One-Year Anniversary: Back on the Subway, 1st Time Since COVID Hit

By Josh Bloom — March 4, 2021

March 5, 2020, was my last trip on the hideous New York City subway. At that time COVID has just begun to hit the city. By any measure, the last year sucked (as does the subway) but now that I’m inoculated I’m able to ride the damn thing again. Here’s the one-year anniversary update of the trip report from last year. Things are much different now.

(March 5, 2020)

Riding the New York City subway is a rather gruesome experience on a good day. And there is no such thing as a good day. They are all bad or worse.

I’ve managed to avoid the wretched thing since the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak, but today I had no choice. Following is my trip report. I hope it goes viral.

1. The Dreaded 6 Train

Stepping onto a 6 is like stepping into some kind of Alice In Wonderland portal where everything’s a little smaller and pushed closer together. Every New York City Subway Line Ranked
New Yorkers have long been passionately arguing about which of the 36 lines that "serve" the city is the worst. It is an argument that will be going on long after peace arrives in the Middle East. My personal "favorite" is the 6 train. I hate the 6 train at the molecular level.

Many maintain that the 7 is the worst, and although I disagree I still have to give them points because this is the train that takes you to Citifield to see the Mets - an experience that is arguably as bad as the ride.

Photos: (Left) Mets fans. 34 years since the last championship. And counting. (Right) The hideous 7 train. Wall Street Journal [2]/AP (Right) The Subway Nut [3]

Report:

- The 6 was less than half full. This itself is astounding since it's normally hard enough to stuff a crouton into the damn thing.
- No masks. One minor cough. No one seemed to care.
- Estimation of face-touching – 20%
- No panhandlers - a previously unknown occurrence. Maybe they know something?

2. The Horrendous L Train
The L train is one of the most popular trains to ride. It’s also one of the most popular to complain about online. It breaks down plenty, it’s always packed, the AC is broken in half the cars, and if you don’t hang on for dear life when it careens under the East River, you’ll be sent flying into the nearest group of angry teens.

The L train was bad enough until 2019 when the Transit Authority announced a “slowdown,” a concept that must be the transportation equivalent of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, challenging the essence of the word “slow.” It has been called “the worst train in the world.” Obviously by someone who never took the 6.

Report:

- Unlike the 6, the L was crowded (1), which isn't that surprising, since a train arrives approximately once every leap year.
- Mood on the train: total indifference
- No coughing
- No masks
- Estimation of face-touching – less than 10%
- One disturbing outlier: A woman kept sticking her right index finger in her mouth, and I don't mean just a little. It appeared that she couldn't remember whether she still had her tonsils and felt compelled to check every 30 seconds. Eww.

The Apparitional Z Train

The Z train is a myth to many, but admit it: when it does show up, you can’t help but get kind of excited.

As advertised, the arrival of the Z did seem to elicit a rather otherworldly response as it pulled into
the station. Was it really there or was it just an illusion?

Could this be the ghostly Z Train emerging from the mist? Photo: J. Alex Lang [6]

It was really there. I think.

Report:

- The train was mostly empty. Except, perhaps, for invisible apparitions.
- **Three masks** - the only three I noticed on the entire trip.
- Mood: Dreamlike state, perhaps because the other passengers, real or not, couldn't believe that they were actually on the mystical Z train.
- Face touching - none
- No coughing

Urban legend has it that the Z was, in fact, named after the rock group ZZ Top.


There may be something to this legend after all. I did notice a goodly number of passengers
sprouting healthy beards. Especially the women.

**Executive Summary:**

- NYC subway riders seemed to be absolutely unconcerned about the coronavirus, which is odd because if nothing else New Yorkers are among the most neurotic inhabitants of the planet.
- But, when it hits the city – and it will, sooner rather than later, the subways, and maybe the entire city will probably look more like this...

**Waiting for the Z train in post-coronavirus times? Photo: Stacy Fortson [8]**

- Most surprising was the absence of masks. I expected to see plenty.
- Nah, check that. It was the absence of panhandlers on the 6. Where did they go? West Palm?

**NOTE:**

(1) The term "crowded" on a New York subway train is not a subjective term. It is defined as "when passenger density is such that when 50% of the time an individual sticks out his or her tongue it protrudes into another rider's ear."

**Update, March 5, 2021.**

**Crowd:**

Things were quite different one year later. The subway wasn't empty, but it sure wasn't crowded. One thing was obvious – no one was sitting next to anyone else. There was a one-seat barrier on either side of most passengers – a far cry from pre-pandemic days when every seat was taken. If you don't know the configuration of NYC subway seats, let's just say that it's a half-assed job, meaning that if you're trying to sit between two people you better have only one-half of an ass because otherwise there's no way you're going to fit into that seat unless, perhaps, you're a ballet dancer or stick figure.

Why? In a misguided effort to increase seating capacity, the Metropolitan Transit Authority apparently decided that the average subway rider weighs 85 pounds and wears size 0 clothing, hardly the profile of the typical commuter. Sitting down between two people could reasonably be considered a sexual assault in other areas of the country.

**Masks:**

*Everyone on every train I had the displeasure of riding on was wearing a mask. No exceptions. Even a drug-addled woman who came onto one train to sing for money (or maybe it was the screeching brakes, hard to tell) wore one, although it was situated near her navel.*
The 6 Train:

The dreaded 6 train, aka Satan's Spawn, wasn't even crowded, which is nothing less than a miracle. But it still sucked. The arrival signs in the stations were either out of order or gave inaccurate information. For example, the sign would say that the next train was two minutes away, but we all knew that a flotilla of tap-dancing albino elephants was more likely to pull into the station within two minutes than the 6.

But it was OK:

The mood was different. People seemed to be much more relaxed, perhaps comforted that with three fantastic vaccines now available this disaster was going to start winding down soon. Thank you, Pfizer, Moderna, and J&J. You guys were magnificent.

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: https://www.acsh.org/news/2021/03/01/one-year-anniversary-last-subway-ride-covid-hit-15362

Links
[6] https://www.flickr.com/photos/jalexlang/38138546842/in/photolist-217b2fs-21gMD9v-Z1nbyQ-23KsNeC-Z24LXw-GJKs68-2bmcG3d-WUPcYg-N3ijZL-2dVxjik-2fmAnrw-2cUU7Qa-24pk6Tx-23AHJjN-24aJOyS-23sBAYc-28Le1QT-HstUxu-2dq11LE-VbTe7f-Rut4x5-MxJZm-23qnaTr-2bTFHqP-22fiz3N-2eb4oMJ-R6nFhB-28T9Zif-21gKgSy-CvYKDN-QHmZQY-SXNMdQ-29NJUl1-2b615Sqq-MZPfBN-DJNxgT-HPKXXev-2aZuFWM-H9Audi-269Y9k5-NK69d4-CLD3sM-ZXPSHV-ZAji5No-Eh2rUv-GnXZTD-21iQbo4-25PnjQ-QAdJlT-291cboR