Subway Safety

Introduction

The New York City subway system is the lifeblood of our city, transporting millions of people daily and fueling the economic activity that makes New York the greatest city in the world. But the system is facing a crisis of safety and disorder that threatens its essential role in New York City life. According to a survey conducted by the Citizens Budget Commission, in 2023, fewer than half of all New Yorkers feel safe riding the subway during daytime hours – down from 86% in 2008 and 82% in 2017. At night, just 22% feel safe using the system.[1]

This perception reflects a worrying reality. Between 2019 and 2024, felony assaults in the subways have increased by 112% and misdemeanor assaults have increased by 59%. The nature of subway crime has fundamentally changed: while traditional property crimes have experienced a much slower rate of growth, subway assaults have soared and calls about disorderly behavior have doubled since 2019.
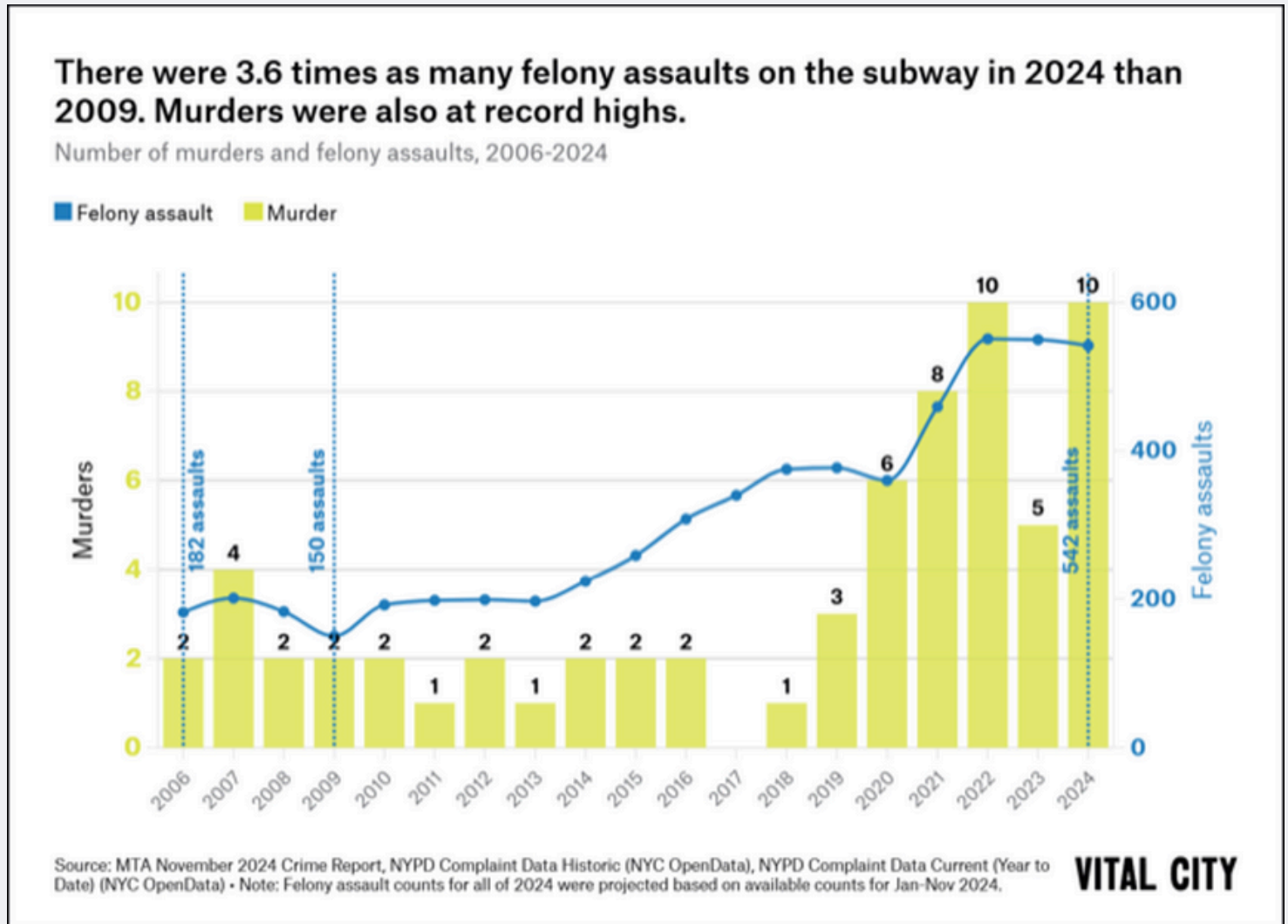
The COVID-19 pandemic both reduced ridership and intensified underlying issues — with emptier trains and greater economic hardship, more vulnerable individuals sought refuge in the subways, creating a vacuum that allowed disorder to fester. The enclosed, sometimes desolate environment of subway stations and trains magnifies the impact of each incident. Jack Maple, who helped create the NYPD's CompStat in 1994, described the disproportionate effect of subway crime on public perception of safety as follows: "A robbery on the subway is like a murder in the street. A murder in the subway is like a multiple-murder in the street. Because the subway is everybody's neighborhood."[2] In other words, even though less than 7% of New York City's violent crimes occur in the subway system, each crime underground reverberates loudly and undermines New Yorkers' confidence in the system's safety.

