CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

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May 7, 2009
Start: 10:35 am
Recess: 11:20 am

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E:
JOHN C. LIU
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
G. Oliver Koppell
Miguel Martinez
Larry B. Seabrook
Daniel R. Garodnick
Jessica S. Lappin
Darlene Mealy
Vincent Ignizio
Eric Ulrich

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Connie Crawford
Senior Vice President and Chief Engineer
MTA New York City Transit

Pete Velasquez
MTA New York City Transit

John O'Grady
MTA New York City Transit

Lois Tendler
MTA New York City Transit

Elyse Peters Arnold
Muslim Consultative Network

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Good morning, welcome to today's hearing of the City Council's Committee on Transportation. My name is John Liu and I have the privilege of Chairing this hearing.

First, let me apologize that we are getting the hearing started a bit late, but nonetheless, we are going to proceed and get this over with.

The Committee has been convened today for the purposes of holding an oversight hearing on the status of MTA efforts to mitigate flooding of the subway system from severe storms.

Almost two years ago on August 8th, 2007, a severe storm struck the New York City area and dropped up to three inches of rain in some areas. This storm caused havoc throughout the city, shattering windows, and toppling trees, and ripping the roofs off houses. In Brooklyn, a tornado that was part of the storm forced the evacuation of 20 houses and damaged 50 other buildings. An insurance industry trade association estimated the damage from that storm to be $25 million. The storm caused the subway system, which serves 5 million riders on an

average weekday, to shut down right before the morning rush hour. The storm also took away most transportation options for commuters, disrupting bus and commuter rails, and flooding made travel by car difficult, if not impossible.

The MTA does operate 280 sump pumps in the subway system that pump water up to street level where it is then supposed to go into the storm drains. The sump pumps are only designed to remove up to 1.5 inches of water an hour and were clearly overwhelmed by that storm. Even if the sump pumps were working, it's unclear that the storm drains, would have been able to handle the extra water.

Many subway riders were upset that they did not get any notice of the subway disruption until after they had already entered the system.

The severe disruptions from this storm caused many to question the state of the city's infrastructure. Some meteorologists have predicted that the number of severe storms hitting the New York City area will double as a result of global warming.

Then-Governor Eliot Spitzer ordered the MTA to develop a plan to address severe weather and the MTA presented its findings in a report to the governor dated September 20th, 2007, and that report made recommendations on how to improve operations, addressing engineering problems, and better communications or the need thereof. Many of the recommendations in the report, such as installing street furniture that would prevent water from going into the subway system, and using e-mail and text messaging to better communicate to riders are common sense and, under the deadlines stated in the report, should have been implemented by now.

This hearing today will examine the progress of the MTA in efforts to mitigate the flooding of the subway system.

We have been joined by Council Members Dan Garodnick of Manhattan and Council Member Eric Ulrich of Queens. I want to thank the staff of the Transportation Committee for preparing this hearing: Legislative Counsel Phillip Hom and the Finance Analyst Chima Obichere.

And with that, we turn the floor over to our esteemed representatives of the MTA.

MS. CONNIE CRAWFORD: Thank you. I've got a PowerPoint presentation.

[Off mic]

MS. CRAWFORD: Oh, I'm Connie Crawford, Senior Vice President and Chief Engineer for the MTA New York City Transit.

So the storm on August 8, 2007, was a severe storm, up to 100-year storm for New York City. It is most remarkable for the intensity of rain in a very short period of time, and the fact that it was not predicted, at least by most people, and it came during the morning rush hour. It did produce the first tornado in 100 years in Brooklyn.

The rainfall, as you mentioned, 3 1/2 inches, but it was in a couple hours and up to 1-inch in a 15 minute period of rain out in JFK, which is quite remarkable.

The storm swept across the city from Manhattan over to Brooklyn and Queens, 19 major segments of the system had to be shut down due to water encroaching over the third rail. Two

and a half million customers were affected and, as we well know, our customers do not have good alternatives.

So this shows you at 6:10 a.m., the first lines were affected by the storm and a half hour later, many more lines were affected. By 7:30 good portions--about three-quarters of the system were shut down or affected by the storm. However, by 9:30 we started restoring service and the last couple of lines were brought in later that evening.

