

## SUMMARY

### Subway and Buses Handling of Lost Property MTA/OIG Report #07-05

An audit of the lost and found system at Transit resulted in recommendations for improvement of processes throughout the system. This system gathers lost property that is turned in, secures it until it can be transferred, forwards it to Transit's Lost Property Unit (LPU) located near Penn Station in Manhattan, then logs and stores it in the LPU to be claimed. Of OIG's two reports, one examines the intake process by which the Departments of Buses and Subways receive and forward lost items to the LPU, and the other examines the LPU's practices associated with the acceptance, storage and return of lost items once they arrive at this Unit.

OIG found a number of systemic deficiencies that contributed to an unnecessarily low (18%) return rate. For example, many items never arrived at the LPU. In one test, OIG staff turned in to Transit staff 26 items as having been found throughout Subways and Buses; only three actually made it through the system to the LPU. Other system vulnerabilities include weak security of items in the field and in the LPU (notably with respect to passports), and an inadequate database for tracking and locating found items. These weaknesses all contributed to the low return rate, as did the sometimes slow process of forwarding items to the LPU from field locations. OIG also found that Transit's efforts to best serve its customers leave unaddressed longstanding issues regarding compliance with the New York State Personal Property Law, which technically requires that the lost property be turned over to and accepted by the New York City Police Department after a certain period of time.

We made numerous recommendations including:

- Better monitoring and supervision of specified lost property operations;
- Establishing a requirement for investigation of valuables missing after intake, including documentation of the investigation and its results;
- Consideration of appropriate administrative action, including legislative amendment, regarding compliance with the Personal Property Law; and
- Producing written coordinated lost property procedures for Buses and Subways that include a definition of valuables and a method of safeguarding them, as well as a requirement to forward all passports to the U.S. Department of State.

Transit officials have already implemented several of our recommendations, including those addressing vulnerabilities in the computer system and the handling of passports; Transit is still considering our other recommendations, including how best to bring lost and found operations into closer compliance with law.