---

1 CBC Resident Survey, March 2024, quoted in Nicole Gelinas, "New York's Promising Experiment in Making the Subways Safer," The New York Times, August 14, 2024.
2 Peter Moskos, "Fix the Subway, Not Society, " Vital City, January 23, 2025 https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/fix-the-subway-not-society.

These trends are reflected in the chart below, which was compiled by the New York City think tank Vital City.

There were 3.6 times as many felony assaults on the subway in 2024 than 2009. Murders were also at record highs.

Number of murders and felony assaults, 2006-2024

■ Felony assault ■ Murder

Source: MTA November 2024 Crime Report, NYPD Complaint Data Historic (NYC OpenData), NYPD Complaint Data Current (Year to Date) (NYC OpenData) • Note: Felony assault counts for all of 2024 were projected based on available counts for Jan-Nov 2024.

VITAL CITY

Subway safety is a critical part of the broader public safety challenge, which Andrew Cuomo addressed in a Policy Paper dated March 10, 2025. The subway safety crisis is also a symptom of deeper systemic challenges across our city.

Subway Safety

Today's subway crime is characterized by a complex mix of mental illness, substance abuse, homelessness, and recidivism. Data compiled by Vital City presents a compelling picture of the sources of crime and disorder on the subways.[3]

⏩ Among violent subway arrestees in 2022-23, 17% had a prior violent offense on the subway in the previous six years and 70% have a prior violent offense in any location. A startling 25% of violent subway arrestees had a prior farebeating arrest.

⏩ NYPD analysis of 3,700 unique individuals arrested 2+ times in the subway system during the last two years found that among 51 individuals with 10+ arrests:

- 69% had a prior drug arrest;
- 41% were documented as homeless at some point;
- 59% were documented as having a mental health issue at some point; and
- 65% homeless or an Emotionally Disturbed Person (EDP) at some point

⏩ ·Among individuals in the top decile of overall subway arrests who also had a history of subway violence:

- 53% had a prior drug arrest;
- 58% were documented as homeless at some point;
- 80% were documented as having a mental health issue at some point; and
- 89% homeless or EDP at some point

These statistics indicate the extent to which the subway system has become the place where the city's deficiencies in social services, mental health treatment, and public safety converge in one enclosed space.

Andrew Cuomo's Gubernatorial Record on Transit Safety

As governor, Andrew Cuomo prioritized subway safety and crime reduction through enhanced policing and inter-agency collaboration.

---

[3]Aaron Chalfin, John Hall, and Paul Reeping, "Just the Facts on New York City Subway Crime," Vital City, January 30, 2025.

Adding 500 MTA police officers

This sense of priorities was reflected in his decision in 2019 to direct the MTA to add 500 additional MTA police officers to the transit system to tackle fare evasion, assaults on transit workers, and quality-of-life issues on subways and buses. Governor Cuomo remained steadfast on this position despite intense criticism from progressive officials (including two of Mayor de Blasio's appointees to the MTA board) and advocates, who argued that the additional police presence was unnecessary. At the time, these groups also called on Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio to withdraw the surge of 500 MTA, Bridge & Tunnel and NYPD officers that they had added to the public transit system earlier in 2019.[6]

As a result of Cuomo's initiative, daily uniformed presence in stations and trains increased markedly, with MTA Police conducting daily subway patrols in New York City, concentrating specifically on assisting NYPD Transit in addressing unruly behavior, other quality-of-life conditions impacting riders, and fare beating. Governor Cuomo also frequently ordered targeted surges in transit security during high-profile events or after major incidents.

These policing initiatives aimed at reassuring riders and deter crime underground. Cuomo's tenure coincided with historically low subway crime rates, and he sought to maintain this trend through strategic enforcement adjustments. Working with the NYPD, the MTA under Governor Cuomo's direction targeted "hot spots" for fare-beating and station disorder, cracking down on violations to enhance passenger safety. By 2019, major felonies in the transit system had declined 3.4% compared to the prior year.[4]

The governor credited the "omnipresence" of officers with discouraging criminal behavior and improving response times to incidents. He also supported initiatives like anti-harassment campaigns and expanding subway CCTV coverage to assist in crime prevention and investigation.