This is what it looked like out in Queens, which is very often plagued by any amount of rain. As you can see we are vulnerable at street entrances or, you know, on the sidewalks where the water can go in. This is water streaming in at a station through the vent bays that are in the sidewalk. Another view, you can see our customers, however, are still very hopeful that trains are going to come along.

The public, I don't believe, is quite aware of the effort that it takes for us to restore service after the water comes in, because it's not just the water. The water that comes in

from the street is bringing in newspapers, other garbage, cans, and they stream down the stairs, they stream across the platforms down into the right-of-way. We had to remove eight tons of debris silted mud from the right-of-way--that was hand work, they take this stuff by hand, put it in the bags, and carry it out of the system.

And then we have to inspect all the signal and track equipment that's in the right-of-way, this is vital equipment, it's got to be in good running order, it's a safety concern. So you get some indication of the 46 trip stops, 32 switches, insulated joints, all had to be overhauled after the water was cleared. We have to test and validate all of the equipment. In that process, we found a number of components that were damaged because, again, this debris carried by the water, running through the track bed, so 18 induction stop motors, the stops, you know, the emergency train stops, track relays, 53 resistors, seven transformers, four electric switch motors all had to be replaced in the track bed before we could restore service.

The cost of the recovery effort for

the Transit Authority--removing the debris and doing the repairs--was $270,000 from that one storm.

The MTA a month later issued a report on the storm with the findings and recommendations. That storm report was written with a cooperative effort of various city agencies.

With this report and the direction that we received, we've developed really a new strategy in dealing with storms. One thing, which I'll show you, it's not so much the pumping capacity, our pumps have capacity, but the problem is the water coming in, you got to keep the water out of the system. When the water comes in, we can deal with the water, it's the debris and everything else that the water brings in that really takes a long time for us in restoring service. So there are places where the water gets in, we've got to keep that water from coming in.

We had 33 areas that are subject to flooding in the system, and have been over the last 10 years. This is a list of locations and frequency of flooding in the last 10 years, and

you can see those areas out in the Hillside, Queens are the most prevalent over 10 years, so you're getting four disruptions to service a year, but there are other places around the city.

We initially focused on seven locations that have the most frequent flooding and we had an 18-month goal of getting these places corrected.

I want to talk to you a little bit about just what causes flooding in the system and how our drainage system works. This is a typical cross section that you would find in a subway system. Do I have a pointer on here? So here's a sidewalk grate. The water will come in through the sidewalk grate, come down into the--comes in through the grate, down into the track bed. From the track bed, we have pipes that take it over to a sump, a low point where the water will collect. We have pumps there, we have 287 pump rooms in the system, and, by the way, they're not there primarily for flooding conditions, they're there because we take on water, the subway system for the most part is below the groundwater level. We pump out 13 million gallons of water every day,

not due to rain, but just due to groundwater that seeps into the subway system. We pump the water up to a relief manhole up at the street and there it will wait until the streets are cleared, because eventually we want to get to the city sewer, but we cannot pump any water into that city sewer until the street itself is clear and the sewer is clear. So in an event like August 8th, we waited a couple of hours for the street sewer to clear before we could then pump the water out of the system and into the sewer.

Again, this is a photo at Hillside.

And these are areas where the water gets in through the vent gratings and through street stairs--the most common entry points.

So our design solutions for the gratings, we can raise the gratings so that the water cannot get down into them. Some gratings we can seal, we can close off with concrete and just make it sidewalk. We can also try to re-grade the area so that the water does not enter into the gratings. We also can modify street entrance stairs so that water will not go down those. We also had three locations on August 8th where the

city sewer system located down at the track level backed up and backed up water into the track bed. And we have several, we have a dozen or so of those locations around the city that are vulnerable.

