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IMMEDIATE

MTA Transit's Legendary Redbirds Make Final Trip

[[40 Year Old Subway Cars Noted For Durability]]

MTA New York City Transit's legendary Redbirds have made their farewell journey. The last 11-car train of Tuscan-red cars operated Monday, November 3rd, on the Flushing Line between Times Square and Willets Point before being permanently retired from service.

As recently as three years ago, there were more than 1,400 Redbirds of various vintages serving many of NYC Transit's A Division routes (numbered lines). However, with the MTA's \$2 billion capital investment in more comfortable and reliable high-tech subway cars the number of Redbirds on the system have dwindled. Their last stronghold was along the No. 7 Flushing Line, where the cars have operated since 1963.

Lately they've become the stuff of urban curiosity and interest in them grew especially as their numbers decreased. Of course, one of the main things subway riders will miss are the metal hand straps once so common in New York City subway cars. The Redbird fleet was the last to have them.

"Even for those of us who tend to be nostalgic, the retirement of the Redbirds has a lot more bearing on the future than the past," said MTA Chairman Peter S. Kalikow. "Through the funding provided by our capital programs we have invested nearly \$2 billion in the purchase of new subway cars from 2000 through 2004. The car fleet is now 100% stainless steel and our trains have never been more reliable."

Chairman Kalikow also noted that since 2000, NYC Transit customers have benefited from the purchase of 1,400 new technology subway cars. Partial funding for the new R142, R142a and R143 cars currently in service was provided through grants from the Federal Transit Administration. Overall, major investments have also been made in the areas of station rehabilitation, track replacement and signal modernization. Substantial Capital Program funding has also been invested in the facilities where subway trains and buses are stored, maintained and overhauled.

Replacing the Redbirds on the Flushing Line are stainless steel R62A class cars manufactured in 1985 by Bombardier. "With the phase-in of these stainless-steel cars, Flushing Line customers are riding on brighter, more modern equipment with an excellent reputation for reliability," explained NYC Transit President Lawrence G. Reuter. "We can't guarantee the outcome of a Mets game, but the R62As should make the ride to and from Shea Stadium that much more pleasurable."

Historically, NYC Transit's Redbird fleet was made up of six similar car classes manufactured between 1959 and 1963. During their service lives they sported several different paint jobs. While the pictured-window Flushing Line cars were the only ones to wear the fancy blue and cream design created for the World's Fair, all were painted MTA silver and blue in the 1970s and then all white in the early 1980s. The cars were finally painted red and dubbed "Redbirds" when the fleet was overhauled and cleansed of painted graffiti between 1984 and 1989.

The last Redbirds in passenger service were also the last to be manufactured. Built between 1963 and 1964 by the St. Louis Car Company, the 51-foot 75,600 pound R33 and R36 cars were assigned to the No. 7 line in time for the 1964 World's Fair at Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. Despite succumbing to the ravages of corrosion in their later years, the Redbirds still provided reliable transportation for customers day in and day out thanks to NYC Transit's knowledgeable and hard-working maintenance force.

"The 'Redbird' fleet has performed beyond our wildest expectations," added President Reuter. "But the fact of the matter is that they are obsolete equipment, and have outlived their usefulness. The time has come to retire them in favor of cars that are more modern and more dependable."

In retirement, the majority of the Redbirds have been the basis of an artificial reef program off the shores of several states along the eastern seaboard. NYCT has also done a brisk business selling parts from the old cars. Collectors have snapped up sign boxes, hand holds, horns and other items since they were placed on sale about a year ago. About 100 of the cars have been saved and are being converted to work equipment.