Addressing homelessness in the subway system

Earlier in 2019, Gov. Cuomo pushed the MTA to form a dedicated Homeless Task Force, charging it with finding solutions to reduce homelessness in the subways.[1] The State also began to scrutinize the effectiveness of outreach programs. The MTA Inspector General in 2019 found that New York City's subway outreach contractor, the Bowery Rescue Committee (BRC), "at best" provided minimal services and sometimes ignored people seeking help.

---

[4]New York City Police Department,"Overall Crime in New York City Hits Record Low in 2019," The Official Website of the City of New York, January 6, 2020, https://www.nyc.gov/site/nypd/news/pr0106/overall-crime-new-york-city-hits-record-low-2019#:~:text=,The%20NYPD%27s.

Subway Safety

Based on the inadequacy of existing outreach measures, Governor Cuomo piloted the idea of joint teams of law enforcement and social workers. By late 2019, this MTA/State task force recommended a multifaceted approach: continuing to deploy special outreach "emergency teams" from New York State's Office of Transitional Disability Assistance (OTDA) in the transit system, significantly expanding the MTA Police force with some officers dedicated to homeless outreach support, and working closely with New York City's Department of Homelessness Services during encounters. This model of "co-response" teams has since been adopted as an indispensable element of working with the homeless in the subway system.

A Plan to Restore Order and Safety to Our Subways

As mayor, Andrew Cuomo will implement a comprehensive plan to address crime and disorder in New York City's subway system. Andrew Cuomo's Subway Safety Plan is designed to restore rider confidence and reclaim the subways as a safe, orderly environment. The plan's key elements include:

▶▶ **Policing and Enforcement Strategies**

- Transit System for Transit Use Only
- Increase Police Presence and Strategic Deployment

▶▶ **Infrastructure, Access Control, and Environmental Design Improvements**

▶▶ **Fare Evasion and Revenue Protection Strategies**

▶▶ **Mental Health and Homelessness Response**

▶▶ **Coordinated System Response and Criminal Justice Accountability**

▶▶ **Data-Driven Deployment and Response**

▶▶ **Behavioral Science and Crime Deterrence**

▶▶ **Unified Governance and Coordination**

▶▶ **Implementation and Oversight**

Policing and Enforcement Strategies

Policing practices in the transit system have shifted over time, directly influencing crime and disorder outcomes. Repeatedly over the last 50 years, surges of policing in the subway system have succeeded in reducing crime and low-level offenses. However, when this vigilance was relaxed, crime and disorder returned.

The first step in Andrew Cuomo's Subway Safety Plan is to ensure the NYPD Transit Bureau has sufficient manpower and a clear mandate to keep the subway safe and civil, while also reducing the need for unsustainable surges.

Increased manpower alone, however, is not enough. As Peter Moskos, a professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, has noted:

> "The number of police matters less than what those police do….More police on the subway can prevent crime and disorder, but only with clear leadership and an understanding of what can and should be legally policed."[5]

Andrew Cuomo's Subway Safety plan emphasizes both the quantity and the quality of policing in the subway system. Recent experience shows the consequences of inconsistent strategies. For example, in the late 2010s, enforcement of minor offenses like turnstile-jumping was scaled back, which signaled that low-level disorder would be tolerated. This leniency was followed by an uptick in subway disorder.

In early 2022, recognizing the mistake, city and state leaders redirected police to again enforce transit rules as part of a subway safety plan. Within months, felony crime in the subways began to fall and riders reported feeling safer. The share of lapsed riders citing personal security as a reason to avoid the subway dropped from 61% to 44% after these efforts. The lesson is clear: consistent enforcement and visible, proactive policing are critical to deterring crime and reassuring the public.

Moreover, as described further below, they must work in tandem with clinicians, social workers and civilian outreach workers, since many of the issues driving violence and fear stem from mental health and addiction challenges that cannot be met with traditional policing alone.

The two guiding principles of our police enforcement strategies must be: first, the transit system exists for transit only; and, second, increasing the police presence and deploying them strategically.

[5] Peter Moskos,"Fix the Subway, Not Society," Vital City, January 23, 2025,https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/fix-the-subway-not-society.

The Transit System Exists for Transit Use Only

Restoring subway safety requires a fundamental shift in how we view and manage the transit system. For too long, the subway has been allowed to double as a shelter or hangout for people with nowhere else to go. While tolerance of this situation may have seemed compassionate, it has created an untenable environment that fails both subway riders and those seeking shelter in the system.

The subway system's core mission is transportation – moving New Yorkers safely and efficiently across the city. This means ending the practice of treating the subway as a de facto shelter or public gathering space for non-transit activity. This is not about criminalizing poverty or mental illness but about ensuring the appropriate use of critical infrastructure. Just as we wouldn't allow someone to set up residence in the middle of Fifth Avenue, we cannot allow the subway system to serve as a default homeless shelter.