So 10 years ago Transit Authority attempted to solve this problem out in Hillside by raising some of the vent bays and this was a rather crude, simple way of doing that, sort of a concrete bunker with the grating on top. It was not well received, it does the trick, but it wasn't well received, and we knew we couldn't go forward with that scheme. So after August 8th, 2007, we had a design charrette, brought in some of the top architects working in the city and asked them to address this issue: how can we modify the vent bays so that no water comes in, but do it in a way that it becomes a street amenity, rather than an unattractive problem.

Here are some of the initial concepts that they came up with. A lot of effort goes into raising a vent bay or deciding what gets done with a vent bay because they are fire, life, safety components of the system. They are

designed to get heat out in the summer, but also, if there's a fire, to let smoke rise out of the system, so you can't just go and close them all, they're vital to the system.

We had to do topographic surveys to identify where the low points are, where the water would flow and that gets into the hydrology analysis. Also figuring rainfall and where the water will come in. For example, at Hillside it's because you've got that hill adjacent to Hillside Avenue and the water runs down that hill.

We conducted very complex three-dimensional computational fluid dynamics modeling of each section of tunnel to see where we could close a vent bay and where we had to keep it open for fire, life, safety reasons.

We did pedestrian counts at every location, because we, certainly if we're raising a vent bay, we've got to do it in a way that it still allows pedestrians to use the sidewalk.

And then we classified vent bays in the flooding areas, whether they could be raised, whether they could be closed with concrete, or if no action at all needed to be taken because it

wasn't a low point where water would collect.

This is one of the solutions, it was characterized by the architect as Celebrating the Water, so it's got this wavy appearance on top, but the chief characteristic is that it's high enough that the water will not enter the system.

And this shows Say it With Water, it shows that the water will rise up to below the top of the grating and keep the water out.

This was our first prototype put out on Hillside Avenue. And here's some more details, you can see a couple units there on the left, and here you can see a couple units that are in place, they're in line with the lamppost, they're intended to be just sort of part of your street furniture. Some more views.

In the Chambers Street area on Broadway, Lower Manhattan, we developed a different scheme, we did not need the height, we don't have the height of water that you have out in Queens, but we needed to keep water out, and this is a solution that was developed. It's lower, it's wider, and it has bike racks and

benches on it. So here's the first prototype, and here they are, we've put in, I think, 16 of these in that area and you can see they are very well being used by the community, become part of the street furniture.

In upper Manhattan on Broadway, we had a couple locations where we have vents in the Broadway Mall, this was the before condition. Those vents when the street flooded, those vents would take on water. What we did was put a curb around them and raise the vent so it's protected from that type of flooding. We also put a raised pad in front of some of the stairways, if you had a station entrance in the vicinity of a flood zone so that we could keep the water out.

As I mentioned, we have some locations where the sewer system would back up into the subway and this is one. So the sewer manhole on the right, the water would back up through that blue sewer pipe into the track bed. What we've done is installed a check valve. We had some 100-year-old check valves in parts of the system, we had replace some of those that weren't functioning, but there were several locations

where there no check valves at all and so we've moved to install them. This shows the work done at 23rd Street. It's not easy, the pipe runs through the fare control area and we identified, as you can see, where we could excavate, we had to dig a deep hole down to the pipe and install the new check valve on a little sort of a bypass of the existing pipe just to have the room to get the check valve in.

Where we are now. The seven locations that we intended to have done within 18 months are done; we've raised 864 vent bays, one vent bay is 4' x 5'; we closed just as many, sealed off the concrete, so now that's an area of sidewalk that's just concrete pavement; we've completed the designs for the remaining 18 locations where we need to do something with the vent bays. We've installed check valves at seven locations, we have 14 more in the procurement process and then nine more in design and then that will complete the areas where we need to put in check valves.

A lot has also been done on the maintenance side. Areas that have not yet

received vent bay treatments are subject to protection now by our operating department and they call it Operation Submarine, they're going out--and that picture on the top right shows a blue tarp that is placed down with concrete weights and timbers, that's actually at, I think, 34th and 8th, next to Penn Station.

We're also doing far more cleaning, we've worked with DEP as well and they're doing more cleaning of catch basins in the areas of flooding, but we're cleaning our vents, cleaning the track beds so that debris doesn't clog the drains in the track beds. And we're constantly monitoring locations and making sure that our efforts are working.

