

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

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September 25, 2008

Start: 10:00am

Recess: N/A

HELD AT: Committee Room
City Hall

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Diana Reyna
Daniel R. Garodnick
Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr.
Larry B. Seabrook
Michael E. McMahon
G. Oliver Koppell
Vincent Ignizio
Miguel Martinez
Darlene Mealy
Jessica S. Lappin

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

Christopher P. Boylan
Deputy Executive Director
Metropolitan Transit Authority

Douglas Sussman
Director, MTA Community Affairs
Metropolitan Transit Authority

Estelle Stamm
Concerned Citizen

John Rozankowski
Concerned Citizen

Matt Shotkin
Concerned Citizen

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2 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Welcome to
3 today's-- no?

4 [Pause]

5 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Good morning.
6 Welcome to today's hearing of the City Council's
7 Committee on Transportation. My name is John Liu
8 and I have the privilege of chairing this
9 Committee. And we're joined today by Council
10 Members Diana Reyna, from Brooklyn and Queens;
11 Council Member Daniel Garodnick from Manhattan and
12 Council Member Joe Addabbo, from Queens. We've
13 convened this hearing as quickly as possible in
14 the aftermath of some revelations made by the Vice
15 Chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation
16 Authority, the Vice Chairman of the Board of
17 Directors, Mr. Mack, who a couple of months ago
18 made public some comments and his thoughts about
19 why it is that MTA Board Members and Officials
20 should have free access to the subways as well as
21 to the MTA operated bridges and tunnels. And
22 apparently Mr. Mack's thought process was that MTA
23 Board Members should be encouraged as much as
24 possible to use these bridges and tunnels and the
25 subways, because they can see firsthand any

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2 problems that may arise, and may warrant attention
3 by the MTA. And he went on to say that it's
4 important that Board Members register these
5 complaints and suggestions for improvements,
6 because when the public makes complaints or offers
7 suggestions, they basically go into the garbage
8 can, quickly and promptly. We just want to make
9 sure that that is not in fact happening. I know
10 my colleagues, in my office, we call get what
11 could be more than our fair share of complaints
12 about the MTA, about the subways, about the
13 busses, about the bridges and the tunnels. And we
14 forward them on a regular basis, in writing, and
15 also when patterns emerge we call for oversight
16 hearings to figure out exactly what the MTA is
17 doing. We had also been under the supposition
18 that the MTA does have a rigorous complaint review
19 process where riders or the general public could
20 come in, or to call in, or to email. or to fax or
21 to write in with their complaints, and that there
22 would be a thorough process at the MTA that would
23 address those complaints, and of course address
24 those complaints without any utilization of the
25 circular file. And so we want to make sure that

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2 these complaints are taken care of by the MTA, and
3 not just for the sake of taking care of them, but
4 also so that the MTA could improve their processes
5 in the interests of the riders and the general
6 public. And so we're very delighted that
7 officials from the Metropolitan Transportation
8 Authority have joined us today. And we'll hear
9 from them exactly what it is that the MTA does to
10 address complaints when they come in from the
11 general public, and if there's any differentiation
12 between the way public complaints are handled and
13 Board Member complaints are handled. And so with
14 that, we're very pleased to be joined by
15 Christopher Boylan, I believe the Deputy Executive
16 Director at the New York Metropolitan
17 Transportation Authority. And we've also been
18 joined by Council Members Larry Seabrook, from the
19 Bronx, and Michael McMahon, from Staten Island.

20 [Pause]

21 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Good morning.

22 [Pause]

23 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Is that
24 better? That's better. Great.

25 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Far better.

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Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Thank you.

Good morning, again. Thank you. Let me start by setting the stage a little bit. I did have the opportunity to talk to Commissioner Mack about his comments. And I think given an opportunity to have phrased his remarks a little differently he would have. I think his intention was not so much to cast any aspersions on how we address complaints, but really to highlight the Board Members' role in really bringing things to the MTA Board. And I think I'll leave it at that, but thank you. As many of you know, we provide over 8.5 million bus, subway and commuter rail rides every day in our 14 county area. And we interact with another 900,000 cars on our bridges and tunnels, representing another 1.4 million drivers. Taken together that, the numbers, account for about 3 billion customer interactions a year. And I'd venture to say that that's significantly larger than almost any public or private corporation in the country, if not the world. But we do have a lot of interaction with the customers. In that context, it's pretty

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2 remarkable that the majority of our customers,
3 when we survey them, despite what you may think or
4 hear or read, are relatively satisfied with our
5 service; particularly since we've invested what we
6 have over the last 25 years in rehabilitating and
7 rebuilding the system. And while we're far from
8 perfect, I think you all understand the delicate
9 balance that we strike every day with our tens of
10 thousands of employees who work very hard
11 coordinating equipment schedules and our
12 customers. And we like to call it in house the
13 daily miracle, because we do deliver people to
14 where they want to go safely and reliably. When
15 we do get customer input, and there are many
16 avenues that I will talk about today, I think it's
17 interesting to note that about a third of the
18 input would fall in the category of complaints,
19 and the rest are really a mix of compliments and
20 suggestions and questions. So we are-- we're
21 happy about that and I think we address them
22 fairly thoroughly, and I'll go into that in
23 detail. Over the last couple of years we've made
24 great strides in using technology and a new set of
25 customer service initiatives to actively seek out

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2 and encourage customer input about the quality of
3 our system and our service. Let me touch on the
4 five primary ways we have interaction with our
5 customers, the more formal ones, aside from the
6 fact that our customers see our bus drivers and
7 our train operators and our conductors and our
8 token clerks and others throughout the day. Back
9 in February of 2003, we put in place a very
10 successful email system that's conveniently
11 available from our website, every page on our
12 website, MTA.info, under the FAQ/Contact Us
13 button. That system is now handling over 200,000
14 inquiries each year. And one of the things we
15 designed into the email system was a robust
16 frequently asked questions section. And we're
17 very happy to report that the industry wide
18 average for customer satisfaction is answering 70%
19 of the questions through your frequently asked
20 questions-- we answer about 90% of our customers
21 inquiries through our frequently asked questions.
22 And the reason for that is, it's not only a robust
23 set of questions based on what we hear from our
24 customer, but it's adjusted based on what's going
25 on, if there are service issues or if there's a

1 storm, we change them to make sure that our
2 customers can get to the information. And then we
3 also link in our frequently asked questions, to
4 other areas of the website where they can get
5 their answers immediately. So I think our
6 customers think it's effective and that leaves us
7 with 10% of the mix to answer through emails and
8 others. On average we field about 200,000 emails
9 a year from various sources. And we acknowledge
10 all of those immediately and we strive to provide
11 a substantive follow up rather than just an
12 acknowledgement as quickly as we can. Now our
13 initial goal was to do it within ten day, and I
14 will tell you that we have accomplished that and
15 more. We are now average for 2008 a turnaround at
16 about 2.21 days. And most of our years between
17 2003 and now, we surprised ourselves too, and
18 somewhere between two and three days is the
19 turnaround on our emails. So that's the most
20 efficient was for us to get input and answers back
21 to our customers. That said, we still take mail,
22 correspondence through the mail, and that accounts
23 for about 6,000 or 7,000 at New York City Transit-
24 - a year; and at our two railroads, Long Island
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2 Rail Road and Metro North, about 5,000 each. Our
3 corporate goal has historically been 14 to 21 days
4 to turnaround a substantive answer, and I think
5 you'll understand that when you handle a piece of
6 paper and you shuffle it around to the various
7 places in an organization as large as ours, it
8 does take some time to not only handle it, but to
9 research those. We have a 97% success rate in
10 terms of meeting that 14 to 21 day deadline, and
11 we try to bring the rest of that 3% in as quickly
12 as we can. Third, each of our operating agencies
13 have customer service call centers, which are very
14 busy. And our customers can speak directly
15 through an agent or through a TTY. And all the
16 customer service center numbers, and I think many
17 of you are familiar with our map, they are all
18 listed on the back of our map. So if you need
19 anything from the MTA or from other regional
20 transit providers, it's right on the back, the
21 numbers are right on the back of our maps; and
22 those are readily available throughout the system.
23 We also get a significant number of calls every
24 year, and referrals, from the City's 311 hotline,
25 and we are working very closely with the City to

1 try to help them answer some of those questions
2 before they may have to refer them over to us, and
3 we have a very nice working relationship with 311.
4 In terms of the numbers of calls that we field,
5 New York City Transit's customer service hotline
6 answers 2 million calls a year. And most of them
7 are for travel directions and trip planning, which
8 means that we can address them immediately and
9 move on. Other inquiries are routed through the
10 system, and the follow up rates depend on what
11 kind of issue it might be. We have the same goals
12 for that 14 to 21 day response, and we have a
13 success rate of meeting those at about 97% also.
14 Fourth, we actually have physical customer service
15 walk-in centers for all our properties. Grand
16 Central we have a customer service center in the
17 Gray Bar building for Metro North. At Penn
18 Station there's a customer service walk-in center
19 for Long Island Rail Road. And at the side of our
20 two Broadway New York City Transit headquarters
21 downtown at 3 Stone Street, customers can come in
22 and they can ask a broad range of questions from
23 Metro Card to half-fare cards and so forth. And
24 before I forget, although it's not in my remarks,
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2 I forgot about us at MTA Headquarters. But Doug
3 Sussman here, who has been the face of the MTA for
4 many years, fields dozens of customer inquiries
5 and complaints every week at the front desk of the
6 MTA. He also fields calls on our community
7 affairs hotline. And Doug tries to turn those
8 things around within two weeks, and is pretty
9 successful at doing that. That's not included in
10 my remarks, but I think it's relevant. Fifth and
11 perhaps most important for us in terms of contact
12 with our customers, comes from our 70,000
13 employees, and these are represented and non-
14 represented employees from train operators and
15 conductors to customer service reps and station
16 staff and others. And they have hundreds, if not
17 thousands, of interactions with customers a day.
18 They are answering questions all day long, and
19 they do take complaints and comments and
20 criticism. And there is a process within the MTA
21 family to take those and route those through the
22 system. I give some examples in my remarks about
23 how one might have a complaint pass through our
24 conductors, train operators, station agents and
25 even our cleaners in the system. And I'd be happy

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2 to either answer questions on that later, or if I
3 don't have the detailed answers, get back to you
4 on that-- but it is in my remarks. On our 6,000
5 busses, our bus drivers are front line, and they
6 probably have the most interactions with our
7 customers every day, because our customers have to
8 actually physically pass by them. Most times they
9 do a good job, and we like to think that we can
10 improve things, you know for them and for our
11 customers, but they really are at the frontlines
12 and they work hard to give our customers
13 information. In all those instances, however,
14 where an inquiry comes in through one of our
15 employees, it's tracked and we give our customers
16 a response by phone or in writing, depending on
17 the contact information they supply. Now I only
18 have numbers for the things that we are able to
19 get back to customers on, but there are thousands
20 of inquiries a day that get responded to right on
21 the spot that I can tell you about that we take
22 care of. And we're happy for that. If the
23 customer is satisfied right there on the spot,
24 that's the best. So even with all these existing
25 avenues for customer input and comment, we've