Changing mindsets about what behavior is appropriate in the subway begins with a clear message: the transit system exists for transit use only. Those not using the system for transportation will be directed to leave the stations and trains. This policy will be enforced through compassionate outreach and firm but fair direction from transit personnel. The goal is not to punish individuals experiencing homelessness or mental health crises, but to restore the subway's core function while ensuring that people who need help are connected to appropriate services in proper facilities. Police officers and outreach workers will be trained in a "person-first" approach – treating all individuals with dignity and respect while also enforcing clear standards of conduct in the transit system.

Increase Police Presence and Strategic Deployment

A visible, active, and strategically deployed police presence is essential to restoring safety. Analysis shows that while most crimes in the subway occur during peak ridership hours, the risk per rider is actually highest during off-peak periods. And of the city's 472 subway stations, just 30 locations account for roughly half of all violent crimes underground.[6] This pattern necessitates a smarter, data-driven deployment of law enforcement resources.

At the time of the merger of the Transit Police into the NYPD in 1995, NYPD Transit had 4,100 officers. In recent years, the dedicated transit force dwindled to roughly 2,500 officers. In response to rising subway crime, stopgap measures have been used: in 2019, Governor Cuomo's directive led to hiring 500 new MTA police officers, and more recently, surges in subway crime have required adding NYPD officers to the transit force through mandatory overtime.

[6] Brittany Kriegstein,"NYC Subway Violence Is Concentrated at a Sliver of Stations and Times, Report Finds," Gothamist, January 24, 2025,https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-subway-violence-is-concentrated-at-a-sliver-of-stations-and-times-report-finds.

In January 2025, for example, Governor Kathy Hochul announced an initiative to deploy about 300 additional shifts of NYPD officers to patrol trains during overnight hours for six months. Because this deployment will rely primarily on overtime, the cost of maintaining this program for just six months is estimated to be $154 million, which will be split evenly by the State and the City.[7] A larger permanent force of NYPD Transit will be more efficient and effective than this stopgap approach.

Governor Hochul also deployed National Guard troops to patrol the subway system. By December 2024, the number of National Guard personnel patrolling the subways had risen to 1,000. While the public has generally welcomed this added presence, relying on the National Guard is not as valuable as adding permanent NYPD Transit officers, since National Guard troops cannot make arrests.

Under Cuomo's plan, NYPD Transit will be rebuilt to a staffing level of roughly 4,000 officers, which is about 50% more than the current permanent force level of NYPD Transit. Historically, maintaining about 4,000 transit officers (as was done in the 1990s) led to materially lower levels of subway crime, demonstrating the impact of a well-staffed transit police division on prevention.

The public strongly supports a greater police presence on the subways. According to a 2022 Quinnipiac University poll, an overwhelming majority of voters (86%) support having more police officers in the New York City subway system.[8]

---

[7] Emily Pramik and Valerie Gudino, Cost Estimates for Governor Hochul' s Overnight Subway Policing Initiative, with Brian Cain and Jacob Berman (New York City Independent Budget Office, January 2025), https://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/cost-estimates-for-govenor-hochuls-subway-policing-initiative-january-2025.pdf

[8]Michael Javen Fortner, "The Message: Order Maintenance and Its Discontents, " Vital City, October 25, 2022, https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/just-the-facts-on-new-york-city-subway-crime

But numbers alone are not enough – it matters how officers are deployed and what they do. The think tank Vital City, in its recent report of Recommendations on Subway Safety, [9] did an effective job of describing key elements of strategic deployment of police, which includes the following elements:

▶▶ Make aboveground precinct commanders operationally responsible for non-hub stations.

▶▶ Provide officers with clear guidance to address quality-of-life issues and appropriate training to effect the guidance.

▶▶ Improve officer engagement and accountability, including conducting regular oversight of assignments through frontline supervision.

▶▶ Ensure police swiftly attend to customer complaints, whether the complaints relate to conditions or crime.

▶▶ Use technology to improve police response.

Under Andrew Cuomo's Subway Safety Plan, officers will be trained to engage with individuals respectfully, but also proactively. Data shows that disorderly conduct and drug use in the subway are among the strongest predictors of future violence.[16] Officers will be trained to recognize and address these precursor offenses – not to rack up minor arrests, but to prevent escalation. At the same time, officers will use discretion and de-escalation techniques, especially when encountering individuals who are in crisis or non-violent. Consistent enforcement of transit rules will send the message that the subway is not a place of lawlessness, while careful training and oversight will ensure enforcement is fair and respectful.

---

[9] Vital City, "What to Do (and Not to Do) About Subway Safety, " Vital City, March 13, 2025, https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/what-to-do-about-subway-safety-nyc-policy-recommendations

Infrastructure, Access Control, and Environmental Design Improvements

Physical infrastructure plays a crucial role in subway safety. The system's existing turnstiles are easily bypassed, and emergency exit doors are frequently misused for entry. Nearly 400,000 riders enter the subway each day without paying.[10] While fare evasion itself costs the system nearly $300 million in 2022[11] (fare evasion on MTA buses in 2022 cost the MTA another $315 million), the impact on safety goes beyond lost revenue. Data shows that one in four violent subway offenders have a prior fare evasion arrest[12], making fare control an important tool for overall system security.

