

SUMMARY

An Inquiry Into Whether MTA New York City Transit Consistently and Correctly Identifies and Reports Subway Platform-Edge Safety Defects **MTA/OIG Report #09-07**

In late January 2008, for a third time in three years, a subway rider fell to the tracks after a defective rubbing board broke under the customer's weight. As a result, NYC Transit commenced a review of virtually all of the rubbing boards used in the hundreds of stations in the subway system, rating each board as being in "good," "fair" or "poor" condition. In accordance with its standards, NYC Transit staff had to address any safety defect within 24 hours.

As part of its audit and investigation, the OIG conducted and photographed its own platform-level inspections of numerous stations across three boroughs – stations that NYC Transit during its system-wide survey had judged to be in "fair" or "poor" condition. The OIG inspections and follow-up interviews with NYC Transit management officials confirmed that NYC Transit inspections were not consistently and correctly identifying and reporting platform-edge safety defects, a necessity for making repair of these defects a top priority. Four key findings were identified:

- Platform-level inspectors at NYC Transit subway stations failed to correctly identify and report platform-edge safety defects visible at 16 of 23 stations sampled by OIG.
- Out of an OIG sample of 25 comments made by platform-level inspectors reporting non-safety defects, 22 of those comments used language that actually indicated safety defects. These inconsistencies were left unresolved by managers.
- Different inspectors described the same platform-edge condition inconsistently. For example, inspection reports covering one station over a short period of time with no intervening repairs, showed that two inspectors described the rubbing boards as "ok," while two others described them as "loose" (a safety defect) and a fifth noted that "rubbing boards in need of repair."
- NYC Transit's stated goal is to repair 75% of "non-safety defects" within 60 days. Nevertheless, NYC Transit only met this goal 41% of the time during the first eight months of 2008. Further, the backlog of defective rubbing boards was so great that in mid-2009, NYC Transit revised its target for bringing all defective boards into a state of good repair to December 2009. NYC Transit has since reported that it has now brought all defective boards into a state of good repair.

The OIG made four recommendations in January 2009: better define what constitutes a safety defect; provide intensive and continuing training of those who inspect platform edges; require closer immediate supervision and coordination to ensure that safety defects are correctly identified and reported; and provide executive oversight. These recommendations were accepted in March 2009, after additional discussions with NYC Transit.

As a follow-up on this critical safety issue, in the summer and fall of 2009, the OIG conducted further site visits and observed a training session to see if NYC Transit had actually improved its identification, reporting and timeliness in addressing defects. We confirmed that NYC Transit trained Stations personnel on the correct identification of safety defects and how to report problems in a standardized fashion. As a result of our site visits, we concluded that inspections have improved to the extent that defects were being identified and repaired according to NYC Transit policy at the sites we visited. We will continue to monitor implementation of OIG recommendations as appropriate.

Press

[**Report of Inspector General Barry L. Kluger, An Inquiry Into Whether MTA New York City Transit Consistently and Correctly Identified and Reports Subway Platform-Edge Safety Defects**](#)

[**NY Daily News 05/27/2009, Awful track record**](#)

[**NY Post 05/27/2009, Big Gap in MTA Safety**](#)

[**Newsday 05/27/2009, Transit inspections criticized**](#)