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IMMEDIATE

MTA Train Speed and Safety Task Force Announces Preliminary Findings: Subway Train Speeds to Be Safely Increased Up to 50% in Parts of System

Task Force Identifies Core Areas of Focus for Future Train Operation Testing to Safely Increase Running Times

Working with Union Officials, NYC Transit Will Provide Certainty to Train Operators Signals Will Be Properly Calibrated

Final Task Force Recommendations to be Sent to MTA Chairman by End of Year

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) today announced preliminary findings of the Train Speed and Safety Task Force that demonstrate subway train speeds on certain sections of track can be increased by as much as 50 percent. The task force initiated a study with engineering firm STV, with the help of Transport Workers Union, that remains ongoing but has already determined four core areas of focus that would lead to faster trains while prioritizing customer and employee safety.

The task force's initial work examined stretches of track from 14 St to 34 St-Penn Station on the Seventh Avenue **1 2 3** lines and in Manhattan to the 34 St-Hudson Yards terminal of the Flushing **7** line. The task force determined the following areas of focus to identify tracks where speeds could be safely raised: Reducing running times through straight tracks and interlockings, improving running times through curves, alleviating bottlenecks and fine-tuning schedules to optimize train movement, and updating speed signage to increase train operator confidence.

The next step is for the task force to examine appropriate and safe speed limits using train operation testing in actual conditions to determine running speeds in different configurations.

"Our modern trains are better designed than our older fleet, and we have new tracks and continuous welded rail, better water drainage, improved electric service and interlockings, all of which means we can safely increase speeds beyond those set 20 years ago," **said MTA Managing Director Veronique Hakim**. "Our work continues, and we are committed to drastically improving service and increasing the reliability of the system for all customers."

"As a former federal regulator, I understand that the safety of the more than 5.6 million people who ride on North America's largest mass transit system is of paramount importance," said **former U.S. Federal Aviation Administrator and task force chair Jane Garvey**. "The goal of this study has been - and always will be - to increase reliability in the system, reduce running times, but all while ensuring that riders who rely on the subways will reach their destinations safely. I am extremely confident that the recommendations the task force is making today are a huge step towards achieving these goals and I look forward to continuing this important work."

The New York subway system was built more than 100 years ago, and to provide for safe operations, various measures were implemented to ensure that trains did not go faster than the conditions they could handle. Two fatal incidents at 14 St-Union Square in 1991 and on the Williamsburg Bridge in 1995 cumulatively led to subway trains operating at slower speeds. Later, the NTSB concluded in both cases the accidents were mainly due to operator error, however, localized system and signal issues were also discovered. At the same time, the MTA never completed the comprehensive speed and safety review they had commenced and thus the trains remained operating at slower speeds with actual devices installed to limit train acceleration.

The slowdown was further compounded by the practice of train operators controlling trains, some of whom believed that the signal system was not properly calibrated, at speeds below the posted limits due to the perception they would be unfairly penalized. The result led to operators driving even slower than posted speed limits. Over the decades, car design and track geometry have improved, allowing cars to maintain stability and safe operation at higher speeds, but the speed limits were not changed to reflect these advancements in safety and comfort.

Under the task force's preliminary recommendations, NYC Transit will coordinate with the TWU to ensure that mis-calibrated timed signal timers have been fixed and that operators will not be penalized. Overall, the task force's findings build on the success of NYC Transit's Safe Seconds effort to increase subway speed limits by locating and fixing mis-calibrated signals in parts of the system. The task force's continuing work will expand the number of locations where speeds could be raised, and increase operator confidence thanks to coordinated efforts with Transit's labor partners.

Final recommendations from the task force will be sent to MTA Chairman Patrick Foye for review and approval by the end of 2019.

"The task force's work builds on the success of the efforts NYCT has underway by identifying new opportunities to deliver more benefits for our millions of daily riders," said **Sally Librera, NYC Transit Senior Vice President for Subways**. "With safety as our top priority, we're doing everything we can to improve operations as we work toward modernization."

"Our Train Operators want to get riders to their destinations as quickly as possible while maintaining safety, and it's frustrating for both passengers and our workers to endure delays due to unnecessary speed restrictions or signal issues," said **Earl Phillips, Secretary-Treasurer of TWU Local 100**. "The initial findings of the Train Speed and Safety Task Force are incredibly promising, and most importantly, when these recommendations are complete I have no doubt that our confidence in the system will be restored and it will result in a fairer system for our operators and a better experience for riders."