We have purchased additional temporary pumps, that we can easily deploy around the system. We conduct drills with our staff so that they are very quickly deployed when rain is predicted. And we've also got our pump trains, we've relocated the pump trains to those areas that are most likely to flood so that they can be quickly deployed.

We issued a flood report a year ago

for internal use directing all the various departments within the Transit Authority of what efforts need to be made when a flood condition is likely to occur during that occasion, and also it's used by the city's office of OEM--Emergency Management--for coordination with them in a flood condition.

We've made communications improvements. The first thing we did was we installed Doppler radar screens in our operation centers and trained our staff so that they are able to interpret when a storm is coming and make sure appropriate actions are taken to prepare for it. We've set up a communications desk at the rail control center, installed the bus command center desk at the rail control center, so that we improve that coordination between our rail operations and bus operations.

We've worked very hard to establish clear emergency protocols, again, mostly internally within the agency so that various groups are prepared and take appropriate action. And protocols between the operations center, we have a maintenance of way operation center, a bus

operation center, hydraulics and so forth.

We've also improved the way we communicate with outside agencies. These are agencies within the MTA family and also outside the MTA family. And we've also improved the way can we communicate with the public through our website and through broadcasts and digital means.

We've also, and this is a change in strategy, if you read our flood report, if you read the actions taken on August 7th, everything was done in order to maintain service--that was the mentality of the Transit Authority, at all costs you maintain service. This was a storm where we could not maintain service and we weren't prepared to tell the public, "Stay away from the subway, we can't provide service right now," we didn't tell our bus customers as they were coming taking a bus to the subway, "By the way, the subway's not running." It was always our mode of thinking that if you're coming to the subway, we'll somehow get to you and provide that service. What we are now developed within our operation centers is contingency plans that if we can't provide service, lets make sure our customers

know, stay away from the subway for couple hours and we will restore service then. We've also developed a contingency plan with buses so that if, in fact, we have a severe disruption--not just due to flooding, but for any reason--that we have alternate busing that can be implemented. Not that busing can carry the capacity of the subway system, but to the extent that we can provide service, we will with buses.

And that concludes my presentation.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Well thank you very much. We have been joined by--and there are multiple hearings occurring simultaneously, so members will be joining us and leaving and rejoining us. We have been joined by Council Member Larry Seabrook from the Bronx, Oliver Koppell from the Bronx, and Jessica Lappin from Manhattan, and we have Darlene Mealy here with us from Brooklyn.

We have questions from Council Member Garodnick.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Just one, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing, and I appreciate the

testimony of the MTA.

We all remember that day in August of 2007 and I think collectively vowed to do what we can to ensure that the city subway system would never again be vulnerable to what was a 100-year event, but we all suspect will probably be coming more frequently. So we thank you for your efforts to try to address the issue.

My only one question to you is obviously the street furniture that you described is more suitable in some locations than others, will you be willing to work with local communities to address what might be most appropriate to accommodate local needs when figuring out how to address those concerns?

MS. CRAWFORD: Yes, we are constrained in many ways by the ventilation requirements and so forth, but we've come up with two basic designs, we do believe some slight modifications can be made to make them work as required.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Terrific. Well we look forward to working with you on that and, again, appreciate your work to

try to address what we know is a very complicated issue. Thank you.

MS. CRAWFORD: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you. Thank you, Council Member Garodnick.

So, on August 8th of 2007, obviously it was a torrential downpour, but there were also some reports that the drainage system was really not up to 100% at that time. So even if the drainage system was working at 100%, it wouldn't have been able to drain all that water so quickly.

MS. CRAWFORD: You mean the city sewer system?

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Well the drainage system even within the subway system.

MS. CRAWFORD: We--

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Was the drainage system within the subway system at 100%? Probably not.

MS. CRAWFORD: We're actually pretty close we're about--oh, Peter Velasquez.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Yeah, push the button and please identify yourself.