The MTA is currently investing $1.1 billion to modernize turnstiles at the 150 highest-traffic stations, covering 75% of ridership. Early results from pilot locations with new high-barrier turnstiles show 20-30% reductions in fare evasion.[13] This program must be accelerated and expanded across the entire system. While the upfront cost is substantial, the investment will pay for itself through recovered fares and enhanced safety.

Upgrading all 472 station entrances with fare control that is hard to bypass (such as full-height turnstiles or new gate designs similar to those used in London and Paris) will be expensive, but compared to the $300 million the MTA loses to fare evasion each year (not to mention the downstream effects on disorder in the subway system), it is a cost-effective and necessary investment. A modernized fare control system will both improve revenue collection and send a message that rules are enforced systemwide.

Emergency exits present another challenge, requiring a balance between safety (for evacuation), accessibility and security. These doors are often propped open or used illicitly, undermining fare control and sometimes compromising safety. The MTA should deploy staff strategically at high-risk exit doors, install alarm and door timers that discourage misuse, and enhance monitoring through cameras. Upgraded station security infrastructure, including updated and expanded camera coverage, better lighting, and improved emergency communication systems will support these efforts.

---

[10] Report of the Blue-Ribbon Panel on MTA Fare and Toll Evasion, May 2023, updated December 18, 2024 (Metropolitan Transportation Authority), https://new.mta.info/blue-ribbon-report-fare-toll-evasion.
[11]Report of the Blue-Ribbon Panel on MTA Fare and Toll Evasion (Metropolitan Transportation Authority)
[12] Vital City presentation
[13] ICYMI: Governor Hochul Announces Subway Fare Evasion Down 26 Percent in New York City, Metropolitan Transportation Authority, updated January 30, 2025, https://www.mta.info/press-release/icymi-governor-hochul-announces-subway-fare-evasion-down-26-percent-new-york-city,

Beyond fare gates and doors, the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) will guide station improvements. One of the simplest yet most effective steps is improved lighting. Bright, even lighting in stations, on platforms, and in passageways eliminates the shadowy corners where illicit activity can hide and increases natural surveillance by riders and staff. The MTA should ensure that every station is well-lit: upgrading outdated, dim lighting to modern LED systems that provide bright illumination (and have the side benefit of energy efficiency). Proper lighting on platforms and in tunnels will make potential offenders feel exposed and observed, reducing the incidence of assaults and robberies. It is a straightforward safety intervention that yields immediate benefits.

Another key infrastructure upgrade is the proliferation of surveillance technology, notably CCTV cameras. In recent years the MTA accelerated the installation of security cameras in both stations and subway cars and thousands of cameras are now in place in stations citywide.[14] Cities like London have long credited their extensive CCTV coverage in the Underground for helping keep transit crime low and swiftly solving crimes that do happen. New York's system historically has lagged in camera coverage, but the recent push has dramatically improved this.

The MTA should take full advantage of these cameras by integrating them into a state-of-the-art monitoring system that can use advanced analytics to enable an immediate response by transit police.

Station design and maintenance also influence safety. Stations that are clean, well-maintained, and free of graffiti or blight send a signal that authorities are present and in control. In the dark days of the 1970s and 1980s, many stations were filthy, poorly lit, and covered in graffiti, contributing to an atmosphere of neglect and lawlessness. It is important that the MTA continue its station modernization and rehabilitation programs – fixing broken lights, removing graffiti quickly, cleaning trash and spills regularly, and repairing broken tiles, benches, and exit gates.

---

[14] ICYMI: Safer Streets and Subway: Governor Hochul, MTA and Law Enforcement Officials Provide Update on Keeping New Yorkers Safe on the Subway Ahead of the Holidays, Metropolitan Transportation Authority, updated December 18, 2024, https://www.mta.info/press-release/icymi-safer-streets-and-subway-governor-hochul-mta-and-law-enforcement-officials,

Fare Evasion and Revenue Protection Strategies

Curbing fare evasion is a critical piece of improving subway safety and shoring up the system's finances. As noted, fare-beating has surged to unprecedented levels in recent years – an estimated 13% of subway riders (and an even higher percentage of bus riders) are now entering without paying, compared to around 5% pre-pandemic. This rampant evasion costs the MTA hundreds of millions in lost revenue and also breeds an atmosphere of rule-breaking. Enforcing fare payment is not just about money; it's about setting norms. Historically, crackdowns on fare evasion have helped restore order in the transit system and have even led to the apprehension of individuals carrying weapons or with warrants, preventing more serious crimes.