ABOUT THE TASK FORCE:

The Train Speed and Safety Task Force was created in July 2019 and charged with addressing longstanding and unnecessary train slowdowns across the system. The task force is chaired by former U.S. Federal Aviation Administrator Jane Garvey and members include:

- Robert Lauby, former Chief Safety Officer at the Federal Railroad Administration;
- Tony Utano, President of TWU Local 100;
- Dominick Servedio, Executive Chairman of STV;
- Andy Byford, President of New York City Transit;
- Pat Warren, Chief Safety Officer at the MTA;
- Thomas Quigley, General Counsel at the MTA; and
- Veronique Hakim, Managing Director at the MTA.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM MTA MANAGING DIRECTOR AND TASK FORCE MEMBER RONNIE HAKIM:

Several months ago, Governor Cuomo posed straightforward questions to the MTA: "Are the trains moving slower than they did years ago? And if so, why? Do they travel at the same speed as other systems?" These apparently simple questions in actuality were not simple to answer.

After much analysis, the task force's preliminary findings show that the answer is yes, the trains move at slower speeds than they did 20 years ago. And yes, it is possible to safely increase the speeds to higher limits; and no, NYC Transit trains do not travel as fast as some other systems.

The historic facts on train speed are difficult to specifically reconstruct as the first-hand recollections are somewhat obscure. However, research shows that the cumulative effect of actions taken after two tragic train accidents in Union Square in 1991 and on the Williamsburg Bridge in 1995 were that NYCT trains operated more slowly. This was a safety precaution put in place as the MTA did a comprehensive speed and safety study and the NTSB reviewed the cause of the crashes. Later, the NTSB concluded in both cases it was mainly operator error, however, localized system and signal issues were also discovered. At the same time, the MTA never completed the comprehensive speed and safety review they had commenced and thus the trains remained operating at slower speeds with actual devices installed to limit train acceleration.

This speed reduction moved trains at slower speeds than comparable systems internationally.

This slowdown was then compounded by the practice of actual train operators. There has been a widespread perception held for years by train operators (with some basis) that the signal system was not properly calibrated to the posted speed limits and that if operators traveled at the posted speeds they would be unfairly penalized by mis-calibrated signals. The result has been that the operators have been driving slower than even posted speed limits.

Our analysis also suggests the current posting of speed limits and signage in the system is irregular or deficient and must be corrected for train operators to have confidence.

Another factor to consider is that modern trains are better designed than our older fleet. We have installed new tracks and continuous welded rail, we have improved and corrected the flawed signal system and water drainage, improved electric service and interlockings: all improvements made through the Subway Action Plan. The result is that trains can operate at not only the speed of operation dating back twenty years but can be safely increased beyond that level.

To study the proper speed and safety operating protocols, the MTA established a unique task force of top safety officials, engineers and train operator union representatives in July. The MTA Speed and Safety Task Force is chaired by Jane Garvey, former Administrator at the Federal Aviation Administration, and members include Robert Lauby, former Chief Safety Officer at the Federal Railroad Administration, Tony Utano, President of TWU Local 100, Dominick Servedio, Executive Chairman of STV, Andy Byford, President of New York City Transit, Pat Warren, Chief Safety Officer at the MTA, Thomas Quigley, General Counsel at the MTA, and myself.

The work of our task force has begun with engineering work to study the track configuration and car capacity. The next step is for the task force to examine appropriate and safe speed limits using train operation testing in actual conditions to determine running speeds in different configurations.

The initial findings of this work have identified core areas of focus:

1. Reducing running times through straight tracks and interlockings
2. Improving running times through curves
3. Alleviating bottlenecks and fine-tuning train scheduling to optimize movements
4. Updating and improving speed signage to increase operator confidence in posted limits.

Our preliminary estimate is that by correcting the current issues, train speeds could be increased by as much as 50 percent.

We will join with our union officials in this testing to provide certainty to the train operators that the signals are properly calibrated to the new posted limits.

Our final recommendations will be sent to MTA Chairman and CEO Pat Foye by the end of the year for his approval.

Our work continues, and we are committed to drastically improving service and increasing the reliability of the system for all customers.