



Office of the MTA Inspector General
Daniel G. Cort



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SUBWAY EMERGENCY EXITS AUDIT REVEALS HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS, POOR INSPECTION PROCEDURES, AND DELAYED REPAIRS

MTA Inspector General Daniel G. Cort issued an audit report today that found portions of New York City Transit's (NYC Transit) subway emergency exit infrastructure to be in a serious state of disrepair — potentially jeopardizing the safety of passengers, first responders, and MTA workers.

Auditors from the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) encountered tripping hazards, obstructions, inadequate or nonexistent lighting, exposed wiring, loose or broken handrails, corrosion, and other unsafe conditions during visits to emergency exit locations, underground tunnels, under-river tubes, segments of elevated track, and a portion of Staten Island Railway.

The examination also revealed significant lapses in NYC Transit's inspection, maintenance, and repair procedures related to these facilities, which serve as a daily workplace for employees and contractors in addition to their potential use in emergency situations.

"In a subway emergency, whether in a tunnel or above ground, the escape routes must be unobstructed and provide safe passage," said IG Daniel Cort. "I saw first-hand some of the issues highlighted in our audit during site visits, and I am deeply concerned about the poor conditions we observed. The common-sense improvements we recommend are crucial to ensuring safe emergency evacuations."

OIG conducted site visits in late 2023 to assess whether the subway system's emergency exits were safe, functional, and structurally sound.

Among the audit's findings:

- Of the 163 total assets OIG evaluated at 106 locations, 41% had moderate to severe defects that required repair either immediately or in the near term. Of the 65 emergency exit stairwells assessed, 54% had serious defects.
- Subway emergency exits had an array of hazards, including one hatch failing to open from the inside, structural defects (some concrete ceilings and walls were severely cracked and decrepit), and poor drainage and water intrusion causing corrosion or structural damage. OIG also found inadequate or no lighting at all in exit stairways and filthy or broken fixtures.

In some instances, OIG and NYC Transit personnel had to navigate by flashlight.

- In some underground tunnels or tubes, OIG observed significant structural defects, damage from water intrusion, and inadequate lighting. Also, access and emergency exit walkways known as bench walls were uneven, cracked, and in some locations separating from the tunnel walls. Some had been fitted with metal straps for support.
- Along elevated tracks, OIG observed many loose or broken handrails, with some deficient handrails stretching more than 100 feet. In some areas more than 30 feet above street level, the handrails may not have been able to support significant weight.
- The quality of NYC Transit's inspections needs improvement. Only 13% of the serious defects identified by OIG in exit stairwells had been previously noted by inspectors. Also, inspection reports did not regularly include enough detail and photos to help repair crews identify the defects requiring attention.
- Approximately 76% of the serious defects reported by inspectors were not responded to by repair crews within the 90-day period required by NYC Transit policy.
- Subway emergency exits located in a Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) yard, inside a Con Edison facility, and along tunnels connected to the new Grand Central Madison terminal had not been managed in a coordinated fashion.

OIG made 24 recommendations to NYC Transit and two to MTA Construction & Development (C&D) to resolve some of the most glaring issues encountered during the audit, including ways to improve the quality of inspections, the timeliness of repairs, and the condition of emergency exit lighting and electrical systems.

NYC Transit accepted nine recommendations, while rejecting the remaining 15 for a variety of reasons, ranging from disagreement with what was proposed to claiming that current policies and procedures were sufficient to resolve OIG's concerns. The two recommendations to C&D have been deemed accepted.

On February 2, 2024, as part of this same audit, OIG sent a letter to LIRR regarding two subway emergency exits on its property. LIRR had erected a chain-link fence too close to the hatch openings, and a significant amount of stored equipment and material obstructed an exit pathway. LIRR accepted all four recommendations and said it has addressed the issues.

Read the reports:

[- NYC Transit Subway Emergency Exits - Significant Work is Needed to Reach and Maintain a State of Good Repair](#)

[- Unsafe Site Conditions at Emergency Exits for NYCT Subway on LIRR Property](#)

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