Andrew Cuomo's plan calls for a two-pronged strategy on fare evasion: invest in robust physical deterrents and modern payment systems, while reforming enforcement policies to be effective yet equitable. The subway loses $300 million in fare evasion annually. The MTA should hire 500 MTA police (the same number of MTA police that Governor Cuomo directed the MTA to hire in 2019) to monitor the turnstiles to reduce fare evasion, while it is completing the implementation of the new infrastructure in place of the existing turnstiles to stop fare evasion. On the physical side, as described above, the MTA should accelerate the installation of new high-security turnstiles and fare gates that are much harder to bypass. Station entrances will be better monitored. The ongoing roll-out of the OMNY contactless fare system opens the door to eventually implementing a proof-of-payment model in the subways, similar to many European systems – where random inspectors check that riders have tapped in, instead of gating every entry.

Second, the MTA should expand the number of human resources present in the subway system to combat fare evasion. The MTA's 2022 Blue-Ribbon Panel on Fare Evasion concluded that, "police should be out of the fare evasion equation altogether" except in cases of physical altercations or egregious misconduct. The MTA should create a team of MTA inspectors whose sole job is fare compliance.

Chronic fare-beaters who consistently flout the law will face escalating penalties – larger fines and, if necessary, criminal charges for habitual offenders who refuse to respond to civil measures. Evasion that is accompanied by assault on an employee, vandalism of equipment, or other criminal acts will continue to be prosecuted by the NYPD. The message is that everyone must pay their fare to keep the system running.

This philosophy of enforcement will be complemented by an effort to increase the use of New York City's Fair Fares program. As Andrew Cuomo noted in his Affordability Agenda, Fair Fares NYC is a city program that provides eligible New Yorkers a 50% discount on subway and local bus rides. Uptake of Fair Fares has grown, but participation remains well below the number of people eligible. As of early 2024, roughly 331,000 New Yorkers were enrolled in Fair Fares, even though about 800,000–950,000 people are eligible under the income threshold. For those who do enroll, the impact on affordability is significant.

Mental Health and Homelessness Response

As the data cited above shows, the subway safety crisis is deeply intertwined with the challenges of mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness. On any given day, the MTA estimates that between 500 and 700 homeless individuals who are in the transit system are in need of mental health treatment. These individuals often ride the trains or camp in stations because they have nowhere else to go or are in the throes of untreated psychiatric conditions. Many have cycled repeatedly between the streets, hospitals, jails, and the subways without long-term help.

Co-response engagement teams
The City and the MTA have a number of programs designed to engage with the homeless and mentally ill individuals in the subways. A number of these programs rely on a "co-response" model of creating teams including clinicians, social workers and police, which Governor Cuomo piloted in 2019. Andrew Cuomo's Subway Safety plan calls for improving the coordination among these different outreach efforts as well as increasing the resources devoted to them.

One such program is the Subway Co-Response Outreach Teams (SCOUT) program. SCOUT pairs mental health clinicians with MTA Police in the transit system. Together, these specialized teams canvass the subway system for homeless individuals and offer services such as shelter placement, medical care, and social services. The primary objective is to encourage individuals to leave the subway system and accept assistance that can lead to more stable living conditions.

A similar program called the Program for Accelerated Therapeutic Health, or PATH, was launched in October 2024 and focuses on providing accelerated therapeutic health services to homeless individuals in the subways, particularly those with mental health and substance abuse issues.[15] The PATH teams consist of DHS nurses and outreach staff working alongside NYPD transit police who conduct outreach overnight at subway stations across Manhattan from 8:00 PM to 12:00 PM. Participating police officers receive specialized training in crisis de-escalation and allow their clinical partners to take the lead once safety is assured.

---

[15] Office of the Mayor,"Mayor Adams Announces New 'Co-Response' Operation Focused on Serving More New Yorkers in Need on New York City Subways, " The Official Website of the City of New York, October 10, 2024, https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/750-24/mayor-adams-new-co-response-operation-focused-serving-more-new-yorkers-need-on#/0

Subway Safety

The theory of these "co-response" teams such as SCOUT and PATH is that the presence of police affords clinicians a greater sense of personal safety, enabling more meaningful engagement. These programs in part reflect the inability of traditional outreach programs by homelessness services organizations such as the Bowery Rescue Committee to adequately address the problem. Andrew Cuomo's plan to increase the size of NYPD Transit will facilitate the scaling of programs such as SCOUT and PATH.

These programs will be more effective if they systematically track interactions between people with serious mental illness, addiction issues or homelessness and the social service providers and police who are interacting with them. These interactions currently are not tracked in real time but should be. Whenever possible, it is important to not just remove individuals from the subway system, but to ensure they are connected to services.

