

# GIANARIS REPORT

## Breaking Barriers:

Every New York Subway Line's  
Rating on Accessibility

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# Breaking Barriers: New York's Least Accessible Subway Lines

## *How New York Can Build an MTA for All*

With only one-quarter of New York's subway system currently accessible under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), thousands of New Yorkers are denied access to the New York City subway system. The largest public transit system in the United States is also the least accessible to people with mobility issues. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) failed to make the needed investments to improve service, accessibility and infrastructure. Recently, the agency rolled out a new plan to begin a major overhaul of the system, giving the opportunity for the system to reimagine how access for all users is delivered.

***“It is unacceptable and embarrassing for New York to be worst in the nation in subway accessibility. For New York to thrive, it must have an MTA for All, where everyone can access the subway system to get to work, school and around our city.” – Senator Michael Gianaris***



Senator Gianaris  
with transit  
activists at an  
“Access Denied”  
campaign rally in  
Astoria



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## Background

New York City Transit (NYCT), a subsidiary corporation of the MTA, runs the New York City Subways. It is the largest transit system in the North America and the seventh largest in the world – serving more than 1.7 billion riders in 2017. Comprised of 472 stations, the system has more than 665 miles of track<sup>1</sup>.

Of the 472 stations in the system, less than 25 percent are ADA accessible, with some parts of the city being entirely unserved by accessible train service. The lack of accessibility is not only a challenge to those who are mobility-impaired, but also to parents travelling with children in strollers and seniors. The system was subject to a consent decree in 1994 which required 110 stations be made ADA accessible by 2020 but exempted the remainder of the stations<sup>2</sup>. Currently, accessibility is subject to a lawsuit by Disability Rights Advocates and the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York<sup>3</sup>.

Most recently, the MTA missed an excellent opportunity to perform greater accessibility upgrades during its Enhanced Station Initiative (ESI) program. Originally planned for 32 stations, the program was reduced to cover only 19 stations when significant cost overruns were discovered<sup>4</sup>. The program implemented cosmetic fixes, including public art installations and WiFi at above ground stations, while missing the opportunity to include significant improvements signalization or accessibility. Senator Gianaris was a vocal opponent of this program from its inception and pushed for more ADA-accessible stations.

This report aims to address the volume of accessibility on each individual line. Questions remain about the reliability of individual stations listed as accessible – for example, the number of outages which impact elevators further hampering their accessibility or construction projects which shut down stations for prolonged periods of time requiring individuals to travel to other stations.

Data for this report was retrieved from the MTA's own public listings of accessible stations and can be referenced at their website, [www.mta.info](http://www.mta.info).

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<sup>1</sup> "New York City Transit Facts and Figures." The Metropolitan Transportation Authority. <https://bit.ly/2LqQkLG>

<sup>2</sup> "Access Denied: Introduction." Transit Center. <https://bit.ly/2NlBdn8>

<sup>3</sup> "US Attorney Berman Sues MTA for Disability Violation." Adler, Ben. City & State New York. March 13, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2zLiDTg>.

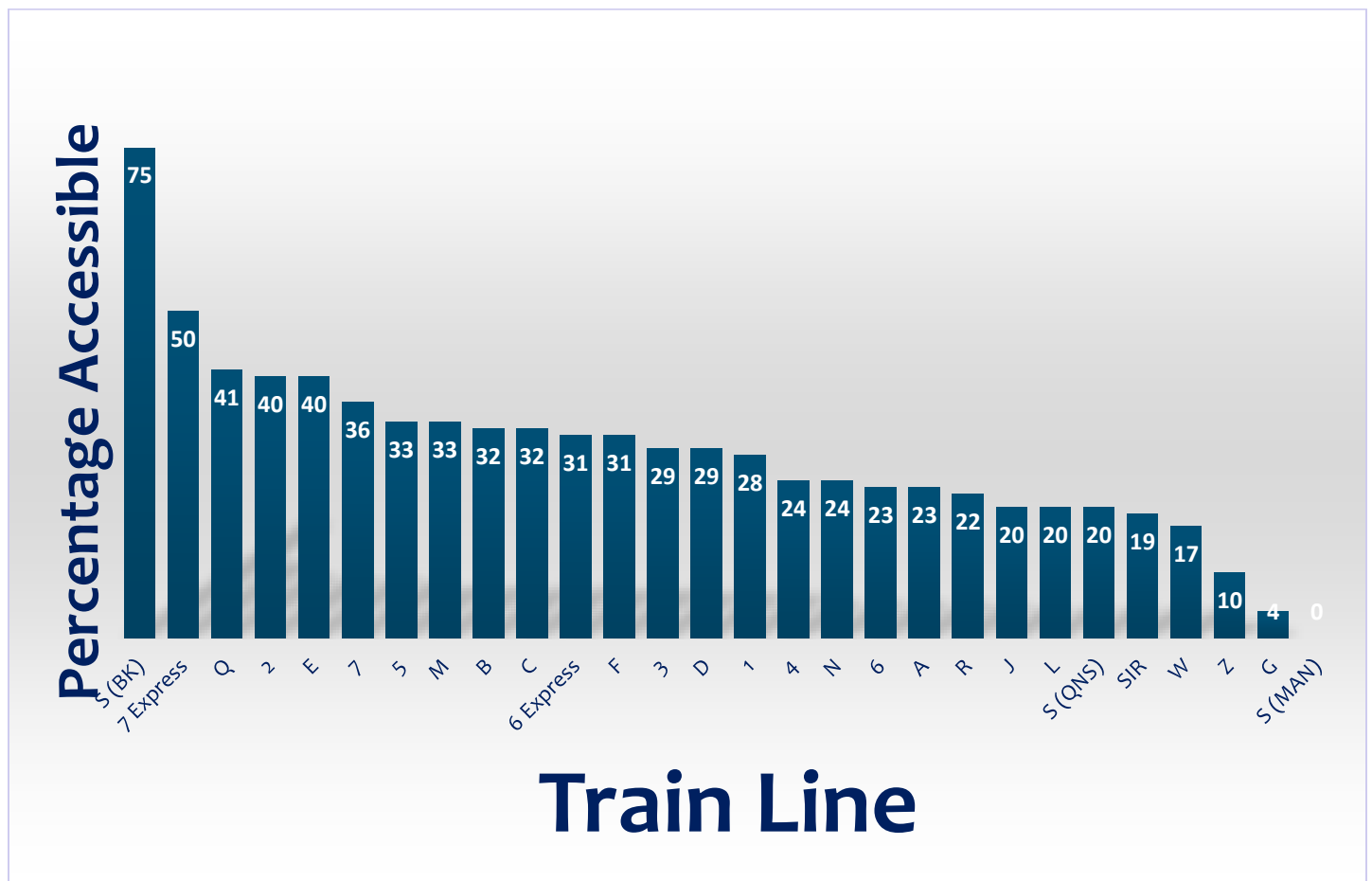
<sup>4</sup> "New York Subway Cuts Back Plan to Renovate Stations." Berger, Paul. Wall Street Journal. April 4, 2018. <https://on.wsj.com/2kN2sKX>