MR. PETER VELASQUEZ: Pete Velasquez. Okay, we didn't have any pump equipment fail, there was no equipment failure and every pump was pumping, it's just that there was just too much water, just overcome, overwhelmed, whichever you want to call it.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: So--

MS. CRAWFORD: [Interposing] I believe our pumping capacity exceeds the sewer capacity in most locations, our gallons per minute that we can pump out?

MR. VELASQUEZ: We are--

MS. CRAWFORD: Well we're constrained by the sewer department--

MR. VELASQUEZ: [Interposing] Right, constrained by.

MS. CRAWFORD: --put it that way.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: All right. So--

MS. CRAWFORD: [Interposing] But yes, was there more water, at some points there was more water coming in than we could pump out, the rate of influx was greater than our ability to pump it out.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Well yeah, we

understand that, but so it is your testimony that the drainage system that's within the responsibility of the MTA was fully operational on that day?

MR. VELASQUEZ: Yes.

MS. CRAWFORD: Yes.

MR. VELASQUEZ: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: And that there were no parts -- we're not talking about just broken pumps, we're also talking about clogged drainage pipes, things like that.

MR. VELASQUEZ: Well with the water rushing in through the vent bays also comes debris, normal daily debris and that might block the drain, but it won't clog the drain, that's where we have responders go, they jump in the water and they remove the debris to allow the water to get into the drain. If it can't go in this drain, it'll overflow and go to the next drain, so it does run down into where the sump is so that the water can be removed.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay. We've been joined by Council Member Vincent Ignizio of Staten Island. Good morning.

All right, so the MTA was totally dependent then on the city's drainage system.

MR. VELASQUEZ: We always are.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay. All right, and then once the flooding occurred, then I understand that you have installed many of these elevated grates, is what you call it, right?

MS. CRAWFORD: Raised.

[Crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Raised grate, raised grating. What else is planned besides the raised grating? Additional pumps, maybe or...

MR. VELASQUEZ: No.

MS. CRAWFORD: No, we are just now I think finishing up the last pump replacements.

MR. O'GRADY: No, I think...

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Yeah, please identify yourself.

MR. JOHN O'GRADY: My name is John O'Grady, I work at CPM for Connie. I think we recognize that installing additional pumping capacity is of no help to us because of the capacity of the existing city sewer system. We can't pump out when the city sewer system is

supercharged--

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Overwhelmed.

MR. O'GRADY: --as a result of the storm anyway. So understanding that we could put pumps in but it won't have any benefit to us, what we've done is decided to keep the water out of the system to the maximum extent possible in these vulnerable areas, and that is by raising the grates. If we can keep the water out, we won't need the additional pumping.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: All right, so does that mean every underground station is well equipped with a pump already or a drainage and pumping system that will bring the water back up?

MR. O'GRADY: We have pumping capacity at the low points of every segment of the transit system.

MS. CRAWFORD: It's not necessarily at a station, the pump room could be in between stations, it's where the low points are.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay. And in order to install the raised grating, the MTA has worked closely with presumably the Department of Transportation and other city agencies?

MS. CRAWFORD: That's right, the Design Commission, Municipal Art Society, MTA Arts for Transits been very helpful in the effort.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay. I mean, I think we will be hearing from some people who were not necessarily part of the process and that would include some of the residents, perhaps the businesses along the roads or streets where the raised grating was installed, but was there any kind of Community Board input also? It was just done at the agency level?

MS. CRAWFORD: Yes.

MR. O'GRADY: Yes, every location that we worked with, we had Community Board interface, yes. I'm sorry, go ahead, Lois.

MS. LOIS TENDLER: I'm Lois Tendler. We've been to Queens Borough Board and Manhattan Borough Boards and individual Community Boards affected by the grates that we've already placed in and we are in the process of reaching out to Community Boards who are affected by proposals to move ahead in the next set of locations.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: And then with

regard -- so it does appear that much of the construction work has been accomplished. Where are we in terms of the plan? The report that was issued, I believe it was roughly 30 days after that torrential downpour, where are we in terms of the progress?

MS. CRAWFORD: We committed to -- actually we committed to six locations within 18 months, which is now, our last month, and we have addressed in fact seven locations by then and we also did the check valves at seven--

MR. O'GRADY: Three additional locations that were in the MTA storm report, yes.

