

Safer Subways

Curtis Sliwa's Plan to Restore Safety in Public Transportation

The lifeline of New York City has long been its transportation system. Our subways connect us with our home life, education and professional careers. The average weekday ridership in MTA-run subways reached nearly 5.5 million in 2019.¹ But as we reel from an emotional and economic crisis spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, we must work to solve the renewed challenges facing our subway systems.

In 2020, the average weekday ridership in MTA subways just reached 2 million, a 62% decrease in daily commuters. The annual total subway ridership for 2020 was 639 million, compared to 1.7 billion annual riders in 2019, a 62% decrease in annual riders.

Summary of subway ridership

Year	Average Weekday	Average Saturday	Average Sunday	Average Weekend	Annual Total
2015	5,650,610	3,309,731	2,663,418	5,943,149	1,762,565,419
2016	5,655,755	3,202,388	2,555,814	5,758,201	1,756,814,800
2017	5,580,845	3,156,673	2,525,481	5,682,154	1,727,366,607
2018	5,437,586	3,046,289	2,392,658	5,438,947	1,680,060,402
2019	5,493,875	3,087,043	2,407,152	5,494,195	1,697,787,002
2020	2,040,580	1,203,072	932,240	2,135,312	639,541,029

Source - <https://new.mta.info/agency/new-york-city-transit/subway-bus-ridership-2020>

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a stark drop in ridership on public subways, and as a result has helped fuel the massive increase in crimes committed in the subways. In 2020, New York City recorded nearly 697 felony arrests in subway stations, an increase of 120% from 2019, which recorded 559 felonies.² The economic devastation from the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred an increase in the homeless population living in our subways. In turn, crimes such as assaults, robbery and fare evasion have become commonplace. We must make our subways safe again.

My “Safer Subways” plan will restore order within our transportation system and will galvanize our pursuit to aid the homeless and emotionally disturbed residing within our subway system.

¹ <https://new.mta.info/agency/new-york-city-transit/subway-bus-ridership-2020>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/18/nyregion/mta-subway-crime-stats-rates.html>

After witnessing first hand the devastation caused by homelessness, drug use and gang violence in our subway stations, I devoted myself to taking back our transit system and restoring peace and civility. In 1979, I formed the Guardian Angels, a community-based patrol group dedicated to guarding our city's subway stations and preventing violence in all forms, including assault, battery and even murder. The Guardian Angels have helped stem the tide of crime within our subways, and as a result have expanded to over 130 cities in 13 countries around the world.

I've seen our subway system at its worst, and now we're slipping back into the abyss. I entered the mayoral race to improve New York, to fight and take back the lifeline of our city and to ensure that people can safely ride the subways. My administration will stem the rising tide of violence, drug use and crime within our transit systems. My "Safer Subways" plan includes the following proposals:

1. Deploy Emotional Support/Social Worker Task Forces to City Subway Stations

A major issue within our transit system is an increasing homeless and emotionally disturbed population aimlessly drifting like lost souls in the underworld. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the crisis, with many homeless individuals having lost their jobs or had their financial difficulties worsened through lapsing benefits and cutbacks in government programs. Without proper care, our most vulnerable citizens are often found roaming through our subways, placing themselves in harm's way. In addition, with lax enforcement of illegal drug use, they are much more susceptible to becoming addicted to any number of drugs, including crack cocaine and heroin.

In order to restore confidence within our transit system and to ensure the safety of all commuters, we must undertake a compassionate, comprehensive effort to relocate emotionally disturbed and homeless persons to care facilities and shelters. In addition to the deployment of NYPD Transit Bureau officers, I will direct the creation of task forces of certified social workers, health professionals and addiction specialists.

Their objective will be two-fold:

1. Decrease the homeless/mentally ill population within the city's transit system.
2. Ensure individuals receive the care and assistance they require.

To fund the task forces, I will redirect appropriate funds from ThriveNYC, the failed mental-health initiative launched by Mayor de Blasio.