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2 become more acutely focused in the last year and a
3 half or so on customer service as part of the
4 seven strategic priorities that were set out by
5 our Executive Director and CEO Lee Sander, when he
6 arrived in January of 2007. Customer service, I
7 would say, is arguably at the top of his seven
8 list of priorities. And we have worked with our
9 employees and externally with our stakeholders to
10 develop a series of aggressive customer service
11 initiatives to improve our environment, and also
12 to do a better job of communicating, listening and
13 responding. We have a customer service
14 initiatives program that builds on the customer
15 service issues that our agencies already have in
16 place. And the focus in the customer service
17 initiative is on three major areas, customer
18 information, customer engagement and service
19 improvements. In terms of customer information,
20 in the last year and a half, we've made
21 significant progress on providing better trip
22 planning. New York City Transit's Trip Planner,
23 which is available on our website and on your PDA,
24 allows better electronic travel information than
25 what was previously available. And you may have

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2 noted that on Tuesday of this week, we announced a
3 terrific partnership with Google Maps, to provide
4 the largest and I think the most powerful regional
5 transit travel system in the country. You could
6 go from Montauk to Minneola to Maspeth, wherever
7 it is you want to go in the region, whether it's
8 on our service, PATH or New Jersey Transit, you
9 can now do it through Google Maps. We're moving
10 ahead on our plans to provide cell service in all
11 our underground stations, to join the 39% of
12 stations above ground that already enjoy it. And
13 in the next few weeks, in early October, we will
14 actually be going live with our real-time, or I
15 should say as near to real-time as we possibly
16 get, email and text messaging alert system. So
17 our customers can know, as they're traveling to
18 and from their stations, if there are service
19 disruptions. We've improved our in-system
20 customer service notices. And we are piloting
21 customer service screens and station message
22 boards throughout the system, so that our
23 customers can see what the status of their system
24 is before they pay their fare and before they make
25 that choice. It's very important for our

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2 customers. You may recall last August when we had
3 a very severe storm on August 8th; many of our
4 customers were in the system and did not have good
5 information before they went in. It only angered
6 them further, because they would have liked to
7 have service alternatives. The email and text
8 messaging alerts and the customer service screens
9 will hopefully prevent that and give them
10 alternatives up front. We're also going to be
11 adding more capability and information to our
12 website. One of the things that people have asked
13 us for, and we're going to try to deliver it as
14 well as we can, is explaining elevator and
15 escalator information on the website; so that
16 before you can go you can say gee, that station
17 elevator is not working now and I can choose to
18 take another one. We'll be adding our lost and
19 found system. We have a very robust lost and
20 found system at Metro North that we're duplicating
21 at New York City Transit, so people will be able
22 to retrieve lost items immediately. And that is
23 one of the major calls we get. We get a lot of
24 people calling looking for things we've left
25 behind in the system. In terms of customer

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2 engagement, Lee Sander, who you may know is very
3 much interested in our customer input, he and
4 Howard Roberts at New York City Transit have
5 instituted Rider Report Cards. We already have
6 Rider Report Cards at Long Island Rail Road and
7 Metro North. And this way we hear firsthand how
8 we're doing from our customers. We have regular
9 meet and greets on a quarterly basis with our
10 presidents and their senior staff. And they allow
11 us to answer questions on the spot. Two more
12 things, then I'm going to wrap up quickly. We
13 also sponsored a public engagement workshop for
14 the first time in the MTA history about late last
15 year, where we brought a couple hundred of our
16 customers and our staff together to talk about
17 issues that were of concern to them. And it was
18 very successful. We got a lot of good ideas from
19 that. We've also held two webinars. And if
20 you've never been on a webinar, it's an
21 interesting format, where folks can actually ask
22 questions live by email and we can respond, and
23 it's been very successful in terms of customer
24 input, answering questions and so forth. So in
25 conclusion, Mr. Chairman, at the end of the day

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2 there's perhaps no better way to provide our
3 customers with what they want than providing them
4 with reliable and safe and on time service. And
5 if you believe that customers will vote with their
6 feet, I think we must be doing an okay job,
7 because our ridership continues to grow and
8 presents another set of difficulties in terms of
9 making sure that we keep up with that service.
10 But we are committed to improving service to our
11 customers, and where our finances allow, we will
12 continue to strive to better communicate, listen
13 and respond to their concerns. Thank you, and I'd
14 be happy to answer any questions I can, and if
15 not, I'll be happy to get back to you with answers
16 that I don't have.

17 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you very
18 much, Mr. Boylan for your testimony. It sounds
19 like the MTA has a full complement of ways to
20 receive complaints from the public. You're almost
21 implying that maybe you should do a better job
22 communicating that process to the Board Members,
23 so that everybody understands that there is in
24 fact a way for the public to register complaints
25 with the MTA.

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2 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Terrific
3 point.

4 CHAIRPERSON LIU: The point about
5 people voting with their feet, you know, there's
6 not really much of a vote. It's kind of like a
7 vote in the old communist states, where there's
8 really only one candidate. They can only vote for
9 the MTA. The millions of people in New York, they
10 have no other choice in terms of how to get to
11 work except the MTA. So it's a growing City, and
12 obviously the ridership at the MTA is going to
13 grow, and that's not to day that the MTA has not
14 improved service in some respects. And I think
15 the Agency; the Authority does deserve some credit
16 for that. We will have a number of questions.
17 Let me note that we've been joined by Council
18 Member Oliver Koppell, from the Bronx and also
19 Council Member Vincent Ignizio from Staten Island,
20 who is shuttling back and forth between hearings.
21 So, take us through what happens when somebody
22 writes in or calls in with a complaint about the
23 MTA, because I know you described them in your
24 testimony, but what actually happens to that
25 complaint? Say someone complains about a dirty

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2 station or has a complaint, and this is a frequent
3 complaint that my office gets, why can't the
4 trains on certain lines, be properly labeled as
5 express or local, so that people know what kinds
6 of trains they're getting on? What happens to
7 that kind of complaint when it comes in either
8 through the call center or via email or in the
9 form of written correspondence?

10 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Okay. Well
11 complaints like that can come in a number of ways,
12 perhaps three ways, through the email system, that
13 would immediately be what I would call almost a
14 self-selected question. We have a menu that says,
15 I'm writing about a complaint, a commendation,
16 whatever it is that they want to-- so they've
17 already started to help sort through the complaint
18 for us and route it. And then they would say it's
19 about a subway, it's about a bus, it's about a
20 station. And from that-- those complaints are
21 almost automatically routed to the appropriate
22 folks within the agency whether it's in our subway
23 division or whether it's in our bus division,
24 right away you've already started the process of
25 getting an answer. And that would go to a

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2 customer service representative. And each of
3 those areas has an expertise with certain subway
4 lines and certain bus lines and so forth. And
5 that's why I think the turnaround on the email
6 thing is so fast, because we've already eliminated
7 several days of handling and routing and so forth.
8 In terms of letters, those letters will come into
9 our various correspondence centers, whether its at
10 New York City Transit or Long Island Rail Road or
11 Metro North, and they have to be physically read
12 by an individual, and then they have to categorize
13 where all those inquiries are. In many instances
14 we'll have customers who may have multiple issues
15 they want to deal with. They may want to talk
16 about their station, but they may say I also need
17 to know how to get my metro card, and I need to
18 know what bus will take me to Times Square. And
19 then so those things have to be duplicated and
20 routed to those areas, if the individual who is
21 reading that letter doesn't have an immediate
22 response. And sometimes they're very technical
23 and they can't be. So that gets all routed down,
24 routed back to the customer service area where we
25 have people who put together all the pieces of the

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2 responses, and then they get mailed out. And that
3 does take, in some instances as long as 14 to 21
4 days. With the email, again, you've already self-
5 selected the categories that you're interested in,
6 and those get moved very quickly. In terms of our
7 customer relationship with our station employees,
8 we have a formal process in New York City Transit,
9 whether you're in the subway division or in the
10 bus division, to report those up to your chain.
11 If you're a station cleaner, you talk to the
12 station agent. If you're a station agent you talk
13 to a customer service representative. Some of
14 those things get routed to our rail control
15 center. And if we have the information to get
16 back to a customer, which is what we ask for, we
17 put them through the routing system much as you
18 would with a written correspondence. It works
19 fairly well, not perfect, but it works fairly
20 well.

21 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Well, I think the
22 procedures that you've described are-- they seem
23 to be comprehensive in the way they take in
24 complaints. That when people have feedback,
25 complaints-- you also mentioned commendations.

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2 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Yes, we do
3 get some.

4 CHAIRPERSON LIU: All right. It
5 would be interesting to see how many of those you
6 get per year. But nonetheless, you have a system
7 set up to take in complaints. And what we're
8 interested in finding out is exactly what happens
9 to those complaints. I would presume that the
10 average turnaround on emails of 2.21 days this
11 years and the 14 to 21 day turnaround on written
12 correspondence, that is primarily to acknowledge
13 the fact that a complaint has been received?

14 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: No. In
15 fact on the email, everybody gets an instant
16 acknowledgement, so that they know that they are
17 in the queue. You have a number so that if you
18 are following up on it, we know when we got it and
19 we can time it from then. In terms of mail, we
20 try to give an acknowledgment, if we don't have an
21 answer, immediately. But we try to get a
22 substantive answer in that 14 to 21 day period.
23 Again depending on the, you know, when you're
24 talking about average here, there are some that
25 are outside the average of 21 days, but they kind

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2 of fall into that three percent. And some of the
3 issues, you know, Doug shares on a regular basis
4 some of the letters we get. And they are very
5 complicated. Our customers are very knowledgeable
6 about the system. They know exactly what they
7 want. They know the details of how the system
8 works, and they write us very lengthy letters,
9 three, four, five pages, single-spaced. Those are
10 not easy to pour through and respond to. But I
11 would put those probably in the category of taking
12 longer to respond to.

13 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Sure. And some
14 of these New Yorkers are-- I think every subway
15 rider considers themselves an expert in mass
16 transit.

17 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Oh, sure.

18 CHAIRPERSON LIU: And probably
19 rightfully so, because people have been taking--

20 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:
21 [Interposing] Compared to any place else, they
22 are. They absolutely are.

23 CHAIRPERSON LIU: That's right.
24 And now, you know, obviously the comments made by
25 Mr. Mack, they resonated in the public, because it

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2 seems like when people make a complaint about the
3 MTA or to the MTA, nothing happens. The stations
4 don't get cleaner, the subways don't adhere to the
5 schedule, the signs don't get properly fixed or
6 changed promptly. And so it seems like it's in
7 one ear and out the other. And so, is that just
8 an unfounded-- is that totally unfounded or does
9 the public still-- is somewhat right in thinking
10 nothing gets changed, even when they make those
11 complaints?