## Which Lines Are Most Accessible?

While all lines have some access for people with disabilities, subway riders in each borough frequently travel blocks, if not miles, to reach the nearest accessible station or take alternate transportation to a station providing access to those with mobility challenges.

The subway line with the highest raw number of accessible stations is the 2-train, with 19 stations being accessible to people with disabilities. This is 40% of the entire line. The subway lines with the highest percentage of accessible stations are the Brooklyn S-train (shuttle) where 75% of stations are accessible, followed by the 7-express with 50% accessibility.



## Which Lines Are Least Accessible?

Some lines are not accessible despite being at stations that feature elevators. For example, the G, E, and M trains at Court Square are not accessible because elevators only reach the mezzanine level of the station rather than each train line platform.

The line with the fewest accessible stations is the G-train<sup>5</sup>, which only has a single ADA-accessible station at Church Street, in Brooklyn. The line with the lowest percentage of accessible stations is the G-train at 4% followed by the Z-train, with 10% accessibility.

## How Does New York Stack Up?

Of major city mass transit systems across the country, New York has the lowest percentage of ADA-compliant stations.

Agency Name	ADA Accessible Stations	Non-ADA Accessible Stations	Total Stations	% ADA Accessible
Washington, DC (WMATA)	91	0	91	100
San Francisco (BART)	44	0	44	100
Atlanta (MARTA)	38	0	38	100
Miami (MDT)	23	0	23	100
San Juan (ATI)	16	0	16	100
Los Angeles (Metro)	16	0	16	100
Baltimore (Maryland MTA)	14	0	14	100
Boston (MBTA)	52	2	54	96
Cleveland (Cleveland RTA)	16	2	18	88
Chicago (CTA)	98	47	145	67
Philadelphia (PATCO)	7	6	13	53
NY-NJ (PATH)	7	6	13	53
Philadelphia (SEPTA)	37	38	75	49
<b>New York City (NYCTA)</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>23</b>

Data from Federal Transit Administration's National Transportation Database, 2016

<sup>5</sup> The Manhattan S-train shuttle has no accessible stops, but other accessible trains serve both Grand Central and Times Square-42<sup>nd</sup> Street.



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## Recommendations

- **Fully Funding the Fast Forward Plan and Prioritizing Accessibility Upgrades**

Senator Gianaris is the author of legislation creating a surcharge on high-income New York City residents. Other credible revenue generation suggestions, like congestion pricing, have also been proposed. One thing is clear: the MTA needs more money from one or more of these proposals to increase service and accessibility.

- **Developing an MTA for All Access Plan**

NYCT's new "Fast Forward" plan offers some hope because it includes a commitment to increasing accessibility at stations and the appointment of an "Executive Accessibility Advisor" to provide ongoing recommendations to the NYCTA President on system needs. But this plan does not go far enough – accessibility must be at the forefront of every subway station capital project and work should not be done without including accessibility components.

- **Include Elevators in All Enhanced Station Initiative Plans Going Forward**

While the MTA has reduced the overall number of stations included in the Enhanced Station Initiative (ESI) program after it was revealed they cost, on average, nearly twice what was budgeted, the remaining stations undergoing renovations should include elevator access.