The task forces will locate the homeless, emotionally disturbed and others residing in train stations to offer them assistance in finding shelter or medical care. Social workers trained in handling those with mental illnesses will assess the person's medical state and will direct them to

the proper agencies, which include the Department of Homeless Services, the Department of Health and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. Each of these agencies will be streamlined into ensuring that all new applicants requesting medical care, temporary/permanent housing or financial benefits will be reviewed thoroughly and offered all assistance the agencies can provide. Officers teamed with city social workers will be tasked with removing those residing within subways and subway stations, and will also be tasked with removing all persons deemed to be a threat to those in their vicinity.

After 8 years of cutbacks in social services for the homeless and the loss in confidence in our city agencies, we must reconstruct our city government to ensure all those needing assistance are heard and find the necessary resources to improve their situation. Deregulating our city agencies by targeting funding to initiatives that have continually proven to work will be a major objective of my administration. The streamlining process will also include eliminating funding for positions deemed unnecessary and will reduce the bureaucratic hierarchy to ensure that time sensitive situations involving emotionally-disturbed and mentally ill persons receive any immediate care they require. I will also authorize the expansion of Kendra's Law, a law essentially granting judges the power to involuntarily admit people into psychiatric health facilities and undergo treatment. "Involuntary outpatient commitment," as defined by medical professionals, has resulted in major advantages for the taxpayer as well as general wellbeing of New York state residents. Several of those detailed benefits are as follows:

- Costs decreased by almost 50% in a study regarding a group of "frequently hospitalized patients" in a year-long outpatient program, dropping 13% the second year.³
- Individuals participating in mental health services as a result are 74% less likely to become homeless, 55% less likely to attempt to commit suicide and 48% less likely to fall into substance abuse.⁴
- Psychiatric hospitalization rates fell at a larger rate than other programs, almost 20% less likely for patients to be admitted with Kendra's Law⁵

As a result of former Governor Cuomo's decision to temporarily eliminate the Certificate of Need application, which requires hospitals to be reviewed with regard to structural changes in beds or other aspects of their services, psychiatric beds were almost immediately eliminated as a method to maintain fiscal stability during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will reinstate in full the requirement for a Certificate of Need application to ensure any and all psychiatric facilities, beds and equipment are set to be employed for those found within our subway system with medical and mental illnesses.

³ <https://mentalillnesspolicy.org/aot/aot-cuts-costs-in-half.html>

⁴ <https://mentalillnesspolicy.org/kendraslaw.html>

⁵ <https://mentalillnesspolicy.org/aot/aot-cuts-costs-in-half.html>

2. Combat Fare Evasion in All NYC Subway Stations

It has been effectively proven that criminalizing fare evasion serves as a stepping stone for law enforcement to lessen the occurrence of more heinous crimes within train stations. As our stations continue to be devastated by a rising homeless population and criminal activities, the spotlight has turned to fare evasion as a root cause. Oftentimes, criminals and the emotionally disturbed are able to utilize subways and subway stations because they skip paying the fare. With a lax police presence throughout our city's subway system, criminals permeate into the subways and are able to commit vicious crimes against daily commuters. It is imperative to our pursuit of decreasing subway violence that we enable our NYPD Transit Bureau to vigorously tackle fare evasion across our city's subway stations.

NYPD Transit Bureau data estimated that 14% of all subway riders had evaded paying the fare from the months of June to September in 2020, while one in eight commuters avoided paying the subway fare from January through March of 2021.⁶ As the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic begin to recede, NYC can expect a resurgence in transit ridership. This in turn will most likely increase the percentage of riders who will avoid paying the subway fares in subway stations across the city, particularly in those without any police presence. With the reopening of schools for city students, we can also predict a likely increase in fare evasion in the 18-25 demographic group, which accounted for nearly 35% of fare evaders in the city in 2020.