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Well, you
13 know, I've been at the MTA for about 18 years.
14 And the magnitude of difference between when I
15 came and what we have now is dramatic. And I will
16 say, and this is the God's honest truth, many of
17 the things, or most of the things that we
18 implemented are as a direct result of what our
19 customers said they wanted, whether it's directly
20 our customers, whether it's the Permanent Citizens
21 Advisory Committee, whether it's the Straphangers.
22 People have told us very clearly through our
23 surveys and through our regular interaction what
24 they want and need. And then, you know, we've
25 done all different kinds of things to improve

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2 transparency. Are the things we're doing on the
3 street always perfect? No. Can we do some of
4 them better? Yes. And we are constantly trying
5 to figure out ways through our customer service
6 agenda, to make it better. Customer signage, an
7 issue for sure. We want to ensure that we make
8 sure that it's current, that it's neat, that it's
9 understandable. And I think we've made great
10 progress in the last couple of years on some of
11 those things, but no, we're not perfect.

12 CHAIRPERSON LIU: All right. I'm
13 going to defer to my colleagues. I have some more
14 questions after they finish. But I do want to
15 acknowledge Doug Sussman for being up there front
16 and center. He did receive 2,000 complaints from
17 Council Member Addabbo and I just the other day.
18 And so thank you, Doug.

19 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: They're
20 actually here and they're logged. We actually do
21 track them. And Doug and I had a conversation
22 about how quickly we will respond to all them.

23 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Great, we're
24 looking for that 2.21 day turnaround.

25 [Laughter]

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2 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Which puts it at
3 about--

4 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:
5 [Interposing] The clock is ticking.

6 CHAIRPERSON LIU: 1:00 p.m. today.

7 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: That's
8 right. That's right.

9 CHAIRPERSON LIU: We have questions
10 from Council Member Daniel Garodnick.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Thank
12 you very much, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Boylan we
13 thank you for being here. Let me just start off.
14 It's obvious to everyone the reason why we're here
15 today. At the outset was those comments that were
16 made by a Board Member of the MTA saying that user
17 complaints were tossed in the garbage. And that
18 for many of us who use the system and represent
19 the many people who use the system, was a comment
20 that was so beyond the pale and was so completely
21 unacceptable that we felt, all of us, that this
22 was an important hearing for us to have, and
23 understand very clearly from the MTA that that is
24 not the practice and that that is a comment which
25 has been addressed internally and has been somehow

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2 formally retracted by the MTA. So I really wanted
3 to start off with that and understand from you
4 whether the MTA as a Board has actually corrected
5 in any formal policy statement that those comments
6 were not representative of the Board's position
7 and were not the policy of the MTA.

8 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Well, I
9 can't speak for the Board. I work for the Board.
10 But certainly I think we've demonstrated here, at
11 least I hope, and also in comments we made right
12 after Mr. Mack's comments, that that's not the
13 case. And again, Commissioner Mack can defend
14 himself, but I think his intent was not to
15 denigrate the activities that we have.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: I
17 understand, but let me just-- I understand that
18 you are not a member of the Board and that
19 therefore you cannot speak for the Board. But
20 what my question was-- has the Board spoken for
21 itself? Other than through its actions, with the
22 way it actually does respond to constituent
23 complaints, has the Board come out and said, this
24 was not an acceptable comment, and this is not the
25 way we treat customer complaints, this was the

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2 comments of an individual who was not speaking for
3 the Board himself?

4

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I do
5 believe that immediately after that, both Chairman
6 Hemmerdinger and Lee Sander said that this is not
7 reflective of what we do at the MTA, yes.

8

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Okay.
9 So let me just dig a little deeper on some of the
10 things that you mentioned in your testimony. The
11 first was the email responses. You said that that
12 there are 40,000 emails a year, all are
13 automatically-- they get an automated response.
14 And that substantively later, on an average of
15 about 2.21 days of waiting, individuals get a
16 response, which I actually think this is a pretty
17 good number for a response when you're dealing
18 with that number of emails. But I guess what I'm
19 trying to understand here is the instant
20 acknowledgement is not included in that average
21 tally, is it?

22

23

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: No, that's
correct.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Okay.
So this is, the 2.21 is just for the substantive--

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

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[Interposing] That's correct.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: --

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responses that you're giving to the people.

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: That's how-

6

- when we close them out.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Okay.

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: They're

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actually closed out. And in fact, in parts of the

10

family if we can, as you can imagine at New York

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City Transit the volume is extremely heavy

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compared to the other agencies, but in Metro

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North, for example, we try to close those out or

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their staff tries to close them out in a day if

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they can.

16

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Do you

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ever decide that an email does not require a

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substantive response?

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I think we

20

respond to everything. Doug, tell me? We respond

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to everything and try to, in a substantive way,

22

tell the customer, you know, this is not exactly

23

accurate or whatever. But we don't ever ignore an

24

email or piece of correspondence.

25

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Okay.

3

So every person who emails you will get two emails

4

from you. They'll get the automated response and

5

then they will get a substantive follow up. Is

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that right?

7

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: That's

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correct.

9

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Okay, by

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my very quick calculation here, it's about 109

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emails a day to get you to 40,000 at 300-- if you

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got emails every single day of the year. How many

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people do you have responding to these emails that

14

you're able to process them substantively so

15

quickly?

16

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Well based

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on the way we set up the email system, when you

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look at the menu when you go on, and I referred to

19

it a little earlier, you know, a customer can

20

categorize what kind of complaint it is that

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they're making, whether it's bus subway, whether

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it's a station issue, whether it's a complaint a

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compliment or whatever those things are. Those

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get routed to the various areas where individuals

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who are knowledgeable about that particular area

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2 can respond very quickly. And then of course, all
3 it is, is being able to respond quickly and
4 sending it back electronically. So you save huge
5 amounts of time. You know, in the old days,
6 shuffling a piece of paper, faxing and so forth,
7 making sure that you hooked up with the folks who
8 were putting the final response together took a
9 long time.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: So the
11 answer is how many people would be responding to
12 those emails?

13 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: There's
14 hundreds of people throughout the agency. They're
15 not all dedicated to customer service, but they're
16 all dedicated to the area that's being addressed
17 in those letters.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: So those
19 emails or letters could be routed to any number of
20 hundreds of people?

21 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: They could
22 be, right?

23 [Pause]

24 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Come on up,
25 Doug, for a second. I hope you don't mind if I

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2 bring Doug. He's got the--

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4

5

CHAIRPERSON LIU: [Interposing] No,
we love Doug. Come on up. I'm sure he really
wants to be there too.

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DOUGLAS SUSSMAN: Yes, very much.
I'm used to being in front of a microphone. At
Transit we have well over 100 people who directly
respond, fewer at Metro North, Long Island
Railroad. The volume isn't-- warrants more than
that. At Headquarters it's really me and a couple
others, and we know who to route things too that
are misassigned to us. Some people-- the
customers, they sometimes think sending it to MTA
headquarters will result in a faster turnaround.
But if it's a Metro Card customer complaint or
inquiry, obviously Transit is the proper agency,
and I reassign that the same day that I receive
it. So in total it's probably 200 and some odd,
maybe 300 people who actually do the responding,
among all the agencies.

22

23

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: That
makes some sense, because the number of days--
it's a very short number, so I would assume there
were a considerable number of people in the

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pipeline.

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: If it's a policy question that only falls into the world of Chris Boylan, someone will email me and say, we just got this email today, what's your-- you know, so I guess I fall into that mix of answering the customer--

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK:

[Interposing] So you would be part of the group of 100 or 200 people who actually would be providing substantive responses to the 40,000. Okay. Let me just go on to the customer service call centers. What are the hours of availability for those, to talk to a live human being? We all have gotten very familiar with automated call centers, and it's frequently a point of frustration when you can't actually get a live person on the phone. What are the hours in which you can get a live human being?

DOUGLAS SUSSMAN: I know at the commuter railroads it's 24 hours a day, and it's primarily for fare and schedule information, although they can be given other information or problems recorded. Transit is, I believe 20 hours

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2 a day or 18 hours a day? Whatever.

3

4 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: We can get
5 the exact times, but one of the things that we do
6 in Transit is at the forefront of this, is when we
7 are not there live to have a voice recognition
8 system that at least gets you some of the basic
9 information that you want, now you can't answer a
10 detailed complaint, but you can leave the
11 information so we can get back to you and get the
12 complaint info to you. We also through those
13 systems encourage you, if you need a faster
14 answer, to go to our website. So I mean, there
15 are all different kinds of hand offs.

16

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: I got
18 you. Well, I'm curious to know the answer to that
19 question about the number of hours, if it's in the
20 ballpark of 18 or 20 or 24-- I mean those are
21 considerable numbers of hours of the day. But we
22 want to make sure that people do not feel
23 frustrated when they call that they have to go
24 through multiple layers before they actually have
25 the opportunity to speak to a human being. And
that's, I think, critically important; because
it's something where you actually lose the

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2 complaints in the middle because people are
3 frustrated and then they drop off and we never
4 actually get to hear what they're calling about.

5 DOUGLAS SUSSMAN: I would just note
6 for those who do have computer access, a message
7 is given that you can lodge a complaint or get
8 information 24 hours a day on our website under
9 the FAQ section. And so I look at my incident
10 console in the morning and I see people seeking
11 information at 3:00 a.m. So many people do avail
12 themselves of that opportunity.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: I get
14 it. I get that. But, and people-- you know,
15 obviously the internet is great for those sorts of
16 things. But really what I am concerned about is
17 sometimes you just need to get a person on the
18 other line, because your question is more specific
19 than the FAQs, and you don't really want to just
20 to through the automated systems or even check it
21 online. My last question for you, and I wanted to
22 just highlight here your point about the real time
23 email and text messaging capability, which I think
24 is extremely important. My constituents are going
25 to be very interested in this and are interested

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2 in it, the Lexington Avenue line is a line which
3 we are, you know in my office, taking a careful
4 look at in terms of what it means as a practical
5 matter for people who are trying to board and
6 can't get on the trains either because of delays
7 or because they're just too packed. And so we are
8 eager to see the very speedy roll out of that and
9 certainly would be happy to offer you some
10 constructive thoughts on what would be useful to
11 be including in those email or text messaging
12 updates, not just about service disruptions, but
13 also perhaps about, you know, the spacing of the
14 trains, so people could actually recognize, you
15 know, whether the trains are running as they
16 should be, whether they're delayed, where-- you
17 know, other more detailed information so they can
18 make intelligent decisions about when to go in or
19 how much time to allocate for their trip down to
20 work.