MS. CRAWFORD: Yeah, so we've done in fact, more than was expected by this point and--

[Crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON LIU: You're ahead of schedule.

MS. CRAWFORD: --we are constrained--

MR. O'GRADY: Yes.

MS. CRAWFORD: Now we are constrained by funding. We'll need additional

funding to complete the remaining locations.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: So roughly how many more -- I mean, if you've done seven locations with regard to, I guess, any pumps that needed to be replaced, as well as the check valves.

MS. CRAWFORD: Yeah, the pumps are independent, that's not really a flood response, but in terms of raised vent locations to go are how many?

MR. O'GRADY: The flood report has a list of 33 locations, so we -- the flood report has a list of 33 locations in it, that report indicated that we would fix the top priority locations, of which the New York City Transit had six, within 18 months. We fixed those locations, plus we fixed, as Connie mentioned, an additional one location with the raised vent grates and three check valve locations. So we have actually fixed -- excuse me, 10 locations in total so far, we have 23 locations remaining.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: And the ten that have been completed already, are those the most severe and, therefore, potentially take the most

amount of work or most amount of--

[Crosstalk]

MR. O'GRADY: --that slide.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: --monetary resources? Or are the remaining 23--

MS. CRAWFORD: [Interposing] They are the--

CHAIRPERSON LIU: --roughly the same?

MS. CRAWFORD: They're the most severe locations, however, we also wanted to make sure that, for example, the Queens Boulevard line we address all the locations on the Queens Boulevard line. So even if--

CHAIRPERSON LIU: I see.

MS. CRAWFORD: --one might have dropped to a lower priority, we wanted to fix the Queens Boulevard line and we fixed the Broadway line.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: All right, well thanks for fixing the Queens Boulevard line. But of course, we need to get all the lines completely--

MS. CRAWFORD: That's right.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: --fixed and upgraded.

MS. CRAWFORD: So we've completed the designs for the remaining locations and we will be seeking funding in the next capital program.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay. And what would be the approximate cost of what's been done so far?

MS. CRAWFORD: $40 million, including the design efforts for the remaining locations.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: So would the design have to be redone for the remaining locations or you could basically use the same kinds of designs?

MS. CRAWFORD: Same kinds of designs.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: So it wouldn't necessarily cost the money at the same rate, the 40 million -- you know, that's roughly $4 million--

MS. CRAWFORD: [Interposing] We've completed those designs, we've completed the

designs for all 33 locations, right?

MR. O'GRADY: Yes, yes--

MS. CRAWFORD: Yes.

MR. O'GRADY: --all locations are designed.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: All right, so there may be another 70 million for the remaining 23?

MR. O'GRADY: I believe the number is closer to about $80 million.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay, $80 million. So right now, the upgrades are at a standstill because there is no funding for it.

MR. O'GRADY: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Was there some kind of commitment in terms of time frames?

MS. CRAWFORD: Three years was our goal.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: All right. Well I guess, good luck getting it into the five-year capital plan.

MS. CRAWFORD: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Obviously there will be a lot of competing pressure for it, but we

certainly hope that you will be able to complete the plan as expressed in the recommendations and the forward-looking plan itself.

We have some questions from Council Member Mealy.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Good morning. I would like to know how old are the pumps.

MS. CRAWFORD: We've recently replaced all the pumps in the system.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: How recent?

MS. CRAWFORD: Well we're finishing up some right this moment--

MR. O'GRADY: [Interposing] Queens Boulevard right now.

MS. CRAWFORD: --they'll be finished in the next couple months? And that's the last group?

MR. O'GRADY: There's one more pump room the project.

MS. CRAWFORD: One more pump room project.

MR. O'GRADY: But the pumps are-- in other words, over the last several capital

programs there has been an aggressive pump replacement program and--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [Interposing] Periodically, how often do you all replace them?

MS. CRAWFORD: Some 40 years.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Every 40 years?

MS. CRAWFORD: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So have you all thought about increasing their capacity at all since you just said that--

MS. CRAWFORD: [Interposing] We have, the new standard increases the capacity over what we had to the 40-year-old standard.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: But you just put that in place recently.

