



MTA Press Releases

[Select Language](#) ▼

Press Release

November 8, 2010

[Metro-North](#)

IMMEDIATE

The Stars in the Sky are Shining Bright - Again: Grand Central's Famed Constellations Get High-Tech Twinkle.

New York City's most-beloved galaxy, the constellation ceiling above Grand Central Terminal's Main Concourse, is alive with new luminosity in the form of light-emitting diodes. 

Fifty-nine of the brightest stars in the winter sky, such as Castor and Pollux in Gemini and Rigel in Orion, were turned on at a ceremony on the first workday after the return to Standard Time. The new environmentally-friendly LEDs are expected to last 50,000 hours, and use just 4 watts of electricity - 60% less than the previous lights.

"We wanted to brighten the spirits of New Yorkers," said Howard Permut, president of MTA Metro-North Railroad, steward of the Terminal. "This project is another reason to love Grand Central and we are proud to use the latest, greenest technology in the city's beloved landmark."

"We hope people won't run into one another as they crane their necks and peer skyward in admiration," said Jay Walder, Chairman of Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Metro-North's parent agency. "Using new technology to celebrate the traditional grandeur of Grand Central's celestial ceiling is a testament to our commitment to improving the life of the city even as we continue to cut costs."

According to Steve Stroh, chief electrician of Grand Central, the long-lasting, cool-burning LED lights are the third iteration of star light.

"The LEDs replaced a system of fiber-optic lights, which in turn replaced the original, 10-watt incandescent bulbs," Stroh said. "The bulbs were state-of-the-art when the terminal opened in 1913, but over the years, the star bulbs burned out. Replacing them was labor-intensive as the barrel-vaulted ceiling is quite deep - 50 feet from the top of the cornice to the zenith of the arc. Accessible only through the attic above the sky ceiling, workers would have to crawl on all fours to reach the incandescent fixtures and screw in new bulbs."

As the predecessor railroad headed for bankruptcy, there was less and less enthusiasm for this particular maintenance chore and the bulbs burned out, one by one, until the entire winter zodiac sky was dark.

The fiber-optic system, installed in 1997, was a major innovation when it was new and eliminated the need for electricians to change burnt out bulbs. But the tubes that carried the light got brittle and brown, and did not project light with the same intensity. The stars faded. In the search for a new, environmentally friendly solution, LEDs seemed the obvious choice.

The new system will pay for itself in less than three years. The LEDs were installed in their original locations so as not to disturb the famed, 25,000-square-foot cerulean ceiling, with 2,500 gold-leaf stars and a pair of intersecting 23-carat golden arcs depicting the elliptic and the equator.

The portion of the universe depicted in the mural shows the wintertime zodiac and associated constellations such as Pegasus, Triangulum and Fly, as they appear in the northern hemisphere, not as seen from Earth, but as seen from above. When the Terminal opened, there was a civic debate about the sky being reversed, but the builders insisted it was intentional and showed the stars from the gods' perspective.

When gazing up, 125 feet above the Tennessee pink marble floor, one cannot see all the lighted stars at once. As people walk across the Concourse floor and their vantage point changes, different stars appear, giving a twinkling impression.