21 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: It's going
22 to be-- I'll give you a little preview, it's going
23 to be a family wide system that will allow you to
24 go to one place on our website and click on subway
25 lines individually, bus routes individually,

1
2 commuter rail lines individually, the status of
3 our bridge and tunnels. So it should be very
4 robust. I will say this, it's going to be
5 flexible enough to grow to meet additional
6 demands, the type you're talking about, you know
7 if our customers say, well gee this is good
8 information, but I could use X, we'll be able to
9 grow the system as that goes forward. One of the
10 things we really wanted to make sure it was
11 capable of doing, was handling the volumes we
12 think we're going to see in the future in terms of
13 people wanting-- I use the word near real time.
14 And the reason why I say near real time, when you
15 send a email or text messaging alert, some of the
16 messaging delivery is not dependent on us. It's
17 dependent on your outside carrier or whether
18 Blackberry service is working, those kinds of
19 things. So, we will be able to put out as man as
20 a million emails in five minutes, which is a
21 standard that I don't know anyone else has met
22 around the country. In fact back on August 8th,
23 2007, one of the reasons why we were having
24 difficulty with the existing text and email
25 messaging systems that we had at the railroads,

1
2 not at New York City Transit, which we don't have
3 that yet, was that the capacity of our servers to
4 push multiple emails out was starting to eat their
5 own capacity. You know, you'd send out 40,000
6 emails about a delayed train and it took an hour
7 or so to get that out through the service we had.
8 With the system we have now we'll be able to do--
9 it's-- I think it's called diversified processing
10 or distributed processing, where they're not our
11 servers, but you know we couldn't afford to just
12 run our own system like that, so we've contracted
13 somebody to do that. And the guarantee is as many
14 as a million in five minutes. So we think it will
15 be robust enough to handle what we need to do.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Good.

17 It seems like the capacity should be there though
18 at the outset to be able to include the different
19 substantive messages. I mean if you have the
20 ability to communicate to a million within five
21 minutes, certainly you have the ability to decide
22 what is communicated even easier-- then that's not
23 even a technical issue anymore, it's just a matter
24 of what is included in the message or who signs up
25 for what. So I'm assuming that that's correct,

1
2 that it's really not a matter of capacity any more
3 or not a matter of building the system, it's just
4 a matter of getting it organized and rolling it
5 out.

6 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: That's
7 right, and giving our customers as many options to
8 customize what they want. You know, I don't want
9 to be woken up at midnight because there's a train
10 that 15 minutes late. I don't take the train
11 until, you know, 2:00 in the afternoon, that kind
12 of stuff.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Right.
14 Okay. Well that's-- you know, more information is
15 what we're looking for and we appreciate that.
16 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you,
18 Council Member Garodnick. Hey Chris, if you need
19 suggestions on how to push out a lot of emails
20 within one minute, I'd be happy to give you some
21 suggestions.

22 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I'm on your
23 email list so I see yours coming out.

24 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay. I mean, I
25 think we can easily do 50,000 in 30 seconds. So,

1
2 you know, we can race each other to see who can
3 get the email system up quicker.

4 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Should I
5 start now? I will. I'll start now.

6 CHAIRPERSON LIU: We've also been
7 joined by Council Member Miguel Martinez from
8 Manhattan and we now have questions from Council
9 Member Joe Addabbo.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ADDABBO: Thank you,
11 Mr. Chair, and let me publicly thank Chairman Liu
12 for his assistance, with my office as well, in
13 delivering over 2,000 signatures, just raising
14 awareness of the ridership issues that are out
15 there. And again, let me also publicly thank the
16 MTA for accepting these signatures and, I know Mr.
17 Sussman actually meeting us in the lobby and
18 accepting these-- the delivery of these
19 signatures. So I want to thank the MTA, and Mr.
20 Boylan, thank you for your time here as well
21 today. Let me also thank and commend you for the
22 work that you've done already with regards to
23 ridership-- response to ridership concerns. We are
24 pleased to hear that there is such an effort by
25 the MTA on many levels. So again, thank you for

1
2 your efforts. In your testimony though one-- I
3 guess one aspect of, way of addressing ridership
4 concerns that was not mentioned, and one that was
5 discussed previously at transportation hearings
6 and one I was an advocate of, was the surveys that
7 were taken by the riders both on the bus and the
8 trains. These periodic surveys that were handed
9 out to the riders, I thought it was a great way of
10 getting some feedback and some detailed responses
11 on how the ridership considered its service
12 provided by the MTA. So again, I want to commend
13 you on the surveys that were done. Since they
14 were not mentioned in your testimony--

15 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

16 [Interposing] It might have been the verbiage, I
17 used Rider Report Cards.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ADDABBO: Okay. So-
19 - I'm sorry.

20 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: It's okay.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ADDABBO: So again,
22 we appreciate your efforts and obviously the
23 response there. Here's, I guess, my question.
24 Yesterday you had a Board meeting and you made
25 some difficult, you know, fiscal decisions and

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2 you've heard, obviously, statements by Lee Sander
3 about the cutback that MTA has to have because if
4 it's, you know, budget issues. When a process is
5 going so well, like here, where ridership concerns
6 are being addressed-- and again, we are again
7 optimistic and happy to hear that it's going so
8 well, when the MTA is faced with such tough budget
9 decisions to make, do you see this area as being
10 possibly one that is going to be cut back on in
11 the near future as, again according to Mr. Sander,
12 internal cuts are going to have to be made?

13 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I don't.
14 Certainly we're going to have to tighten our belts
15 and there are some initiatives that I think we
16 would have liked to have undertaken that we might
17 not be able to move forward on, but I do think
18 that this is core to our mission of providing
19 service. So I don't see anything there. We are
20 being extremely careful in terms of our
21 expenditures. I think our email and text
22 messaging alert system as well as our regular
23 email system were probably the least expensive and
24 most cost-effective ways we could go to do this.
25 So we're being fiscally smart in terms of doing

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2 that. But I don't see anything based on what I
3 spoke about here today that will change as a
4 result of those things. Those are core elements
5 of our family business. You know, so I don't
6 expect to see them change.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ADDABBO: So any
8 cuts internally even, obviously, to possibly this
9 portion of the MTA's business in responding to
10 customers complaints or suggestions even, you can
11 absorb those cuts and still put out an efficient
12 process?

13 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I think
14 what we're trying to do is-- and I mentioned, you
15 know, use of technology. I think we're trying to
16 use the technology as smart as we can, and, you
17 know, that doesn't mean that you're-- it means
18 that we've been operating at a less costly manner
19 for the last couple years, and we'll try to figure
20 out additional ways to squeeze out more time. Our
21 people are largely-- are very productive. I mean
22 they are productive. They push a lot of stuff
23 out. What we want to make sure though is that as
24 they're pushing that stuff out that the quality
25 remains high. Dough, we refer to this as mystery

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2 shopping, but we do a little mystery shopping too
3 in making sure that the responses that we're
4 giving our customers are quality and not just to
5 the Councilman's-- Chairman Liu's point earlier,
6 are they substantive or are they just
7 acknowledgments. And acknowledgement is nice, but
8 it really doesn't give you anything. You want the
9 information you asked for, and so we want to make
10 sure that the quality is there. And we will do
11 our best to maintain the quality of those answers.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ADDABBO: Well, Mr.
13 Boylan, I thank you and I thank Mr. Sussman,
14 obviously-- did you want to add something, Mr.
15 Sussman?

16 DOUGLAS SUSSMAN: Well, I just--
17 two points. I am copied on almost every piece of
18 correspondence that I forward on to the agencies,
19 so I have an opportunity to check for quality
20 control, and I'm quite impressed that the agencies
21 do indeed respond quickly and to the point.
22 Secondly, we are going to be moving toward the
23 next version of our email system. It's called 7.0
24 and that will improve our productivity a little
25 bit more as well. So, we should yield some

1
2 productivity without any additional cost with the
3 email system.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ADDABBO: Great.

5 And then it's very reassuring to hear that
6 possible cuts within the MTA budget does not
7 obviously dictate that customers and the ridership
8 with their concerns would not be addressed. So we
9 appreciate that. I wish you well as you deal with
10 your budget situation. And of course, I guess if
11 any of us can be of any help, you let us know.
12 But again, I wish you well and thank you very much
13 for your time today.

14 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you,
15 Council Member Addabbo. And questions from
16 Council Member Koppell.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Thank you,
18 Mr. Chairman. I hate to put something of a wet
19 blanket on this. I echo your remark that it seems
20 like there's a way to complain. But that's just
21 the beginning of the process. And even
22 acknowledging complaints is only the beginning of
23 the process. The question is, does anything
24 happen as a result of the complaints. And your
25 statement is woefully inadequate, woefully

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2 inadequate in even indicating the nature of the
3 complaints. I mean you tell how many complaints
4 you got. There's no-- we don't have any-- X
5 number of calls of the calls were for directions,
6 and they were given. Fine. Y number were
7 complaints about slow service, and where? On
8 which lines and when? You know, C number of
9 complaints were about criminal activity. There's
10 no categorizing of the nature of the complaints,
11 just that you got many complaints. Well that's
12 very interesting, and I'm glad you have a way of
13 receiving them. But in this age of technology,
14 and you know, we're asked in our office to keep a
15 compilation of the complaints we get-- and there's
16 no indication here of any attempt to categorize
17 the complaints or indicate the responses, except
18 the fact that you responded. Well it's nice to
19 say, thank you, Mr. Koppell, for complaining about
20 slow service on the number 10 bus, we will look
21 into it. Well that doesn't mean anything. The
22 number 10 bus is still slow. You know, one of the
23 things that I mention, and I'm going to finish
24 because you can answer when I'm done-- we
25 mandated, we being the City Council, mandated that

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2 in the 311 system we get a compilation of
3 complaints by community board district that are
4 coming, so that we can gauge the nature of
5 problems in each area of the City. And the Mayor
6 complained about it, but they're doing it. We
7 passed the law and we get these charts and they
8 show the complaints in each community board
9 district. I'd like to see that. I'd like to see
10 the complaints by borough and by service type,
11 maybe even by line. And then maybe we could also
12 gauge the response. If there were 300 complaints
13 about the slow service on the number 10 line,
14 which happens to serve part of my district, and
15 then let's assume there were 300 complaints in
16 2007, and then in 2008 there were only 40
17 complaints. I'd say hey, things may be getting
18 better. Or what if there were 300 complaints in
19 2007 and 500 complaints in 2008, then I'd say, you
20 know, nothing's happening. So I'd like to see
21 that kind of review of complaints, rather than
22 just telling me that we have a mechanism for
23 responding. And I would ask, you know, bottom
24 line I would ask, have you studied the way that
25 311, which by the way gets many more calls than

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2 you do, how they handle it? Because I must say,
3 I'm very impressed the way the 311 system handles
4 complaints. Have you studied that and considered
5 whether you could install the same kind of system
6 that could give us the data that 311 gives us?

