times per year station agents activated their emergency button:
85 per booth

Yearly number of incidents that could go unreported if 177 booth closures go into effect: 15,045

Fact: The booth closings would hurt many neighborhoods.

Many of the proposed booth closings are at entrances along 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. Although the MTA has been considering these changes since at least 2000, it only sent letters to community boards announcing the proposed changes in recent weeks. And it only did so because it lost a lawsuit brought by transit, community and labor groups. The decision requires the MTA to hold hearings and notify the community boards. (You can read the decision in the case by visiting <http://www.straphangers.org/token-booth/decision>.)

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 virtually "all of the proposed stations will continue to have a full-time booth operating 24/7." 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 your state legislators, the governor and at public hearings!

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

In the subway system, [disabled] students are taught that a token booth with a clerk is a 'safe haven'. The removal of token booth clerks could pose a barrier to some of our student's ability to travel independently.

*—Margaret Groce, Supervisor
New York City school administrator for the Travel
Training Program*

We vehemently oppose the closing of full-time and part-time booths. We still need the eyes and ears [of station agents] to help protect our straphangers and to provide the services that make our subways consumer-friendly, and you just can't put a price tag on safety.

—Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz

Now is the worst possible time to replace token booth clerks with MetroCard vending machines. Despite MTA's justifications for its plans, we know from experience that it is impossible to have safety in the subways without a reliable human presence.

—NYS Senator Eric Schneiderman

Reducing the number of staffed token booth clerks will have an immediate impact on the services carried out by the Emergency Medical Teams. It would be next to impossible for technicians to enter the subway system through a high entry/exit turnstile with their equipment. It would be impossible to exit the system with a patient though such a turnstile.

*—Patrick Bahnken
President, Uniformed Emergency Medical
Technicians and Paramedics Union
of the New York City Fire Department, Local 2507*

If token booths cuts go into effect, the MTA, "will sacrifice untold amounts of rider trust and good will. The plan is a false efficiency. Cutting back on an official presence in the subways didn't make sense even before Sept. 11, and it's especially troubling now."

*—Newsday Editorials
July 10, 2001 and March 12, 2002*