Enforcing fare payment has proved fruitful in decreasing crime levels in our subway system in the past. Under then-Transit police Chief William Bratton in 1990, the NYPD enforced fare payment through a subway-policing program. As a result, the program found that one in seven riders who evaded the fare had outstanding arrest warrants for serious crimes.⁷ The transit bureau recorded a nearly 15% decrease in felony arrests in subway stations in 1991.⁸ A steady decreasing rate followed the next three decades in subway crimes, recording 2,500 felonies a year. However, under the disastrous policing guidelines issued by the DeBlasio administration, transit officers were prevented from enforcing fare payment. As a result, violent felonies skyrocketed between mid-2019 through the beginning of 2021. We must return control of the safety of our transit system back to the transit bureau of the NYPD.

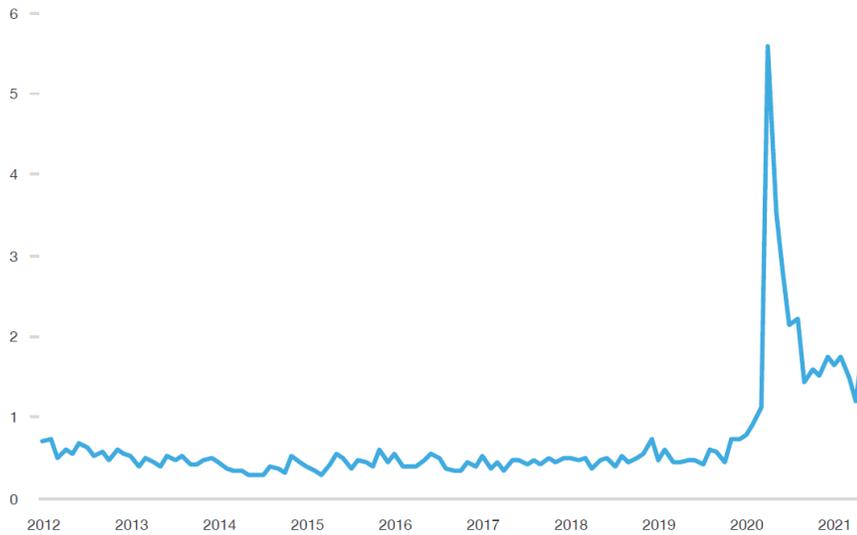
⁶ <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/stats/reports-analysis/subway-fare-evasion.page>

⁷ <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/how-increase-public-safety-nyc-subways>

⁸ <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/how-increase-public-safety-nyc-subways>

FIGURE 4

Violent Felonies per Million Subway Rides, January 2012–May 2021



Source: See Figure 1

Source - [Manhattan Institute](#)

As Mayor, I will call for a rapid deployment of all available transit officers to subway stations across the five boroughs. **I will direct the NYPD to hire an additional 4,500 officers, including an additional 500 officers to our current evasion prevention force.** Officers will be tasked with enforcing fare payment through our turnstile mechanisms. They will also levy their presence to ensure all commuters pay the proper fare amount and detain scammers offering discounted MetroCard rides in exchange for cash. A strong presence in our subway system coupled with fare enforcement will not only lead to fare payment and a decrease in violent/non-violent crime, but it will also aid law enforcement in their pursuit to capture wanted criminals and illegal contraband. The NYPD noted that a significant number of fare-beaters had been carrying illegal firearms, knives and other weaponry. Fare evasion has marked itself as a major obstacle in our pursuit to dampen the increasing crime rate, and in order to tackle this, **I am calling for citywide police deployments in all 472 MTA train stations.**

3. Establish Assistance Booths and Emergency Calling Devices in All NYC Subway Stations

Nearly all 472 MTA subway stations in New York City are equipped with assistance booths located at the entrance of the station.⁹ However, commuters often find these booths empty, with no staff member or MTA employee to assist them. Stations with smaller commuter populations are much more short staffed, and as a result, the assistance booths are not routinely staffed to aid commuters with travel and fare information, station security and other requests. Without adequate staffing in all subway stations in New York City, we are leaving our commuters vulnerable to violence and crime while leaving them severely incapable of seeking help.