7 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: We
8 obviously have a huge amount of information, and
9 all those complaints are categorized. To include
10 them in this set of remarks, I didn't think was
11 necessarily appropriate. However, we will share
12 with you categories of complaints. Whether
13 they're exactly categorized the way you're used to
14 getting them from other agencies by district or
15 board, community board, I don't know if we have
16 them that way. I will certainly--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL:

18 [Interposing] Yeah, but it doesn't need to be that
19 way. It might be better to do it differently,
20 because you're talking about a transit line.
21 Maybe by line or by mode or whatever rather than
22 by community board.

23 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I wouldn't
24 necessarily expect that I would have put all that
25 data into this report. This is a, you know,

1
2 10,000 foot overview of how we address complaints,
3 which is what I was asked to present. But I would
4 be happy to share with you other information,
5 because we do have it. And it does get
6 categorized, and it does get used in the
7 management arena to make decisions about where we
8 are having problems in the system. So if we get,
9 you know, an extra 20% of complaints this month
10 about the number 10, you know, the head of the bus
11 division gets that. And he knows that they're--
12 all of a sudden we have a spike in complaints
13 about the number 10, what's the problem? And our
14 folks do address them. I didn't address them in
15 this particular testimony, but they in fact
16 happen, and I will be happy to share those pieces
17 of information with you.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: I think
19 that would be very helpful. I mean, you know, I
20 understand what Mr. Mack said. For instance,
21 every time I go to the Woodlawn section of my
22 district, the people complain that the number 31
23 bus is running empty along Katonah Avenue every
24 morning. And I've heard this now for a year, and
25 I know it's been brought to the attention of the

1
2 MTA, and nothing happens. And that's what people
3 say to me. We complain about this and complain
4 about this and nothing happens. And that's why, I
5 think, Mr. Mack made the comment.

6 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: You're
7 complaining that the bus is running empty?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Yeah.

9 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: And they're
10 suggesting that we not run it because it's being
11 wasteful? Is that what it is?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Yes, or be
13 rerouted or run it less frequently.

14 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Those are
15 all very delicate issues, politically and
16 otherwise. And I think the moment one suggests
17 those things, we go into a different mode, and
18 that's something that most officials don't want to
19 see us go into, is when we touch service. We have
20 public hearings. Even if there are three people
21 on that route and they are very vocal, it affects
22 the decisions that are made. So there are things
23 there that-- I'm not particularly aware of that
24 one, but we'll look into that specific one too if
25 that helps.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: That is a
3 specific. That's a specific and accurate example,
4 but I'm talking more generally about these
5 complaints, that you should develop a system like
6 the 311 system, so we can focus on where
7 improvements are needed.

8 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I think we
9 have a system that addresses where the
10 improvements are needed. I will say that-- and I
11 put it a little bit in my remarks, we have talked
12 and we continue to talk on a regular basis with
13 311, and we have a very good working relationship.
14 We are a different animal than 311 is. 311,
15 although it's becoming more and more of an
16 answering machine, you know answering the exact
17 questions, it was originally intended to pass some
18 of those calls off to other places where they get
19 answered more specifically. And they do that with
20 us, they send some to us. What we've been talking
21 about is trying to provide 311 with current
22 information that is helpful to some of the
23 callers, so that they don't have to pass them
24 along to us. So if there's a major service
25 diversion, we will be sending them information so

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2 that they can say right up front when somebody
3 calls, yes, the M 10 bus or the BX 10 bus is
4 running, you know, two hours behind-- that kind of
5 thing. But largely, it's a different operation.
6 We have to provide those substantive answers at
7 the end of the day that maybe 311 type operators
8 may not be able to. They're very good at routing
9 those calls to places to get those answers, and
10 that's very admirable. And we will work with them
11 to get more substantive answers through 311. I
12 might also add that later this year, we will be
13 part of the state's 511 system to provide traffic
14 and transit data and media for the entire state.
15 So matter what, you'll dial 511 and you can make
16 choices on a menu to route to New York City
17 transit buses, New York City transit subways,
18 commuter railroads, those types of things. So
19 through the use of technology, things are getting
20 better in terms of information for our customer.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Just to
22 clarify, Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry to take so long.
23 I'm not-- the way 311 answers calls is one issue,
24 but I'm focusing more on the data collection that
25 311 does and the communication of the types of

1
2 problems that are happening in different areas.
3 Another example, I just happened to notice, we got
4 a statement from Scott Stringer, and he was
5 complaining that there isn't a listing or
6 categorization of sexual harassment and groping
7 complaints. So that is something that would be
8 important to create. And then if you found for
9 instance that this was a particular problem in
10 particular lines, possibly, you might-- you know,
11 you might assign extra personnel to monitor this,
12 to warn people and to apprehend people.

13 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: We do, and
14 there is a campaign that's up on the system right
15 now--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL:

17 [Interposing] There is what?

18 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: There is a
19 campaign that's up on the system right now about
20 groping. And that's also an NYPD issue, and we do
21 work closely with the NYPD to address those
22 things, because those are activities that they
23 monitor closely.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: And do you
25 categorize groping complaints? I mean, do you

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2 know how many groping complaints you've gotten?

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4 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I don't
5 today. And I will find out if we do categorize
6 that.

6

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: But you
8 should, that's the kind of thing, I mean as one
9 example, that you should categorize and make
10 known. Thank you.

10

11 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you,
12 Council Member Koppell. I think in fairness, my
13 understanding is that the MTA does categorize the
14 kind of complaints that come in, and it would be
15 helpful, based on Council Member Koppell's
16 suggestion, if you could give us kind of like a
17 summary of-- you know, you're talking about
18 200,000 complaints that come in, 40,000 emails.
19 If you could give us an idea of--

19

20 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:
21 [Interposing] We could do that.

21

22 CHAIRPERSON LIU: --the categories
23 of complaints that are coming in-- late service,
24 dirty stations, groping, whatever complaints
25 people have.

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Yes. We

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can get those to you, yes, Mr. Chairman.

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: They are.

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CHAIRPERSON LIU: They are in fact?

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: They are.

19

In fact, we've had conversations with them

20

recently about the volume of calls that they send

21

to us and how they can help us lower that number

22

so that they can answer that question up front.

23

And so we are trying to, Council Member--

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CHAIRPERSON LIU: [Interposing] So

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you mentioned that there's a significant number of

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2 referrals each year from the 311 line. So do we--
3 I mean, you know how many emails, you know how
4 many call center--

5 CHAIRPERSON LIU: [Interposing]

6 Yes. From 311 we can probably get an exact number
7 of how many of those calls come over on a daily
8 basis. People are constantly calling 311 and they
9 really just want to know how to get from the top
10 of Manhattan down to Queens.

11 CHAIRPERSON LIU: The 2 million
12 calls per year at the call center, does that
13 include all the referrals from 311?

14 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: That's
15 correct.

16 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay, that's
17 fine. And then--

18 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:
19 [Interposing] But we'll break that out for you.
20 We'll break out the 311 for you.

21 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Yeah, that would
22 be fine, breaking out the complaints,
23 understanding the categories. But the issue still
24 is largely unaddressed, the issue of how those
25 complaints get resolved. We understand so far

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based on what you've talked about and the discussion that we have had with you that the complaints are being addressed or responded to. But how are they resolved? For example, when does the MTA consider a complaint resolved? And what is the turnaround time? If it takes 2.21 days on average to respond to an email or 14 to 21 days to respond to a written correspondence, what is the turnaround time for the average complaint to be resolved?

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Well again, it's dependent on the complaint. And, you know, some of the complaints that people proffer may not be something that I would call exactly solvable or resolvable. They may say, you know, my bus doesn't come frequently enough for my commuting schedule; it only comes every half hour or every 15 minutes. You know--

CHAIRPERSON LIU: [Interposing]
See, that's true. If someone calls in out of absolute frustration and says, the MTA stinks.

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON LIU: I don't know if you're ever going to resolve that. Ideally you

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2 could, but maybe a not. But if someone calls in
3 or writes in and says that this door is busted, we
4 can't get into the bathroom at this station, or
5 this station has a putrid smell coming from it;
6 it's probably dangerous to the health. Those are
7 complaints that are not empty complaints, and
8 there's got to be a way to actually resolve them,
9 not simply respond to the complainer.

10 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Inherent in
11 an answer like that should be, yes, you reported
12 that door broken. We've referred it to our
13 station agent. They in fact concur and we will be
14 sending a team to fix it within two weeks, three
15 weeks. That's kind of the substance of most--
16 yeah sure.

17 DOUGLAS SUSSMAN: That's absolutely
18 true in terms of written correspondence and phone
19 calls. I can speak to the email system; it's more
20 than just an email system. It's called the CEMS,
21 the Customer Email Management System. It's called
22 a management system because the complaints are
23 categorized and sent to the appropriate department
24 at the appropriate agency. So for instance
25 Operations Planning at Transit will receive

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2 something that is germane to, the 31 bus or
3 whatever. And so they have a handle as to trends,
4 problems and hopefully offering, you know positive
5 resolutions. So each department is aware of what
6 falls under their bailiwick.

7 CHAIRPERSON LIU: You know, again
8 as much as you gentlemen-- and I do believe you're
9 making a sincere effort at answering our
10 questions, it doesn't actually seem like--

11 [Pause]

12 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay, hopefully
13 that's a sign of happiness. We understand that
14 you have a grasp on how the complaints are taken
15 in at the MTA. What we need to get a better
16 understanding of is how the complaints, real
17 complaints, complaints about things that really do
18 need to be fixed, again, bathrooms-- a specific
19 sanitary conditions that could be harmful to
20 health, missing bus schedules from the posts or
21 outdated bus schedules or the lack of a map at a
22 particular station. Those are complaints that are
23 actually service driven and should be responded to
24 in a timely manner by the MTA. But right now it
25 doesn't seem like, and you know, we can have some

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2 follow up discussions, but it doesn't seem like
3 there is a clear understanding of exactly how
4 those complaints are resolved and how long those
5 complaints are resolved. Because we all have
6 constituents-- because I've written letters and my
7 colleagues have written letters about certain
8 things that at a common sense level need to be
9 fixed, but for weeks and months and in some cases
10 years, nothing happens. And that adds to the
11 perception, public perception that what Vice Chair
12 Mack said is absolutely true, that it goes in one
13 ear and out the other when the general public
14 calls in with a complaint, that these complaints
15 get filed in the circular file. And this is
16 something that we don't want to see continuing to
17 happen at the MTA. And if the complaints are in
18 fact being not only addressed and responded to,
19 but resolved, then we could probably all do a
20 better job of getting the word out to New Yorkers
21 as to exactly what has been done to resolve those
22 complaints, so that the missing bus schedules are
23 replaced, so that the bathroom doors and the
24 stalls are fixed, so that unsanitary conditions--
25 not just dirty, but really unsanitary conditions

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2 at certain stations are removed. I have some
3 more, but let me defer to a couple of my
4 colleagues, Council Member Diana Reyna, with
5 questions.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Thank you,
7 Mr. Chair. I just wanted to be associated with
8 the request for that specific information, because
9 I was looking forward to figures, data, tangible
10 data, that I can certainly try to highlight or
11 figure out, especially because I wanted to
12 associate them to my district. And so I'm not too
13 sure if you have that currently by planning board,
14 by borough by a north, south, east, west system--
15 or is it just categorical citywide? So
16 understanding all of that will allow me to service
17 my constituency. One of the most frustrating
18 points to the congestion pricing issue, and I know
19 that that's a sour issue considering the results
20 of the congestion pricing, I was not in favor of
21 approving a plan that was not going to resolve the
22 complaints that time and time again I have
23 communicated to the MTA. As a matter of fact,
24 through the discussions of trying to develop some
25 sort of understanding as to how congestion pricing

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2 was going to assist our issues with our subway
3 system, time and time again, the feedback was at
4 this moment, we can't answer your questions
5 because we have no money. And so right now I ask
6 myself, out of 40,000 emails, how much of it--
7 what is the cost analysis associated, or is there
8 a cost analysis that's conducted associated to
9 these complaints? And how are they resolved, if
10 there is no budget to resolve them? Unless you're
11 telling me that there is a budget that's
12 associated to resolving a lot of these complaints.

