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Press Release

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[NYC Transit](#)

IMMEDIATE

MTA New York City Transit Prepares for Winter Weather

Successful Measures Implemented After December 2010 Blizzard to Address Shortcomings in Storm Preparedness

MTA New York City Transit (NYCT) has been hard at work preparing an impressive fleet of snow and ice-fighting equipment to be deployed in order to keep hundreds of miles of outdoor track and third rail clear of snow and ice and prevent bus passengers from being stranded. These efforts are part of the development of a new, comprehensive winter weather plan.

After unprecedented conditions during the December 26, 2010 blizzard crippled the system, NYCT immediately began a review and change required to strengthen storm preparedness. Many of the changes that were implemented were quickly executed and tested with great success during subsequent snow storms in January and February. Measures were recently tested again during Hurricane Irene and the first winter snow storm of this season which occurred just before Halloween. The changes enacted include:

- Appointment of an Emergency Coordinator to facilitate MTA-wide storm response coordination and information sharing;
- Establishment of situation rooms to manage storm response activities;
- Adoption of procedures for preemptive curtailment of service when conditions render normal service untenable;
- Designation of dedicated customer advocates ensuring the well-being of customers on stuck vehicles;
- Improvements in procedures to deliver more detailed and reliable bus service status information on the MTA's website;
- Improvements in bus operating procedures for evaluating and responding to degraded road conditions.

"The most important shift in agency thinking was moving away from the philosophy that we will deliver service until we can't," said NYCT President Tom Prendergast. "We learned from last year's storm that at some point, it was safer and more prudent to temporarily suspend service."

Subways

In the event of a snowstorm with accumulating snow, personnel stationed in the Storm Control Center--part of Subways' Rail Control Center--communicate with outlying local storm fighting centers, coordinating the overall snow-fighting effort in the field. Activities are based on the winter operations plan, which outlines five levels of response, with Level V being the highest. This covers the availability of snow-fighting personnel, tools and equipment required for deployment with the forecast of a severe storm.

In addition to snowplows, NYCT mobilizes ballast regulators, jet-powered snow blowers and modified de-icers--retired subway cars modified with tanks and other specialized equipment to spray de-icing fluid on the third rail.

Until early 2011, Plan Level IV was the highest level of response to a winter weather event. Plan Level IV was called when a snowfall of five inches or more was forecast. However, just after Christmas last year, a powerful blizzard ripped through the region stranding trains on the outdoor lines and prompting the MTA to rethink its approach to operating service in the face of harsh weather conditions.

This was the impetus for an additional plan level. Plan Level V is now called when the forecast is for a weather event that may require an orderly and temporary suspension in service on select line segments, to allow for snow and ice removal.

"Our goal has always been to keep our services up and running so that our customers can get to where they need to be no matter what the weather," explained Carmen Bianco, Senior Vice President, Department of Subways. "We have a tremendous investment in machinery, manpower and experience. But when we performed our review of how we performed during the Christmas weekend blizzard, we determined that there was a point where we should no longer send trains onto the nearly 220 miles of outdoor track of certain lines."

The entire Winter Operations Plan, and its levels I through V, is updated each year and is in effect from November 15th through April 15th. Winter preparations, however, begin in June when supplies are submitted for procurement, and are completed by Halloween.

Buses

The same premise applies to buses as well. Similar to subways, it includes a new alert level which provides for controlled service curtailment and establishes guidelines as to when to declare alert levels relative to the forecasted storm arrival. To make traveling easier for bus customers, the Department of Buses has its own fleet of snow fighting equipment, particularly the salt-spreading trucks equipped with plows assigned to each depot. They work in cooperation with the Department of Sanitation to keep bus routes clear and passable. However, when street conditions worsen, buses will likely operate on a reduced schedule, and determinations will be made on a route-by-route basis about how much service can be provided based on street conditions. In cases of severe weather and impassable roads, bus service will be suspended rather than risking having buses get stuck on the roads. Arrangements have also been made for sharing real-time plowing information via transit representatives at the City's Office of Emergency Management Emergency Operations Center.

In the area of equipment, the Department of Buses now has a consistent policy for tire chaining, based upon the specific conditions or forecasts. This policy requires chaining of the articulated fleet when the severity and speed of the storm warrant, while also taking into consideration the service area of the buses. Whenever possible, articulated buses scheduled to be in service overnight are to be replaced with 40-foot standard buses, and all buses to be in service overnight, regardless of type, will be sent into service with chains.

Paratransit

For our Access-A-Ride paratransit service, we have developed a dashboard storm monitoring system to track immobilized vehicles and customers. NYCT has also coordinated a procedure with OEM and City first-responders for rescuing customers on immobilized vehicles or those who develop medical needs during storms. Also in place is a new paratransit-specific Storm Action Plan that includes processes for curtailing all non-medically essential service; this plan was tested earlier this year during storms in January and February, as well as during Hurricane Irene.

Lastly, as part of this collaborative effort and for the first time, MTA is conducting periodic all-agency winter storm executive communications and decision-making exercises to practice the communications activities and decision-making that must take place during winter storms and other emergencies. Additionally, to enhance our communications with customers, MTA has taken steps to insure its communications systems function well during any type of emergency. The current website design allows for the quick posting of service information and includes a special weather page that becomes the mta.info homepage during weather-related events affecting operations.

The MTA now partners with New York State DOT to provide current service information for all MTA agencies by telephone using 511. The 511 system provides customers with one easy-to-remember phone number to access all MTA transportation information. In addition, the MTA now has protocols in place for providing 311 with service status updates and alternative transportation options; enabling 311 and 911 to direct MTA service inquiries to the appropriate MTA communication channels; and enabling the MTA to track MTA-related 311 and 911 complaints during storms and other significant operating events.