



The City of New York

Manhattan Community Board 1

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New York City Council Committee on Transportation

**Oversight – Emergency Planning and Management During and After the Storm:
MTA’s Response and the Long-term Impact on the City’s Public Transportation System**

**Testimony by
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**Tuesday, February 12, 2013, 10:00 a.m.
250 Broadway, Committee Room, 14th Floor**

Good morning, Chairperson Vacca. I am Catherine McVay Hughes, Chair of Manhattan Community Board One (CB1). Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Emergency Planning and Management During and After the Storm: MTA’s Response and the Long-term Impact on the City’s Public Transportation System.

Public transportation has always played an essential role in New York City. The MTA provides an all-encompassing, affordable public transportation system unparalleled by any other in America. We witnessed the system’s vulnerability, however, in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy on October 29. Residents, workers and visitors in CB1, which includes the majority of Lower Manhattan below Canal Street, were among the millions who lost access to public transportation following the storm. CB1 experienced a nearly complete loss of transportation during the week following the storm, with all MTA subways and bus service shut down south of 34th Street, the suspension of the entire PATH and ferry systems, and a restriction on cars entering the city that began on Sunday, October 28.

Subway service did not resume in Lower Manhattan until Saturday, November 3, while adequate subway service did not resume until Monday, November 5, a full week after Superstorm Sandy. Parts of Lower Manhattan, however, never lost electricity and power was restored to areas west of Broadway late on Wednesday, October 31. The impacts from this loss of MTA service were compounded because PATH service did not resume between Lower Manhattan and New Jersey until November 26, nearly a month after the storm, during which time many commuters and tourists needed to use ferry service. Full PATH service, in fact, did not resume for three entire months. While the Holland Tunnel opened nine days after the storm, the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel did not fully open until three weeks after the storm.

The loss of transportation within CB1 greatly hindered residents’ mobility and prevented commuters from reaching their offices. Local small businesses were severely impacted because their customers, suppliers and staffs could not get to them. These hardships were compounded by the power and telecommunications outages; the losses suffered by businesses were generally not covered by business interruption insurance.

The loss of subway service surely contributed to the decision by the Department of Education to keep public schools closed for an entire week, even in areas where power never went out or where schools were not damaged. This further complicated the situation for working parents.

CB1 is grateful to the MTA personnel who worked around the clock to restore service as quickly as possible. Despite the commendable responsiveness of the MTA, this disaster has appropriately provided the impetus for a discussion about how to improve long-term emergency planning and management. CB1 recently adopted a report titled *Emergency Preparedness: Lessons Learned from Superstorm Sandy* which provides a synopsis of the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy within CB1 and recommendations for improved planning for the future. I would like to share with you today a few points from this document.

Public Transportation Emergency Management

The delayed issuance of an evacuation order, coupled with the system-wide public transportation suspension and limited taxi availability, hindered transportation to safer zones and emergency centers. We recommend that the City works with the MTA to provide additional public transportation options that give people in vulnerable areas ample time to evacuate. We believe that the deployment of public buses for residents of Zone A in the hours after the system-wide shutdown would have encouraged greater cooperation with evacuation orders.

The days following the storm illustrated that the City must plan for future, system-wide interruptions to public transportation. Despite increased bus and ferry service, commuters and residents experienced severe delays that increased safety concerns and stifled economic activity. Also, residents who remained at home and lost their usual public transportation services had a hard time leaving the area post-Sandy when utilities were out.

A contingency plan that incorporates bus fleets from private companies and the public school system could greatly improve interim public transportation. Alternate and expanded routes should be deployed to meet the needs of commuters faced with suspensions and restrictions on tunnels and bridges. The commencement of the Bike Share Program will provide a new transportation system that can be included in contingency plans.

We commend the communication, outreach and responsiveness shown by the MTA during and after Superstorm Sandy, especially the user-friendly temporary maps. We hope the MTA will build on this success with any additional contingency plans.

Transportation Resiliency for the Future

Storm surges inundated our subway tunnels and required massive operations by the MTA to clean and repair the tunnels. The inundation of the tunnels did, however, lessen the storm surge level on land. The City and MTA must commence a study to determine whether tunnels should be barricaded against storm surges, and/or if tunnels should be retrofitted to withstand future storm surges. In either case, defenses against increases in sea levels and storm surges in the future are of paramount importance.

CB1, in particular, is familiar with the long-term inconveniences that insufficient protection can create. Recent reports indicate that restoration of the recently opened South Ferry Station may take up to several years, at a price tag of around \$600 million, greater than the original cost of the station, which was completed in 2009. We are pleased to hear reports that the station will be retrofitted to protect it against future storm surges. We hope that the MTA will identify other potentially vulnerable stations and provide retrofitting to prevent substantial suspensions of service. For example, the A subway is still not completely restored and this complicates and lengthens the commute for people coming in from Far Rockway that work in Lower Manhattan.

The loss of power, furthermore, delayed restoration of subway service. Lack of circuit redundancy meant that the damage to Con Edison's 14th Street substation left the entire Manhattan subway system inoperable south of 34th street for nearly a week. Back-up power and/or circuit redundancy should be seriously considered to prevent future power-related suspensions of subway service.

Finally, expanding the mass transit system should be considered in future discussions about how to increase transportation resiliency. New York City relies upon the availability of affordable and ubiquitous MTA service; resiliency and development must go hand-in-hand to provide adequate transportation for Lower Manhattan's growing population of over 60,000 residents, 310,000 workers and 10,000,000 tourists as of last year.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I hope that CB1 will continue to be part of a dialogue leading to improved emergency preparedness and management for New York City public transportation.