Facilitate involuntary removal
The number of incidents of violence on the subways involving the seriously mentally ill raises the issue of the city's use of its authority under State Mental Health Law to involuntarily commit and inpatient psychiatric facilities individuals who pose a risk to themselves or others. Because many of these incidents involve individuals who have cycled through the criminal justice system but remain untreated for their serious mental illness, it also raises the failure of courts and prosecutors to utilize Article 730 evaluations of whether a defendant is mentally competent to stand trial. If the defendant is not mentally competent to stand trial, the court could order the defendant to be detained in a forensic inpatient psychiatric facility.

Andrew Cuomo's plan For Mental Illness, Addiction and Homelessness, to be released in the coming weeks, will address these issues in depth. For purposes of the issue of subway safety, suffice it to say that consistent application of these legal authorities – even if infrequently deployed – are an important element in keeping the subways safe and in reducing the sense of disorder that is caused by individuals who clearly need mental health support.

Coordinated System Response and Criminal Justice Accountability

The current approach to handling crime and disorder in the transit system is too often disjointed and ineffective, marked by fragmented responsibilities and a lack of follow-through. In 2024, out of approximately 6,000 arrests made in the transit system, prosecutors declined to pursue more than a third of the cases, and over 20% were dismissed outright. This resulted in a collective non-action rate of 56.1% – a significant increase from 36.7% in 2018, which jumped after the policy shifts such as the Manhattan District Attorney's decision to stop prosecuting most fare evasion cases.[16]

This lack of accountability has serious repercussions: it undermines public trust that the system will protect them, and it represents missed opportunities to intervene with offenders to prevent future harm. Essentially, more than half the time someone is arrested in the subway, nothing happens – no services, no consequences, no follow-up.
The consequences of this systemic breakdown are clear. Individuals with repeated transit-related offenses who also had frequently have histories of disruptive behavior, 36% had pending serious criminal cases at. For example, just 38 individuals arrested for assault in the time of their latest subway incident transit system last year were linked to 1,126 additional crimes across the city.[17] This pattern of fragmented response – where neither the criminal justice system nor the mental health system effectively intervenes – endangers both the public and the individuals themselves.

Addressing this challenge requires a cohesive, system-wide strategy that brings together law enforcement, the courts, and social services. First, the Mayor's office should work with the NYPD and the city's criminal justice system to create dedicated Transit Intervention Teams comprised of specialized prosecutors or units in each District Attorney's office to focus on transit cases, as well as designated judges or court parts for transit-related offenses.

These teams will develop expertise in the nuances of subway incidents (from turnstile-jumping to emotionally disturbed persons causing disturbances) and will be better equipped to craft appropriate responses – whether that's diversion to a treatment program, a specialized probation that bans an offender from the transit system or pursuing jail time for the most violent perpetrators. By having a dedicated transit crime unit, repeat offenders can be identified and tracked, and patterns (like a person's escalation from fare evasion to violence) will be flagged rather than lost in the shuffle.

---

[16] Nicole Gelinas, "New York's Promising Experiment in Making the Subways Safer, " The New York Times, August 14, 2024.
[17] Erica Brosnan, "Adams Blames Stretch of Transit Crimes on Repeat Offenders, " Spectrum News NY1, March 6, 2024, https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/mornings-on-1/2024/03/06/adams-blames-stretch-of-transit-crimes-on--surge-in-recidivism-?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

Second, the plan will implement clear, enforceable protocols for handling repeat offenders, particularly those with known mental health issues. For example, if an individual is arrested multiple times in the subway and has a documented mental illness, there should be a protocol to refer them for a psychiatric evaluation and consider involuntary commitment or mandatory outpatient treatment, rather than simply issuing another desk appearance ticket

A critical piece of a coordinated response is improved information sharing. Currently, NYPD officers, outreach workers, and even prosecutors often lack real-time access to information about an individual's past incidents or mental health history during encounters. Under this plan, when an arrest or removal occurs in the subway, relevant data will be at officials' fingertips: prior arrests (especially in transit), known mental health flags or past psychiatric holds (within the confines of privacy laws), and any active judicial orders (like an existing Kendra's Law outpatient treatment mandate or a stay-away order from the transit system).

New York City will build or enhance databases and communication channels between the NYPD, DHS (Department of Homeless Services), DOHMH (Department of Health/Mental Health), and the court system. For example, the co-response teams (SCOUT) should be able to quickly check if the person they are engaging has a history of violence or self-harm so they can act accordingly. Prosecutors should receive a report of an arrestee's transit infraction history and any information on services provided by outreach teams, to inform their decisions.

Breaking down silos between agencies will allow for a "whole person" approach – someone who commits a crime in the subway and clearly needs mental health help can be directed into care through the court process, instead of just being released with no coordination. All information sharing will be done with respect for privacy and legal constraints, but the guiding principle will be that public safety officials have the information they need to make the best decision for both public safety and the individual's well-being.

