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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

Video, Photos & Rush Transcript: Governor Cuomo and Chairman Prendergast Celebrate On-Time Opening of Second Avenue Subway With Inaugural New Year's Eve Ride

East Side Neighbors, Workers Who Built the Line, Dignitaries, Elected Officials, Leading NY Cultural Institutions Join First Ride; Festive Celebration Features Local NY-Made Food & Beverages, as well as Performance by an MTA Music Under New York Band

Earlier this evening, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo celebrated the on-time arrival of the Second Avenue Subway – the system’s first major expansion in more than 50 years – with the line’s inaugural ride. The new line’s first ride and celebratory party were cohosted by MTA Chairman and CEO Thomas F. Prendergast and attended by Second Avenue Subway and MTA workers, local community members, dignitaries, local elected officials and members of President Obama’s Cabinet. Attendees rode to each of the new stations and rang in the New Year with a celebratory countdown and toast at the 72nd Street station.

The inaugural ride, in a train specially wrapped with Second Avenue Subway logos, included celebratory stops at the new 86th and 96th Street stations, which were [previewed to the public at open houses last week](#). At each of the new stations, participants of the inaugural ride were greeted with the words "Excelsior" and "E Pluribus Unum," permanently displayed on beams there as New York’s message to people who ride the subways. Guests also had an opportunity to view the public art in each station, part of the largest public art installation in New York State history.

The celebration was attended by many of the workers who helped build the new line’s massive underground tunnels and stations, as well as the workers who will operate the system. Community residents, local merchants, and elected officials also took part in the festivities, along with members of President Obama’s cabinet -- U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson and U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx.

VIDEO of the Governor’s remarks is available on YouTube [here](#) and in TV quality (h264, mp4) format [here](#).

AUDIO of the Governor’s remarks is available [here](#).

PHOTOS of the event will be available on the Governor’s Flickr [page](#).

A rush transcript of the Governor’s remarks is available below:

Well, thank you very much. Good evening to all of you. What a great night, huh? First to Tom Prendergast, nothing happens without leadership and Tom really stepped up to the plate. The entire team, the MTA, Ronnie Hakim and Michael H and everyone really stepped up to get this project done on time and not just done on time, make it extraordinary. Let’s give Tom and the entire team at the MTA a big round of applause.

And all the people who worked on this before – we had Joe Lhota who was here, Mayor Dinkins who was here, Mayor Bill de Blasio who made a major commitment to the MTA. All the contractors who were here, I don’t want to start to name them, but they really, really made a superhuman effort to get this done on time and let’s give them all a round of applause.

You know this is really quite a New York story. They talked about the Second Avenue Subway 100 years ago, literally, and then in the ‘40s they knocked down the elevated line that was on Second Avenue and Third Avenue because they were going to build the Second Avenue Subway. They just forgot to build the second avenue subway. So, what you had was all that volume then going to Lexington Avenue and that’s what made the 4, 5, 6 line on Lexington Avenue the busiest lines on the planet and this Second Avenue Subway line is now going to give the East Side access, it will reduce the congestion on 4, 5, 6 – it’s been a long time coming, but it is not just – this is not your grandfather’s subway station. I said to my family, I said “You know how about this for an idea. We have a New Year’s Eve party in the new subway station?” And they gave me that look, like you know, “there’s crazy dad again.” But, I said this is unlike any subway station you’ve ever seen. You look at this mezzanine level, which subway stations normally don’t have, its open, it’s airy. You look at the public art that is in all these stations, it is amazing. So, let’s give them a round of applause.

We’re reaching New Year’s rapidly and there are two words that you saw in these stations that I just want you to think of for this New Year’s. One word that you see when you’re going down the escalators is the word ‘Excelsior.’ And some people said, “Well nobody’s going to know what that means.” I said, “Well good, let them look it up.” Excelsior is the state motto. Excelsior means, ever upwards, always aspirational, and it is a perfect word to describe not just the state’s motto, but the spirit of the people of the New York. We are always about aspiring to do more, aspiring to do better. That is the New York spirit and it always was the New York spirit. They said, “Well why did you need to get this done on the deadline?” We needed to get this done on deadline because we’re New York and when we set the deadline, we’re going to get it done. We needed to show people that government works and we can still do big things and great things and we can still get them done. Not just for the MTA, but we have airports that we have to build at the La Guardia and JFK. We have a new Penn Station that we have to build. We have roads and bridges that we have to build. We have a new convention center that we have to build. And it’s not just what we have to build – we’re New York. We shouldn’t settle for second best on anything. It’s not okay that we have homeless people sleeping on the streets. It’s not okay that we have public schools that don’t educate every child to their fullest potential. This is New

York and there is nothing that we can't do when we put our mind to it and that's what we have to remember and that's what Excelsior says to every one of us.

The other word, the other expression, is E Pluribus Unum and I feel in a lot of ways, this country, this year is going through a period of soul searching. And you feel sometimes that the country is looking for its moorings. Our founding fathers said "E Pluribus Unum" and that says it all. It says when they founded this country it was unique. It's the only country on the globe that is not about one race or religion. The concept here was that they would form a country and they would open the doors and that's what the Statue of Liberty is in New York Harbor. And we would invite people from all over the globe and Emma Lazarus would write a poem that asked for the poorest internationally to come to this great new land and populate this new land and out of many, E Pluribus Unum, out of many we would form one. Out of people from all over the globe, we would form one community. That is who we are and that's what made us who we are and that's what made this country the greatest country on the planet.

New York, in many way, is the epitome of that because we were the stepping off point. We were where the ships landed, so we have more diversity and more concentration than probably any state in the nation. And our point is, we get it, and we understand that when people get angry, the instinct is to blame. And who do you blame? You blame the people who look different than you. You blame the newcomer. You blame the foreigner. But that's not America at its best. And that's not the vision of our founding fathers.

New York says, by its very existence, you can take 18 million people from all across the globe, bring them together and form one community and it can be the strongest community on the planet. New York says you can take Christians and Muslims and Jews and they can all live together. You can take black and white and brown, you can take gay and straight and bring people together and you can find the unity and you can find the commonality.

And New York says, while the nation is going through its soul searching, we reject the instinct to blame and we reject the instinct to divide and we reject the instinct to separate. Because the only thing that can destroy this country, the only thing, is to try to divide this country. Our strength is in unity. Our strength is understanding that diversity that our founding fathers asked for, has worked and we have come together, and it is a source of strength and a source of beauty. And that's the message that New York has to carry. We have to stand up to this nation as a model of diversity, a model of immigration, a model of finding commonality, not differences. A model that says the founding fathers were right – E Pluribus Unum – bring us that diverse mix and we will make one beautiful society.

Thank you and God bless you. In a few minutes, we're going to have a great New Year. Thank you.