



NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign

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NEWS RELEASE

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Top Ten Best and Worst Events for City Subways and Buses in 2012

The NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign today released its list of the top ten best and worst events in 2012 for New York City subways and buses.

“It has been a tumultuous year for city subways and buses, with superstorms, fare hikes and MTA chairmen coming and going,” said Gene Russianoff, staff attorney for the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign. (The two full lists follow this release.)

Among the top ten worst events for city transit were: Superstorm Sandy hitting; MTA Chairman Joseph Lhota leaving after just a year on the job; the MTA voting to increase transit fares; and subway crime increasing.

Among the best events were: transit rebounding quickly in the wake of Sandy; the MTA adding \$30 million in bus and subway service; the opening of a new connection between uptown 6 and the B, D, F and M at the Bleecker and Broadway Lafayette stations; the return of Poetry in Motion; and subway ridership increasing to highest levels in 45 years.

In a late-breaking development, the U.S. Congress included in the fiscal cliff legislation, a provision equalizing tax-free benefits for parking costs and transit cost. These will now be excluded from taxable income for up to \$240 a month, greatly saving enrolled employers and employees. Transit costs had been excluded only up to \$125 month. The provision is retroactive to January 2012 and is in effect in 2013 and 2014.

This is the Straphangers Campaign’s third annual best/worst transit list. The first was issued in December 2010.

Detailed lists are below and at <http://www.straphangers.org>.

Top Ten Worst New York City Transit Events In 2012

1. **Superstorm Sandy hits.** Many parts of the subways – like the city – were flooded by Sandy this fall. The MTA sustained \$5 billion in damage from the storm. The South Ferry station on the 1 and the A train across Jamaica Bay remained closed.
2. **Sandy costs riders big.** \$1 billion in bonds in needed repairs (out of the \$5 billion) will come from the riders, who will pay \$62 million a year in interest for decades.
3. **The revolving door keeps swinging at the MTA.** With MTA Chairman Joseph Lhota's departure in late December 2012, there have been six MTA leaders in the last six years. That has not helped the cause of winning safe, reliable and affordable transit.*
4. **Fares increase.** Riders were hit with the fourth fare hike in five years. In December, the MTA Board voted to raise fares across the board, with the base fare rising from \$2.25 to \$2.50 and the 30-day unlimited-ride MetroCard going from \$104 to \$112. The result: Riders here pay the highest share of operating expenses of any transit system in the U.S.
5. **Subway crime is up.** Major felonies are up 6.6% for the first 11 months of 2012 compared to 2011, according to the NYPD. As of late 2012, there were 7.38 major felonies a day, the highest level since 2006 – although crime has been decreasing recently. New Yorkers were shocked by two random deaths, in which people were pushed onto the tracks.
6. **The Second Ave Subway explodes.** In August, workers were blasting to create an escalator shaft for a new subway station at East 72nd Street. The resulting explosion spewed concrete and bedrock eight stories high. Fortunately, no one was injured.
7. **Fare beating on buses is worse than thought.** The MTA loses about \$50 million annually to bus riders not paying fares. Fare evasion on buses had been estimated at \$15 million a year, but those estimates have tripled to \$50 million.
8. **Assaults continue against bus workers and other transit employees.** This despite of passage of a state law that raised such acts from misdemeanors to "D" level felonies. There are ongoing initiatives such as cameras on buses and bus operator safety shields. The MTA and transit unions also convened the first National Transit Workers Assault Conference.
9. **Plans to install Wi-Fi and cell service at 30 subway stations were delayed until next year due to storm Sandy.**
10. **The controversial MTA payroll tax was held unconstitutional by a state court judge.** The MTA is confident of winning on appeal, but warned that losing the funds from the tax would badly hurt the agency and its customers.

* The count since 2007: MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow and MTA Executive Director Katherine Lapp (2001-2007); MTA Chairman Dale Hemmerdinger and MTA CEO Lee Sander (2007-2009); MTA Chairman and CEO Jay Walder (2009-2011) MTA Chairman and CEO Joseph Lhota (2012).

The Top Ten Best New York City Transit Events in 2012

1. **Transit rebounds quickly in the wake of Sandy.** New Yorkers called it a near miracle: Most subways were up and running a few days after the storm. It was transit at its best, with managers and workers moving mountains. For several days, New Yorkers experienced what the loss of transit service meant to the city that never sleeps.
2. **The MTA added \$30 million in bus and subway service.** Some of these routes had been cut in 2010. The agency makes permanent the extension of the G train to Church Avenue in Brooklyn and adds several new bus routes to go to underserved areas.
3. **A new connection opens between the uptown 6 Blecker Street and the B, D, F, and M at Broadway Lafayette.** Riders now have a new transfer, as well as a new escalator and five elevators, making the complex fully accessible to disabled customers.
4. **Subway ridership increases to highest levels in 45 years.** This in spite of – or maybe because of – the tight economy.
5. **Bus Time comes to all buses in the Bronx and Staten Island.** As the MTA says: “Instead of waiting at a bus stop in a state of uncertainty, now your phone can tell you when to start walking to the bus stop so you can get there right when the bus does.”
6. **Select Bus Service expands.** SBS speeds pokey buses through such features as riders paying fares in advance; boarding and exiting through three doors; and camera enforcement of exclusive bus lanes. In 2012, SBS S79 on Hylan Boulevard was added to current SBS routes. New SBS routes are coming in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens.
7. **Poetry in Motion is back.** After a four-year hiatus, the popular program returns, with thought-provoking poems in subway cars.
8. **A new transit advocacy group – the Riders Alliance – joins the fray for better subways and buses.** The brain child of a former tenant organizer – John Raskin – the Alliance plans to develop neighborhood leaders to advocate for transit improvements around the city.
9. **The MTA uses technology to make life easier for its customers.** Two examples: a) On seven subway lines, riders will have access to the information on in-station countdown clocks from their homes or offices. Subway Time – just started in a pilot at the end of 2012 – will allow riders to reduce their waits. b) Riders can now apply over the Internet for a refund of lost or stolen 30-day unlimited ride MetroCards. If riders purchased a MetroCard with a credit or debit card at an MTA vending machine and the card is then lost or stolen, they can apply for a refund eFix at www.mta.info.
10. **In a late-breaking development, the U.S. Congress includes in the fiscal cliff legislation, a provision equalizing tax-free benefits for parking costs and transit costs.** These will now be excluded from taxable income for up to \$230 a month. Transit costs had been excluded only up to \$125 month. The provision will be in effect for the years 2013 and 2014 and took effect at the close of 2012.