13 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: The budget
14 dedicated to whatever comes in through email and
15 customer complaints, they're part of the regular
16 ongoing management decisions that we make all the
17 time, which is, you know, addressing problems as
18 we find them, and hopefully some problems before
19 they arise. You know, I hear your frustration in
20 your comments. But there are other avenues, aside
21 from the ones that I talked about, that should be
22 available to you. Each of our boroughs, within
23 the City of New York have a New York City Transit
24 dedicated staffer who should be able to be
25 available to you, and we'll make sure you have all

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2 the laundry list, Mr. Chairman, so that folks have
3 the names and numbers, so that if there are
4 specific problems that you feel aren't being
5 addressed through the other channels, you have an
6 outlet to call.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: I speak to
8 Lois all the time. And she's great, but she's
9 limited. And I'm trying to get-- larger than
10 Lois, you know, there's a system, and how the
11 system responds to its customers. And I'm trying
12 to get an understanding as to what results are
13 produced from that system. For instance, Mr.
14 Boylan, I had suggested during my conversations
15 throughout the conversation of congestion pricing,
16 the issue that my constituency on the M and J and
17 Z line would like the entrance or exit points at
18 the opposite end, where there is no tollbooth, to
19 exit the train on Hughes Street, to be opened. It
20 hasn't been opened for various reasons, primarily
21 due to safety because of-- and it was referenced
22 back in the 80s. You know, we're not living in
23 the 80s. We're living in current times. You
24 know, it's the year 2008. I think we've come a
25 long way to be able to then say that this station

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2 deserves both an entrance and an exit, especially
3 on that line, because it is more crowded than what
4 it used to be. That would cost no money.

5 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Well
6 station entrance openings cost money, believe me,
7 they cost money in terms of having somebody there
8 to open and close, there to maintain that
9 particular area, there to police the area. In
10 fact, as it relates to station openings, we don't
11 just close them willy-nilly. You refer to the
12 80s; some station entrances were closed in
13 conjunction with the NYPD because of safety
14 issues, that may not exist today.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: But how do
16 you update that type of analysis or data or
17 feedback from the NYPD? Do you talk about that on
18 a quarterly basis, on an annual basis on a decade
19 basis?

20 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Yes, and I
21 don't know that specific instance that you're
22 talking about and what the security issues are,
23 but it's like any other decision we make, you
24 balance what you have financially with what your
25 triage list of priorities are. And I can't say

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2 off the top of my head that it's not a worthy goal
3 to do that if you had the resources to do it. But
4 someone somewhere in our organization, and we'll
5 find out specifically in this instance is making a
6 decision that says, you know, I have ten dollars
7 and I'm already spending it right now. In order
8 for me to open that entrance, it's going to cost
9 me 11 dollars. I don't have that. What am I
10 going to do? I'm going to have to close-- you
11 know, I mean it's sometime a zero sum game. So,
12 I'm not trying to make an excuse for that specific
13 instance, but it is a balancing game, and it's
14 only gotten more difficult given the financial
15 situation that we're facing right now. I'd love
16 to be able to say that we could say yes to
17 everything that people ask us for, but sometimes
18 it is difficult. And we will look at that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Mr. Boylan,
20 so help me understand. A complaint comes in. Is
21 it given a log number?

22 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Yes. All
23 the--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA:
25 [Interposing] A reference number--

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

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[Interposing] That's correct.

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COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: So that particular customer who is already complaining receives a log number in return.

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Yeah,

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you'll get one--

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COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA:

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[Interposing] And that's how that customer would be able to--

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

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[Interposing] Track their complaint.

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COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: --just

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continue to give this particular compliant ongoing dialogue for resolution.

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

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Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman too to your concerns earlier, I wish we could say we could resolve every complaint the way the customer would like it to be resolved. But I would be dishonest to tell you that everything that people want, you know they want-- you know I want an extra bus an hour or two busses an hour-- some of those things are not possible. That doesn't mean that when a

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2 customer gets the answer that they're not angry
3 that it wasn't answered correctly and they say you
4 didn't answer the question correctly. We answered
5 it within the mean we have to deal with it--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA:

7 [Interposing] So how do you--

8 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

9 [Interposing] That doesn't mean we haven't
10 answered the question and honestly.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Mr. Boylan,
12 I just want to find out and understand, how do you
13 prioritize then, with the limited budget, because
14 there is no real budget that you work with, you
15 divert these complaints?

16 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: They get
17 attention across the range of issues that, say the
18 subway division has to deal with, or the bus
19 division has to deal with. They don't get
20 addressed just because they've come in through the
21 customer complaint. There's no budget that goes
22 along with that. I mean boy, that would be great.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Right.

24 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: If I could
25 have-- I don't want to use the word a slush fund,

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2 but if I had a pot of money to be able to solve
3 your problem, believe me, I'd do it in a flash.
4 I'd love that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: I'm just
6 trying to understand how do you prioritize
7 complaints then for resolution.

8 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: They're
9 prioritized on a more macro level, across the
10 station's budget, across the track budget, across
11 the bus budget. And that happens at a high level.
12 Now we do take a lot of input from customers, from
13 elected officials, from Board Members. And I
14 can't tell you there's a formula that says, okay,
15 add this all up and it works. You know, sometimes
16 you make tough decisions, and sometimes people
17 don't like the decisions we make, unfortunately.
18 But I think we do try and as I said, it's only
19 getting tougher and tougher. And the City is
20 hitting the same issues that we are. You know,
21 there's got to be some tough choices that folks
22 are going to have to make, and it's not pretty.
23 I've been through bad times before, but I've been
24 through good times too. So it does get better.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: And your

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2 category-- and this is my last question. Do you
3 try to categorize these complaints by planning
4 boards at the very least?

5 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Yeah,
6 that's a question I don't have the answer to. I
7 know we categorize them by subject matter, but we
8 will find out in the context--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: [Interposing]
10 It would be very helpful, not just to establish
11 some priority level for certain complaints at a
12 planning board level, but also for the purposes of
13 input in your capital year process. You know,
14 your projection of projects.

15 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: By the way,
16 even if we don't, we should seriously look at
17 doing that going forward, because it only helps us
18 in terms of making management decisions, in terms
19 of addressing your concerns, it makes tremendous
20 sense to me to be able to do that. Now maybe we
21 can do that through our-- we have a GIS systems
22 that locates specific locations in specific
23 stations, and maybe we can figure out how to do
24 that electronically. If not, then maybe we should
25 figure out how to categorize it in some other way.

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2 That's not a definitive answer, but it's certainly
3 something that we'll look at.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: And you
5 recently had a survey for customer satisfaction on
6 train lines. Your number one was? Do you
7 remember?

8 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Which
9 number? The number one line? We started with the
10 number 7 line, and then we worked through various
11 number and letter lines. We've also done it on
12 the busses.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: But
14 satisfaction?

15 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:
16 Satisfaction, you know, on a scale of one to ten,
17 usually, you know, it's not a perfect score, but
18 it's probably about, you know, in the 6.4, 6.5
19 level, which, you know, doesn't sound great. But
20 as elected officials, you understand if you had a
21 65% approval rating, that's pretty good. So, I'm
22 looking at the glass half full thing. It's not
23 perfect and we have a long way to go. But it's
24 better than it was in the 80s.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Right.

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2 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: And we're
3 continuing to work on it. It takes resources, it
4 takes time. It takes a lot of interaction like
5 this too.

6 CHAIRPERSON LIU: And the number
7 one train line that had that type of satisfaction
8 at the 60% level, do you remember what line that
9 was?

10 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: No in fact,
11 what we'll do is we'll get you the results of each
12 line--

13 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA:
14 [Interposing] I would appreciate that.

15 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: -- by line.
16 And you would be surprised, they're not all that
17 far off.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Right.

19 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I mean
20 we're not talking about, you know we have
21 something that rates 3 and something that rate
22 6.7. They're all like in the upper 5s, 6s, 7s.
23 You know, they're not huge variations. I think
24 when our customers actually pin down, you can have
25 a good conversation, they acknowledge that maybe

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2 things aren't as terrible. By the way, you never
3 hear the good stuff. Mr. Chairman before you
4 said, oh gee, you guys get commendations and
5 compliments? We do. But no one will ever print
6 them. They only print the bad stuff, and you know
7 this. I mean this is part of being in the public
8 sector. It doesn't make news when your bus driver
9 or your conductor or your train operator gets a
10 commendation. We've tried to change that. We
11 acknowledge some of our operators and so forth,
12 since Lee has been here, Lee Sander, has been here
13 at every one of our Board meetings we bring in
14 three or four of them, because they do a good job,
15 and somebody should say something nice about them.
16 But you'll never see that in the paper. We do it
17 every month. Anyway, I'm sorry.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Tough New
19 Yorkers.

20 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: It's human
21 nature, I think.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: We look
23 forward to working with you and receiving that
24 information and it would be very helpful, just for
25 the purposes of planning good transportation.

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2 Thank you.

3 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you,
5 Council Member Reyna. Well you know, look, even
6 though you don't see anything in the media, you
7 should also realize that even Council Members once
8 in a while do say good things about the MTA and
9 what a good job they have been doing in certain
10 respects. But those comments never get printed.
11 You know, that's the nature of it. Of course with
12 the exception of one transportation reporter, who
13 seems to be very fair to the MTA, you know, his
14 initials are B.C., but apart from that, you know,
15 I think we understand the nature of the
16 complaints. But again, I think it's not about
17 just getting the complaints. Obviously the
18 complaint lines are there for a reason. They're
19 not there to get commendations. They're there to
20 receive complaints. And it's the complaints that
21 are supposed to be effectively utilized to improve
22 the service even more. And I do want to make note
23 that, you know, while we realize, and you've
24 alluded to a couple of times, that some complaints
25 just cannot be resolved-- anything from the MTA

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2 stinks to, look, we need a new station here or
3 this station needs to be renovated like, tomorrow.
4 Some complaints cannot be resolved in any kind of
5 a short order. But it's important that the MTA
6 not just lump all the complaints together as okay,
7 they're complaining about this, they're
8 complaining about that. There are a lot of
9 specific complaints that come into the MTA that
10 really should have some timeframe for resolution.
11 I mentioned a couple of examples already. Those
12 are things that don't require a lot of budget--
13 there in fact should already be ongoing staff to
14 take-- or personnel to take care of those
15 particular problems. And it's important that the
16 public sees the results of some of these very
17 reasonable requests and complaints be taken care
18 of.

