

THOMAS P. DINAPOLI  
COMPTROLLER



110 STATE STREET  
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12236

STATE OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

February 14, 2017

Mr. Fernando Ferrer  
Interim Chairman  
Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
2 Broadway  
New York, NY 10004

Re: MTA/NYC Transit – Trash Can Free  
Stations Pilot Program  
Report 2016-F-23

Dear Mr. Ferrer:

Pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article X, Section 5 of the State Constitution and Section 2803 of the Public Authorities Law, we have followed up on the actions taken by officials of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to implement the recommendations contained in our prior audit report, *Trash Can Free Stations Pilot Program Report* (Report 2014-S-29).

**Background, Scope, and Objective**

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) New York City Transit (Transit) provides rapid transit services. The subway has a daily ridership of 5.6 million. It has a fleet of more than 6,300 subway cars, which operate along 660 miles of track, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Transit's Department of Subways (Subways) engages in several activities to maintain station cleanliness. It cleans station platforms, mezzanines, and other areas. It removes and disposes of 13,000 tons of trash from the subway annually, and it cleans and removes trash from the track areas. Subways' Station Environment and Operations (SEO) is responsible for station cleaning, station maintenance, and refuse collection for Transit's 469 subway stations throughout Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens. Trash collected is bagged and stored in refuse storage rooms and platform housings. However, trash storage capacity is limited and may result in the overflow being left in "exposed bags" on platforms until collected by refuse trains or collection trucks. Unsightly and malodorous exposed refuse bags negatively impact the customer experience.

In October 2011, Transit rolled out the "Trash Can Free Stations Pilot Program" (Pilot Program) to reduce refuse in the stations by removing the garbage cans from the platforms at selected stations. SEO's objective was to solve the problem "of poor customer experience of

exposed garbage bags in stations and eliminate the accompanying presence of rodents.” Transit began the Pilot Program at two stations, including 8th Street on the R line and Flushing-Main Street on the number 7 line (Phase I). Subsequently, SEO expanded the Pilot Program twice, as follows: (1) eight additional stations, chosen to represent average-sized stations both elevated and underground, were added in September 2012 (two in each of the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens) as Phase II; and (2) an additional 29 elevated stations on the J and M lines were added in July 2014 as Phase III.

During August 2016, SEO added new trash cans to the mezzanine areas of seven pilot stations that had increases in track fires and increases in the amounts of trash collected from the stations and/or tracks.

Our prior audit determined the effectiveness of the Pilot Program was not well monitored, and no metrics were established to focus on the primary goal of reducing “exposed bags.” However, the pilot was expanded twice, and continued through the issuance of our report. By the third phase of the Pilot Program, Transit had removed trash cans from 39 stations, with mixed results and no firm evidence that the program was effective.

We issued our initial audit report on September 22, 2015. The objective of our follow-up review was to assess the extent of implementation, as of December 14, 2016, of the three recommendations included in the initial report.

### **Summary Conclusions and Status of Audit Recommendations**

We found that the MTA made some progress in addressing the problems identified in our prior report. However, additional actions are warranted. Of the three prior audit recommendations, two were partially implemented and one was not implemented.

### **Follow-up Observations**

#### **Recommendation 1**

*Objectively review the results of the Pilot Program, focusing on originally stated purposes and objectives. Assess performance against those purposes and determine whether to continue the program. Consult with the MTA Board regarding impact on riders.*

Status – Partially Implemented

Agency Action – Transit reviewed the changes in the following three areas at the 39 pilot stations: the average number of bags collected daily at stations, the average number of bags collected bi-weekly or monthly from tracks, and the number of station and track fires per month. The MTA’s Trash Can Free Pilot Status Report, as of March 31, 2016, revealed increases in the number of track fires at seven stations and in the amounts of trash collected from stations and/or tracks. (See Exhibit for a summary of the Status Report.) As a result of the review, in August 2016, trash cans were reinstalled at the mezzanine

levels of these stations. At the closing conference of our follow-up review, Transit officials stated that “exposed bags” were no longer an issue and are not one of the metrics used to assess the Pilot Program; although this change has not been formalized. In addition, after five years, Transit officials had not decided whether or not to continue the Pilot Program.

