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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

MTA Announces Task Force to Address Growing Homelessness in New York City Subways

Task Force Will Work in Partnership with NYPD, MTA Police and New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to Create a Plan Within 30 Days to Measurably Reduce Homelessness and Panhandlers on Subway by End of This Year

Plan Will Focus on Providing Additional Assistance to Those in Need to Provide Better Options Than Staying On the Subway

Problem Has Increased on Subway in Previous Years, Creating Unsafe Conditions for Workers, Customers and Homeless

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) today announced the launch of a task force to combat the persistent and growing issue of homelessness in the New York City subway system. Working in close partnership with the New York City Police Department (NYPD), MTA Police and the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), the task force will have 30 days from its creation, expected in the coming days, to design a plan – focusing on housing alternatives and increased resources – that will lead to a significant reduction in homelessness and panhandling on the subways by the end of 2019.

The announcement follows a letter from Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, sent to the MTA Board earlier this month, urging the board to address this critical issue as part of the MTA reorganization plan. The task force will build on the partnership between the MTA and New York City Police Department that have been working to address this problem.

MTA Managing Director Veronique Hakim said, “Homelessness is a growing problem on the subway, with a growing impact. Through this Task Force we’re going to bring together a broad and empowered group that will help us to develop an expedited plan to keep our customers and workers safe and our trains moving - while providing much needed resources and assistance to this vulnerable population. “

New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance Commissioner Michael Hein said, “Those individuals experiencing homelessness and living in the subway system are not getting the help they need and deserve. The mass transit system is not an appropriate shelter for anyone, and the current approach cannot continue. Our agency is charged with overseeing local social services districts, which are responsible for housing the homeless. We will advise the MTA to ensure that enhancements are made to produce outcomes that result in people who are homeless getting the services they desperately need.”

The task force will look at issues such as: new metrics for measuring homelessness; updating subway rules and regulations to provide more clarity on what is a violation of the rules; enhanced enforcement of those rules; improved coordination among agencies; best practice engagement techniques and methodology; the potential benefit of establishing a dedicated homeless outreach office within the MTA; increased customer communications; additional access to resources for those in need.

The homeless population in the subway system has risen 23 percent in 2019, and homeless individuals are increasingly occupying the subways not for transportation, but for shelter or in some cases illegal activity. These non-transportation activities frequently disrupt service, create delays, and can pose a risk to riders on the trains. In addition, by allowing homeless individuals to stay within the system – rather than finding them supportive housing or other resources – it poses a risk to their own health and safety.

The transit system often provides an opportunity for homeless individuals to panhandle and ask MTA customers for money, which can create a challenge in distinguishing the homeless from con artists. One of the goals of the task force plan will be to provide assistance to social workers in distinguishing individuals who are in need of supportive services from those seeking to take advantage of passengers.