19 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I think one
20 of the things that our customers have seen,
21 although it's diminishing based on a younger and
22 younger ridership group, is for those of us who
23 were around in the 70s, and early 80s, it was
24 horrendous. The system is so much better than it
25 was before, and it took a lot of investment and

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2 time. And I think when pressed our customers
3 agree that that in fact has taken place. Yeah, we
4 need to do more. I don't have answers on specific
5 issues, but we hope you'll bring some of those
6 issues that we may miss to our attention.

7 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay but it's--

8 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

9 [Interposing] You know, Doug and I talk constantly
10 about customer stuff. And if something comes in
11 over the transom and it looks silly, and I say,
12 Doug, that is absolutely silly, we could change
13 that in a minute. And we try.

14 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Well once again,
15 Chris, we prefer to compare things-- it's 2008.
16 We compare things to like the year 2000 or maybe
17 the 90s. But I personally don't like the constant
18 comparison to the way the subways were in the
19 1970s. It's 2008. And so we want to make sure
20 that there's steady progress. We can't keep
21 comparing to the absolute low point that took
22 place 30 or 40 years ago. We have to compare to a
23 benchmark that is more recent.

24 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Okay.

25 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Like 2000, or

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even the late 90s.

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CHAIRPERSON LIU: That is--

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

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[Interposing] Is a matter of opinion.

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CHAIRPERSON LIU: I think-- right.

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I think there are different measures that exist

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2 out there that compare 2007-- I don't know about
3 2008, but 2007 to 2001. And it's a mixed bag.
4 It's definitely a mixed bag. You know, one being
5 cleanliness. Cleanliness of the system has been
6 declining, not increasing. And that's--

7 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

8 [Interposing] And by the way, it's a resource
9 issue. It is a resource issue.

10 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Well, it may be a
11 resource issue, but it's not getting better. So
12 we can't keep comparing the cleanliness of the
13 system to the 1970s. We have to compare it to a
14 few years ago, 2000, 2001. And it definitely is
15 not good compared to those couple of years.
16 Council Member Miguel Martinez.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ: By the
18 way I was born, in 1976.

19 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Okay. Happy
20 birthday.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ: I just
22 want to be practical in terms of-- because you
23 know, I've been elected in the Council for seven
24 years now, and the same complaint that my riders
25 had in 2001, they still have in 2008 in terms of

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2 our busses in Northern Manhattan. So I would just
3 like if you could describe to me what happens when
4 a complaint comes in. Forget that you already
5 described categorizing of complaints, but when a
6 complaint comes in consistent of busses, you know,
7 bunching up, coming all at the same time or busses
8 not meeting schedule or, you know, I get waiting
9 for an hour, two hours and then I get three busses
10 that just fly by and don't make the stop. And you
11 know, customers, riders make the assumption that
12 they're running late so they're skipping stops and
13 moving forward. The same is true-- what do you do
14 when constant complaint, my office, community
15 board, when the busses are the biggest predators
16 in blocking the box and creating horrendous
17 congestion in a community, particularly when you
18 have five or six different route going through
19 your community, which becomes a hub for those
20 routes, how is the MTA, how are you responding to
21 these complaints from these communities? What do
22 you do? The call came in, you have the call--
23 again, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, the same complaint.
24 As a matter of fact on Saturday, and you're
25 welcome to come, there's a community meeting on

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the same issue that I'm describing right now. And I don't see any enforcement. I don't see anyone from MTA in the community addressing these issues. I don't see anyone from the MTA addressing the issues from the issue of-- being part of the problem of blocking the box, contributing to the traffic congestion, not being respectful of, you know, not blocking the box. And again, the bunching of busses is consistent on the 101, on the 100-- it's just horrible. And I know you mentioned the issue of resources. But I mean, what do you do when it's the same complaint over and over and over again?

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I think probably the issue of bus bunching is one of the more common ones we hear around the City, and some of that is a function of the traffic congestion that we have in the City. All our busses start out on a schedule and they're supposed to maintain that schedule the best they can. I take either the M4 or the Q32 every day from the West side over to the East side. And given traffic conditions it can either be a 10-minute ride or it can be 40-minute ride. In the last week it's been

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2 a 40-minute ride. And why? Because we've had
3 some issues with the UN being in town. It may not
4 happen in your neighborhood--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ:

6 [Interposing] That's not a fair comparison.

7 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: But other
8 things can happen. But depending on what the
9 street conditions are, all you need is one
10 blockage to have the busses back up on a regular
11 basis. And those drivers are frequently measured
12 on how fast they get where they're going to, you
13 know, and how best they stay on schedule; so they
14 try to keep on schedule. They should never be
15 passing up customers, even if they're trying to
16 maintain the schedule. So what we ask our
17 customers and what we ask you and others to do is,
18 you know, tell us which ones are there. If
19 there's a bus blocking the box, we'd like to know
20 the number of that bus and the time it is. And
21 not that we will remonstrate with our drivers, but
22 we will say, listen, this is-- you have to keep
23 reinforcing this. We have a constant flow of new
24 drivers and they have to be made aware that
25 they're causing some of these issues. Sometimes

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2 they just get caught, you know, in those boxes and
3 it's not intentional. But it's helpful to have
4 the input--

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COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ:

6 [Interposing] But do you send someone out? I
7 mean, you're getting the calls already and it
8 continues to happen. Do you send someone out from
9 the MTA? I know there are labor issues involved
10 also. I mean how do you deal with that? I mean,
11 you know, drivers are members of Union, members of
12 Labor and I'm respectful of that. But what do you
13 do as the authority when the community continues
14 to complain consistently, community board writes
15 consistently on the issue. Do you send someone
16 out to verify, to look at and then what do you do?

17

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Sure do--

18

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ:

19 [Interposing] What do you do when you do find in
20 fact that a driver is just being neglectful with
21 these issues? What do you do when you know that a
22 driver that it's not so much a traffic issue,
23 because along the route that I'm mentioning, we
24 don't have a UN. You know, the biggest traffic
25 hub out there is the George Washington Bridge, but

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2 by the time they reach there, they're already
3 delayed. So how do you study the pattern-- not by
4 community board obviously, because it's more
5 difficult, but rather the route of the bus? And
6 in addition to that, how do you determine-- I'm
7 going to turn this off. I'm sorry.

8 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: It's okay.
9 Not a problem.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ: How do
11 you determine when there are too many busses in an
12 area?

13 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: The bus
14 division, usually when they find egregious levels
15 of bus bunching will assign a dispatcher to help
16 regulate the flow of these busses, and sometimes
17 they'll do things like hold busses. They can kind
18 of adjust the schedule on the fly so that maybe it
19 makes-- it kind of rationalizes the service, so
20 that you're not sending three busses to the same
21 bus stop at the same time. That may be where
22 sometimes people think that the bus is skipping a
23 stop, you know, they're trying to avoid having the
24 three busses sitting here when one could be going
25 past and picking up other customers. So there are

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2 things that they can do on the ground. Your
3 specific instance, again, what we'll do is I'll
4 talk to Joe Smith, who is the head of the bus
5 division, and see what he's getting in terms of
6 information. Certainly the community affairs
7 folks from New York City Transit who handle
8 Manhattan, if they don't have this on their radar
9 screen, they should--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ:

11 [Interposing] And finally--

12 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

13 [Interposing] They should be coming out to talk to
14 the community.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ: I'll

16 follow up with you individually.

17 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Please do.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ: I'll

19 follow up with you not to take up the time of the
20 Committee. But how far are we from monitoring the
21 busses with GPS?

22 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: We're

23 getting closer and closer. In fact just yesterday
24 at our Board meeting, the next generation of
25 hybrid electric bus was shown to us. And as part

1
2 of that round of busses we are looking at
3 employing a GPS system that actually works. We
4 had some issues in terms of the caverns in New
5 York not being able to use GPS systems that are in
6 use around the country. I think we've overcome
7 those problems, and I saw some software yesterday--
8 - now I don't know what the timeframe is on that.
9 But it is going to allow us to look at every
10 vehicle and be able to control it without having
11 to send somebody out on the street. So I think a
12 lot of that will get solved, to my point earlier
13 about technology. And I think, you know, we've
14 had some success with technology, but there's been
15 some technologies that haven't worked well in our
16 system. This, I think, is going to work well.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ: And
18 finally, Mr. Chair, who makes the determination
19 when establishing the bus lanes? Is it MTA or DOT
20 or the MTA recommends to DOT?

21 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Yes--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ:
23 [Interposing] Which one?

24 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: I think the
25 latter. We work closely with DOT. In fact on a

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2 couple of bus rapid transit projects that we're
3 working on--

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COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ:

5 [Interposing] Yeah, I have one in my district.

6

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Yeah. We

7

work-- yeah you have the--

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COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ:

9 [Interposing] The 12th.

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CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: The 12th,

11

which is--

12

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ:

13 [Interposing] But not the rapid lane, but rather
14 the, say setting bus lane, during peak hours 181st
15 Street hits--

16

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

17 [Interposing] It's DOT, but it's in conjunction
18 with--

19

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ:

20 [Interposing] DOT?

21

CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: DOT, but in

22 conjunction with us. You know, we work closely
23 with them. And then the key issue is enforcement.
24 And so the third part of that leg, the leg of that
25 stool, is NYPD traffic enforcement, and we work

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2 with them too to try to make sure that those lanes
3 are in fact free so that you can flow through.
4 You know, if there's one car parked you can screw
5 up the whole thing.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ: Thank
7 you, I'll follow up with you on that issue.

8 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Sure.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTINEZ: Thank
10 you, Mr. Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you,
12 Council Member Martinez. I just have to get this
13 off my chest. You know, you refer to the canyons
14 of Manhattan or-- or actually you said canyons of
15 New York.

16 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON LIU: With respect to
18 why it's taken so long to implement GPS. Let me
19 remind you that we have the plains of Queens. And
20 Queens is, with 2.1 million people, the borough
21 that's most heavily dependent upon bus
22 transportation. There is absolutely no excuse for
23 the MTA to continue to use the canyons of New York
24 as a reason why GPS can't be rolled out on the
25 busses, so our constituents or New Yorkers who

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2 happen to live in Queens or most parts of Brooklyn
3 and the Bronx and Staten Island, can't understand
4 where there bus is and how far away that bus is.
5 So let's just get the GPS in the busses, because
6 that will go a long way to resolving a lot of the
7 complaints, before they actually even occur.