MR. O'GRADY: Yeah.

MR. VELASQUEZ: So right now the pumps pump 1,900 gallons a minute, that's the standard, the older--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [Interposing] But we just found out that's not enough.

MR. VELASQUEZ: No, we--

MS. CRAWFORD: No, it is enough.

MR. VELASQUEZ: --we've been doing 1,900 gallons a minute and all the pump rooms, we're almost like I would say 98 or 99% in a state of good repair in all the pump rooms systemwide.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: But that last rain, it was not--your pumps were not enough for the weather--

MS. CRAWFORD: [Interposing] No, we pump out, the problem is that the sewer can't take out any more pumping, the city sewer system cannot accommodate any more water. So it's not our pumping capacity that's the constraint, it's the city sewer system.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So have you all coordinated with the city to see--

MS. CRAWFORD: [Interposing] Absolutely, for example, at Hillside Avenue, we talked to DEP, but I believe they are 20 years away from upgrading the sewer system--

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Wow.

MS. CRAWFORD: --in that part of the city and, you have to understand, that's high

up, they've got to fix the piping down at the outlet level, at the river and then build that capacity all the way up until they get to Hillside Avenue. You can't just fix it at Hillside Avenue, you have different fix the whole route.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Will the budget crisis cause you all to deter any of your plans for addressing the weather issues? The severe weather issues.

MS. CRAWFORD: Well, we would like to get this into the capital program, but we have many needs in the capital program and it'll be a process for the MTA and the legislature to set priorities.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: All right. Then thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you, Council Member Mealy.

So part of the effort was also, you had talked about the Doppler radar system. What was the thinking behind that? That the MTA had to have some weather forecasting capability? Nowadays we have the Weather Channel, we've got--

MS. CRAWFORD: Right.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: --weather.com, it seems like they're pretty precise.

MS. CRAWFORD: Previously, we had a weather forecaster under contract who would provide I think the weather predictions twice a day maybe?

MR. VELASQUEZ: Twice at 6 a.m. and at 2:30 in the afternoon.

MS. CRAWFORD: Before each rush hour, and that's what we got. They missed this storm, it came after they made that morning prediction. Now we get the weather reports constantly. We have two forecasters, I believe, and we've also trained our staff at all the various control centers to read the Doppler radar. So we are much more aware, I mean, almost even we can read a Doppler radar and I certainly couldn't have spelled it 10 years ago. So it's a different world for us, it's just New York City, the world in general--

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Well look--

MS. CRAWFORD: --is more aware of weather.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: --I don't want to

belabor the point, it just seemed there were lots of people who were wondering out loud when the MTA announced that they would be installing these Doppler radar systems and training employees on how to read the Doppler radar screens, why the MTA actually had to develop this capability, was it necessary? There were no websites that could actually just tell you what the Doppler radar was showing--

MS. CRAWFORD: [Interposing] Well it does come from--

CHAIRPERSON LIU: --in the metropolitan--

MS. CRAWFORD: --it comes from the National Weather Service website, I believe, is where the Doppler radar is broadcast, you could get this at home on your PC.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: All right. So there wasn't--

MS. CRAWFORD: But we know how to read it, we don't want to be caught flat-footed, so we have a higher degree of awareness now.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay. All right, well, I think it looks like the MTA is on track

with regard to the recommendations and the plans for upgrading the subway system, to minimize the effects of flooding and torrential downpours. Obviously, we have some work to do at the city level to upgrade the sewer and drainage systems and I think your point is well taken that the MTA's drainage systems were, in fact, working properly on that day.

The raised grating, I think we will hear some testimony about that. Obviously this is yet another competitor for scarce sidewalk and street space. And to the extent that you can minimize the intrusion or inconvenience for others, I think that would be greatly appreciated.

With that, good luck with the next five-year capital plan, $80 million would be a small portion of that, but, of course, there are thousands of things that would be small portions of what seems to be a shrinking pie.