To ensure the physical and emotional safety of all city commuters within our train stations, I plan on constructing state-of-the-art assistance booths in every station. Each booth would be supplied with emergency and medical equipment, including First Aid and Disaster Preparedness Kits. In addition to the new assistance booths, the MTA would then require every station to be staffed by at least one MTA employee in their respective booths. The booth workers would share shifts with multiple persons, ensuring that the booth is staff 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Along with the deployment of Transit Bureau officers in every city subway station, this additional layer of security will strengthen our ability to prevent crime and violence while deterring massive fare evasion in our less populated stations.

As an addition to routinely staffed assistance booths in every station, I will also call for an expansion in Help Point communication device installments throughout our city's subway stations. Currently, 36 MTA subway stations are equipped with at least one Help Point communication device within their train platforms.¹⁰ Help Point devices hold two features¹¹:

- Emergency: Pressing the Emergency button calls the Assistance Booth to request aid for medical emergencies, reporting a crime or requesting aid to retrieve lost materials
- Information: Pressing the Information button allows a commuter to request information on train travel and other items either from an automated connection or with a transit representative.

I plan on deploying an installment program aimed at installing at least one Help Point device in all 472 train stations by the year 2023. Using interdepartmental task forces within the Department of Transportation, the Metropolitan Transit Authority and the NYPD Transit Bureau, this installment project will be expedited with any and all resources to ensure that our commuters are able to clearly communicate with emergency workers and transit representatives. In addition to the Emergency and Information buttons, the Help Point device will also be equipped with a 911 button to directly contact medical emergency workers. This in turn will reduce the buffer time between emergency aid request and response.

⁹ <http://www.nycsubwayguide.com/subway/miscellaneous.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://www.amny.com/opinion/new-subway-alert-system-is-a-ticket-to-safety-editorial-1-8505755/>

¹¹ <https://new.mta.info/accessibility/travel/customer-assistance>

4. Upgrade Existing Security Equipment In All Subway and Bus Stations to the Highest Standards of Quality and Precision

Our subway stations have become notorious for their backdated technological abilities, including their surveillance equipment. Too often, law enforcement officers are unable to visually locate suspects of notorious crimes committed within our train system as a result of low resolution or quality distortion. With an outdated technological system serving as the bedrock of our law enforcement efforts we continually risk our city's commuters to crime and violence. In turn, these suspects are able to evade arrest or questioning, and are left susceptible to committing more crimes.

To ensure the safety of train and bus commuters across our city, I will instruct our Department of Transportation to upgrade all existing surveillance cameras to state-of-the-art standards with real-time capabilities.

Currently, all 472 subway stations in New York City are equipped with MTA-issued surveillance cameras.¹² Under the MTA Surveillance Camera Installment Project, all 472 stations had been installed with cameras by September 11th, 2021.¹³ In addition to this installment project, I will form a program to routinely upgrade security and software for all security cameras every 2 years to ensure their protection against malware and physical damage. At a time of constant technological obstacles, our security systems must be secured to aid our law enforcement officers in preventing crimes and ensuring the safety of all commuters.

At the same time, none of the city's 1,310 MTA buses are equipped with surveillance cameras. We need to ensure the safety of all bus commuters in the city, and that begins with security cameras being installed on all of our city buses. As mayor, I will ensure that security cameras will be installed on all of the city's 1,310 MTA buses. To ensure the project's fiscal efficiency we will repurpose unused and former subway station cameras to be installed on our buses. As we face a rising tide of transit crime these new bus security cameras will help law enforcement officers effectively identify suspects and pursue tips and leads leading to the arrest of the perpetrator(s). Such a solution will not only aid in deterring crime in buses but will also raise the level of confidence that commuters have in law enforcement's ability to capture the perpetrators of heinous crimes.

¹² <https://new.mta.info/press-release/mta-announces-security-cameras-installed-all-472-subway-stations>

¹³ <https://new.mta.info/press-release/mta-announces-security-cameras-installed-all-472-subway-stations>