8 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN: As a former
9 Queens resident, I grew up in Rosedale, in fact
10 the Councilman's father was probably my first
11 exposure to an elected official, because he was my
12 member of congress in Rosedale Queens, I
13 appreciate the difference between Manhattan and
14 the rest of the City. I mean, I'm a Queens guy
15 myself, and I hear you. And I think a system
16 that's going to work for the entire-- I should
17 have rephrased that, for the entire City and for
18 the entire region is coming.

19 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Well--

20 CHRISTOPHER P. BOYLAN:

21 [Interposing] I know.

22 CHAIRPERSON LIU: It's coming--
23 it's like the train is coming. It's like, we're
24 going to get it done by the end of the year. The
25 problem is how much longer? Which year are we

1
2 talking about? Is this going to be one of those
3 2020 deals? So look, this GPS issue is not about-
4 - is not what our hearing is about. But I just
5 wanted to say that. We can't keep referring to
6 the canyons of New York as the reason why we don't
7 get GPS. There's no reason. I mean nowadays the
8 GPS technology is so inexpensive and so easy to
9 use. There's just no reason. In fact, you could
10 probably designate like line managers for the
11 busses, at some point, and those line managers can
12 easily track where the busses are and make sure
13 that they're properly spaced apart. Anyway. I
14 think I'm starting to digress too much. I want to
15 thank Christopher Boylan and Douglass Sussman of
16 the Metropolitan Transportation Authority for
17 sitting with us today. And again, we're not
18 trying to give you a hard time, but people do rely
19 upon the MTA for great service and service is
20 better than the 1970s. We want it to be better
21 than 2007, 2006 and all years before that. And we
22 urge you to make sure that there's a systematic
23 way of tracking not only incoming complaints, but
24 tracking the resolution of those complaints as
25 well so that when the public reads offhanded

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2 comments from officials, high officials at the
3 MTA, that those comments don't resonate
4 automatically with so many millions of New
5 Yorkers. Thank you very much.

6 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you, Mr.
7 Chairman.

8 DOUGLAS SUSSMAN: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON LIU: With that we call
10 up our next panel, Ms. E. Stamm, Mr. John
11 Rozankowski, and Mr. Matt Shotkin.

12 [Pause]

13 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Ms. Stamm, please
14 proceed. And you need to pull one of the mics--
15 Sergeant, could you please help Ms. Stamm with the
16 microphone?

17 [Pause]

18 ESTELLE STAMM: Can you hear me?

19 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Much better.

20 ESTELLE STAMM: I want to say I'm
21 in medication hell, so if I'm a little disjointed,
22 please forgive me. I've had many, many complaints
23 with New York City Transit regarding access issues
24 with my service dog, both on buses and on subways.
25 And this has gone on for 12 years. And I can tell

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2 you that while the complaint process is pretty
3 much as was described, the New York City Transit
4 may feel as though they're being responsive and
5 may position themselves as being responsive, but
6 responsiveness is judged not by them, it's judged
7 by the customer. I know Wargus, I hate it too.
8 Go ahead. Lie down. The categorization of
9 complaints that New York City Transit does will
10 not give an accurate picture of what the areas of
11 problems are, simply because they are not broken
12 down in any way that's really meaningful. They
13 have bus complaints. And when you take a look at
14 the bus complaints there are complaints that come
15 in as ADA complaints, no wheelchair access
16 complaints-- this is an area that I happen to know
17 a lot about because I had to do a foil to get this
18 information. You can't tell what it is a customer
19 is complaining about in an ADA complaint by
20 looking at the complaint record. There's no
21 record of how the complaint was actually resolved
22 that would demonstrate that a customer was happy
23 with the resolution, that the resolution that was
24 recommended or promised actually happened, and a
25 promise is meaningless and is actually a way of--

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2 how can I say this? It's a way of fooling the
3 public, in a way that really is not justifiable,
4 into believing that something is going to be done,
5 when in fact it's not. There are no cost things
6 that the MTA, New York City Transit, can do that I
7 personally have asked them to do that are real
8 safety issues that are-- this can't get through a
9 turnstile. Okay. Before they put the panic bars
10 in, I've been trapped, as are people with baby
11 carriages, as were people with other service dogs,
12 trapped in stations. There are panic bars now,
13 but if we got a cop in a bad mood, we could be
14 ticketed. And it's a misdemeanor to go through
15 those unless there is an actual emergency. In
16 addition to that, I have tried to find out where
17 the turnstiles are, so that when I'm exiting or
18 entering a station, I don't have to hunt around
19 for a station that I can get to, nor do people
20 with bicycles, baby carriages, all of that. And I
21 have been told in writing that there is no such
22 list available, and it takes about 15 minutes to
23 get that information from MTA customer service,
24 New York City Transit customer service, because
25 they have to call a station to find out what's

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2 accessible. There's no evacuation planning for
3 people with disabilities. If there is evacuation
4 planning, I haven't been able to get a list. I
5 haven't been able to find out what that evacuation
6 planning is. I'm going to be emotional about
7 this, I will die with my dog, the same way that
8 people with Katrina died with their pets and with
9 their service dogs. It's something that they have
10 an obligation to do both under New York State law
11 and under federal law. If they're talking about
12 engagement and customer service and economics, as
13 a community dispute center volunteer mediator, I
14 do not know why the MTA and New York City Transit
15 is not, as a matter of public policy, because it
16 is the public policy of the unified court system
17 to use mediation as a means of resolving
18 complaints with customers. It is a way that
19 customers can actually feel as though they're
20 being heard, and they certainly don't feel as
21 though they're being heard now. It's no cost.
22 And if they really are getting an email system
23 going, customer report cards should be available
24 by email. If they're putting out email
25 notifications, if they're doing all of that, are

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2 they accessible to people who have disabilities?
3 They are required by law to have their technology
4 available to people with disabilities, and I hope
5 that in fact they go ahead and do that, and the
6 same thing with our electronic travel information.
7 They are required to do it.

8 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you, Ms.
9 Stamm.

10 ESTELLE STAMM: I hope I wasn't too
11 inarticulate.

12 CHAIRPERSON LIU: No, you were very
13 clear. Thank you very much, Ms. Stamm.

14 ESTELLE STAMM: You're very
15 welcome.

16 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Mr. Rozankowski?

17 JOHN ROZANKOWSKI: Okay. In order
18 to answer the question, is the MTA responsive to
19 subway riders, you have to look beyond items like
20 schedules or even cleanliness to policies,
21 procedures, operations and projects. Who will
22 ever forget their imposition of drastic changes on
23 the Queens Boulevard line in 2001? So many people
24 were against it. They did it anyway. And they
25 are continuing their insidious job of officially

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2 terminating the G train at Court Street. In a
3 similar development, the proposed to skip stops
4 service on the number 1 train on the Broadway
5 line. Like Queens, the people in the area did not
6 want it. They wanted a Broadway express from 96th
7 to 145th. It took the MTA 15 years to acknowledge
8 that their program was a failure, cancel it and
9 say that the people were right. And then project,
10 you remember all the hearings on CBTC, OPTO and
11 the Robo-Train. You had grave misgivings. There
12 were TWU workers who were in bitter opposition?
13 What did they do? Imposed it on the L train
14 without testing it under real conditions, imposed
15 it on the number 7, and are putting it on the
16 Queens Boulevard line today. And then we have the
17 token booth closings. This was an issue that
18 actually united New York City in opposition to
19 removing the number one safety feature of subway
20 stations. They closed them anyway. And then are
21 what I call the grand projects, the Fulton Transit
22 Center. What subway riders wanted this? All they
23 wanted was connecting passageways between the
24 different systems. Instead a billion dollars of
25 money was wasted that could have been used for the

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2 10th avenue station in Manhattan. And finally,
3 you have the floor tiles. In 1996, they began
4 installing the floor tiles on subway stations.
5 Riders vigorously protested. They were tripping,
6 falling on these tiles. They said they were happy
7 with cement. It took 12 years and much money for
8 the MTA to say, yeah, the customers were right,
9 we're suspending the program. All of these are
10 excellent examples that show the MTA not only not
11 listening to the people, but exhibiting a callous,
12 arrogant attitude all the time, which has plunged
13 its credibility to zero, and made it one of the
14 most hated agencies in New York City. Is there a
15 solution? I think there is. What you have to do
16 in the City Council is to ask your colleagues on
17 the state level to amend the City charter, to give
18 the City Council real power over New York City
19 subways, to be able to stop wasteful and dangerous
20 programs before they begin. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you very
22 much, Mr. Rozankowski. Let me at this time note
23 that we've been joined by Council Member Darlene
24 Mealy of Brooklyn, and Council Member Jessica
25 Lappin of Manhattan. We also have written

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2 testimony for the record by Manhattan Borough
3 President, Scott Stringer. Mr. Shotkin.

4 MATT SHOTKIN: Thank you, Mr.
5 Chairman and good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and
6 Council Members. I have many highlights to my
7 testimony, so please bear with me. I'll be
8 addressing three things in my testimony today.
9 Among others, the legal briefing that was prepared
10 by Legislative Director Newman with the assistance
11 of Legislative Counsel Phil Hom. One of the
12 issues that was brought up by Deputy Executive
13 Director, Christopher Boylan as well as brand new
14 information from yesterday's Board meeting. The
15 complaint of the average MTA rider is always heard
16 in my opinion, everything from overcrowded trains
17 to diverted east and west side trains to station
18 announcements about trains that are not running,
19 to announcements about track work. There are
20 certain glitches to the trip planner. For
21 instance, even when you type in the right address,
22 it comes up wrong. I filed a complaint, speaking
23 of complaints, with the compliance coordination
24 committee chair, who has yet to get back to me.
25 President Roberts of New York City Transit, made a

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2 presentation about yesterday's MTA Board meeting
3 about line general managers that are already in
4 place on certain lines like the L and the 7. Line
5 general manager teams in charge of station
6 maintenance are being put into place at this time.
7 For example, if somebody drops garbage on the
8 tracks at the end of a shift at a certain station,
9 it will stay there until the next shift, which is
10 one or more .5 hours later. On an MTA bus, the
11 most common complaint from a disabled person,
12 whether in a wheelchair or not, in a walker, is
13 that the wheelchair lift doesn't work. Surprise.
14 Or in the case of last night, on the M50, as
15 Chairman Koppell has already mentioned in his Q
16 and A about rerouting of busses with a VIP in the
17 area, the bus was detoured away from the actual
18 detour. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON LIU: Thank you very
20 much, Mr. Shotkin. We appreciate your testimony
21 today and participating in today's public hearing.

22 MATT SHOTKIN: Thank you, Mr.
23 Chair.

24 CHAIRPERSON LIU: That being said,
25 this committee hearing of the City Council's

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Committee on Transportation is adjourned.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Erika Swyler, 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 January 29, 2009 _____