So I want to, on behalf of the committee, commend the MTA for their efforts with regard to protecting the system against these torrential downpours. I think there probably is still more you could do in terms of communicating

with the passengers and it's always good to hear some coming clean--admissions that there's a certain mindset at the MTA and the mindset is not necessarily bad, that the mindset of getting the system up and running as quickly as possible, but of course at some point it is also important to be realistic and at that point give people the opportunity to reassess the situations for themselves and make alternate plans if at all possible. So to that extent, if you continue to upgrade the communication system, I think we'll all be in a better world.

With that, I want to thank the MTA for their efforts and for joining us today at this hearing. Thank you.

MS. CRAWFORD: Thank you.

[Off mic]

CHAIRPERSON LIU: All right. We have testimony from Elyse Peters Arnold. [Long pause] Okay. Ms. Arnold, please proceed.

MS. ELYSE PETERS ARNOLD: Hello, obviously, this statement was written before seeing the PowerPoint, so a lot of the questions have been answered that are raised in this

statement, although--

CHAIRPERSON LIU: [Interposing] Ms. Arnold, just please identify yourself for the record, it's just a formality.

MS. ARNOLD: Elyse Peters Arnold, Muslim Consultative Network. Like I said, a lot of the issues addressed in this statement have been at least partially answered by the MTA's PowerPoint presentation, but I do want to get this on the record as I'm here representing Muslim Consultative Network and our Executive Director Adem Carroll.

So again, my name is Elyse Peters Arnold, I'm a VISTA volunteer completing a year of service with Muslim Consultative Network, which is a citywide network of diverse Muslim men and women active in civil liberties, social services, and education.

My own work is to help develop MCN's disaster preparedness and community education programs in partnership with the American Red Cross. Recently I've been giving out informational flyers on the swine flue in multiple languages, including Arabic, Urdu, Bengali, and

Punjabi. This is to make sure that information reaches the diverse Muslim communities that include many recent immigrants.

As part of my service I have also been presenting on preparedness at several Islamic schools and community centers throughout the city. I'm on the subway for hours every day on my way to outreach in the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn. Even without the recent rainy weather, I am very aware of the Office of Emergency Management's Ready New York map showing the city's susceptibility to flooding, especially in direct hit hurricanes above Category One.

As I said, I'm standing in today for our director Adem Carroll, who is meeting with the Disaster Diversity in Philadelphia today. He has asked me to bring up a question about the new metal street furniture that has been installed above subway gratings, ostensibly to contain flooding in some way. These very bulky and ugly objects have begun to mushroom around the city, blocking off access to significant parts of the sidewalk. He wishes to ask if these objects are truly cost effective and whether the public has

been fully consulted.

Adem Carroll also notes that various designs exist, one of which includes a bike rack in useful benches, but he has yet to see these anywhere in Queens. Instead we see the design that is attached--these are similar to the pictures from the PowerPoint presentation--which he compares to an Albanian bomb shelter.

I will hand these to the committee afterwards.

To sum up--

CHAIRPERSON LIU: [Interposing] I think we can picture what you're talking about.

MS. ARNOLD: To sum up, we'd like to ask how much fiscal and artistic oversight there has been over the street furniture, including these, as well as some of the new top-heavy phone booths that we've seen around the city. There is the potential that these impediments will create new problems without really solving older ones, including flooding.

We ask that the Committee please look into this matter to ensure that this expense is not money down the drain. Thank you for your

attention and may I also add that AmeriCorps National Service week starts this Friday and there is an event on Saturday in Harlem featuring Governor Paterson.

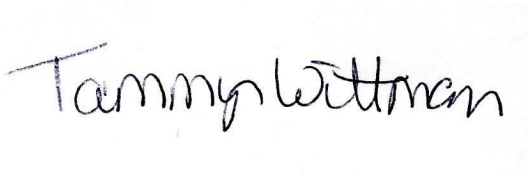
We hope to see you there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: Well thank you, Ms. Arnold, for that extra plug. Oh, thank you very much and say hello to Adem. Thank you.

Well, with that, there being no other witnesses, this hearing of the City Council's Committee on Transportation is adjourned.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Tammy Wittman, certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Signature_____

Date ___June 12, 2009_____