With regard to consulting the Board about the Pilot Program’s impact on riders, we reviewed the Board Minutes for meetings from July 2015 through November 2016 and found no indication that the Pilot Program and its impact on riders was discussed. According to an SEO official, there has been no presentation to the Board regarding the Program.

### **Recommendation 2**

*Develop clear measurable goals and measures of success before deciding to extend or expand the Pilot Program. Establish and use appropriate data collection and evaluation measures. Report on results within a definitive time period (e.g., two months) of the end of the evaluation period.*

Status – Not Implemented

Agency Action – Transit did not make any changes to the goals or measures of success. The Pilot Program started in 2011, and there is no time frame on when a decision will be made on the next steps, including formal decisions to extend or expand the Pilot Program.

### **Recommendation 3**

*Prominently post notices at all stations selected for the Pilot Program announcing the change and periodically remind customers of the stations with no trash cans.*

Status – Partially Implemented

Agency Action – We visited 23 of the 39 pilot stations (including the seven stations where the trash cans were reinstalled) and found signs at 22 of the 23 stations. Of the 22, we found 14 stations posted notices in both the agent booth area and platform area. Three stations did not have any signs in the booth area, and five stations posted no notices on the platform area. Also, since the issuance of our prior report, there have been no reminders to customers of the stations with no trash cans.

Contributors to this report were Robert C. Mehrhoff, Erica Zawrotniak, and Katrina Lau.

We would appreciate your response to this report within 30 days, indicating any actions planned to address the unresolved issues discussed in this report. We also thank MTA management and staff for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our auditors during this process.

Very truly yours,

Carmen Maldonado  
Audit Director

cc: M. Fucilli, MTA, AG  
D. Jurgens, MTA, Audit Services  
Division of the Budget

# Exhibit

## Trash Can Free Stations Pilot Program Summary by Phase (I - III) and Trash Can Free Stations Status Report as of March 31, 2016

Phase I					
	Metric	Pilot	Desired Result	Measured	Actual Result
October 2011	*Exposed Bags on Station Platforms	Yes	Decrease	No	Values at start of Phase I were not provided
	*Rodent Activity	Yes	Decrease	No	Not Provided
February 2012	*Exposed Bags on Station Platforms	Yes	Decrease	No	Not provided
	*Rodent Activity	Yes	Decrease	Yes	No Noticeable Change
	Customer Experience	Yes	Improve	No	Not Provided
	Trash Bags Collected	No	Not Applicable	Yes	Decrease
	Trash Bags Collected on Track Bed	No	Not Applicable	Yes	Mixed
	Fires	No	Not Applicable	Yes	No Increase
Phase II					
September 2012 - August 2013	*Exposed bags on Station Platforms	Yes	Decrease	No	Not Provided
	*Rodent Activity	Yes	Decrease	Yes	Mixed
	Customer Experience	Yes	Improve	No	No Surveys Provided
	Trash Bags Collected	No	Not Applicable	Yes	Decrease
	Trash Bags Collected on Track Bed	No	Not Applicable	Yes	Increase
	Fires	No	Not Applicable	Yes	Increase
Phase III					
July 2014	*Exposed Bags on Stations Platforms	Yes	Decrease	No Information	No information reported out on Phase

	*Rodent Activity	Yes	Decrease	No Information	III as of June 2015 Board meetings
	Customer Experience	Yes	Improve	No Information	
Trash Can Free Stations Status Report					
September 2012 – March 2016	*Exposed bags on Station Platforms	Yes	Decrease	Yes	Underterminable <sup>1</sup>
	*Rodent Activity	Yes	Decrease	Yes	No Noticeable Change <sup>2</sup>
	Customer Experience	Yes	Improve	No	None
	Trash Bags Collected	No	Not Applicable	Yes	Decrease
	Trash Bags Collected on Track Bed	No	Not Applicable	Yes	Decrease
	Fires	No	Not Applicable	Yes	Increase
* Stated purpose of Pilot Program.					
Metrics reported on, but not part of pilot.					
<sup>1</sup> SEO did receive information regarding exposed bags (1 exposed bag at 111th Street Greenwood on September 18, 2015 and 2 exposed bags at Metropolitan Avenue on February 27, 2016), but no other information is available for comparison. It is not captured on SEO’s Status Report. <sup>2</sup> Data for rodent activity is only collected for the 10 Stations that were part of Phase II.					