By instituting a coordinated system response, we can ensure that every arrest or removal in the subway is handled with purpose: either it results in help (for those who need treatment) or it results in proportionate accountability (for those committing crimes). No more falling through the cracks – if you break the rules or endanger others on the subway, you will face meaningful intervention of some kind. This cohesive strategy will protect riders, aid those in crisis, and hold chronic offenders accountable for their impact on the public realm.

Data-Driven Deployment and Response

Effective policing and resource allocation in the transit system demand the use of advanced data analytics and a commitment to continuous improvement. The subway is a vast system, and to deploy enforcement and interventions efficiently, we must leverage all available data to pinpoint where and when help is most needed. A detailed examination of transit crime patterns reveals key insights that should shape enforcement strategies. As noted, while most crimes occur during peak ridership hours, the risk per individual rider is actually highest during off-peak periods. Of the city's 472 stations, just 30 locations account for half of all violent crimes.[18] However, stations with the highest total number of incidents are not always those with the highest per-rider crime rate.

Complexity demands a nuanced, data-informed approach to deployment.

Under Andrew Cuomo's plan, the NYPD Transit Bureau will significantly upgrade its analytics capabilities. We will implement a transit-specific version of CompStat: a weekly or monthly transit safety review where detailed crime maps, charts, and trends are analyzed by police leadership and City Hall. Resources will be allocated not only based on overall crime volume but also on sophisticated risk analysis. This means looking at temporal trends (when crimes happen) and spatial trends (where they happen) together. For instance, if certain stations experience a spike in robberies after midnight, NYPD Transit can surge officers there during those hours even if those stations are quiet during the day.

Data-driven management will extend to how we integrate enforcement with other responses. By tracking the progress of the individuals we intervene with (through the coordinated system mentioned earlier), we can identify systemic gaps. For instance, if we notice a particular person has been arrested or removed five times in a month, data should trigger an alert to get that individual special attention (maybe through a case conference between NYPD, DHS, and DOHMH) to break the cycle. Or if a new form of fare evasion pops up (like misuse of emergency gates in a novel way), data analysis can catch it and inform a quick response (such as a design tweak or targeted patrol).

---

[18] Vital City presentation

Subway Safety

Unified Governance and Coordination

Improving subway safety and restoring the public's confidence in riding the subways requires better coordination among the numerous entities responsible for the subway system. The MTA, which is controlled by the State, runs the New York City Transit system. Although the MTA police patrol some of the major station hubs, the NYPD (mostly through NYPD Transit) is responsible for policing the rest of the subway system.

Numerous city departments, including Department of Health and Mental Health, the Department of Homelessness Services, and the NYPD are heavily engaged in the process of removing people from the subway with serious mental illness, substance issues, as well as the homeless. Finally, not-for-profit organizations provide key services to the homeless and the subway, with varying levels of accountability for performance.

All these entities would benefit from better coordination and access to an integrated data system that would support various initiatives, including a comprehensive record of interactions with the finite number of individuals who create the biggest problems for the subway system.

Implementation and Oversight

Restoring subway safety requires a sustained, results-driven approach with clear accountability. Andrew Cuomo's administration will treat subway safety as a top priority that is managed with clear goals, transparent reporting, and community engagement. To ensure the comprehensive plan is effectively implemented, we will establish a robust implementation framework that includes:

▷ **Well-Defined Success Metrics:** We will go beyond simply tracking felony crime numbers. Metrics will include rider perceptions of safety (measured by routine surveys), ridership levels (as a proxy for public confidence), response times to incidents, number of people removed from the system and connected to services, fare evasion rates, and cleanliness ratings for stations. For each initiative (e.g., number of new officers deployed, or number of people placed into mental health treatment via SCOUT), we will set target outcomes. These metrics create clear performance benchmarks for everyone involved.

Subway Safety

▶ **Regular Public Reporting:** The city will issue monthly "Subway Safety Report Cards" that detail key statistics – crimes by category, enforcement actions taken, progress on infrastructure upgrades, and other relevant metrics. Quarterly reports will more deeply analyze trends. By openly sharing data, we ensure accountability and allow the public to see where improvements are happening and where challenges remain. Transparency will build trust that the issue is being addressed head-on. It will also put pressure on all agencies to deliver results, since their progress (or lack thereof) will be visible.

▶ **Dedicated Leadership and Oversight Structure:** Andrew Cuomo will appoint a high-level Subway Safety Director who reports directly to the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety (or the Mayor) to coordinate all aspects of this plan. This official will convene regular meetings with NYPD Transit, the MTA leadership, homeless services, health department, and District Attorney representatives to break down barriers and keep everyone moving in the same direction. This role will be supported by an oversight task force that includes community representatives, transit workers' unions, rider advocates, and experts – providing a channel for feedback and an independent check on implementation. This task force can conduct site visits and issue its own progress evaluations. Community input is crucial to ensure that policy isn't being made in a vacuum.