



January 5, 2021

Mayor Bill de Blasio  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

I write to both express my appreciation for your and your team's ongoing partnership on transit issues, and to raise a couple issues of importance that I hope can be acted on with urgency.

First, thank you for the close working relationship between New York City Transit and the NYPD. The partnership is invaluable to us.

As you know, security issues in the transit system have been particularly challenging over the last year. Fortunately, NYPD Transit Bureau Chief Kathleen O'Reilly announced several weeks ago that the Transit Bureau is back to full strength after many of its officers were reassigned during the summer protests. We are grateful for their return, as are our customers and employees.

Having restored a full contingent of officers to the transit system, however, I believe we need a still greater uniformed presence throughout the subway system and buses alike.

Over the last several weeks, we've seen a spate of troubling attacks on our customers and workers, including but not limited to:

- A station agent threatened and pushed to the tracks on the G line
- A station agent beaten
- A bus operator beaten
- A bus operator threatened and attacked by a perpetrator who also broke bus windows
- Multiple shoving incidents
- Six separate incidents of violent assaults on women at the Morgan L station in Bushwick

In some recent cases, good Samaritans have taken it upon themselves to pursue and restrain perpetrators until police arrived. I know you agree that, while we are grateful for their actions, this is extremely dangerous.

At New York City Transit, we know that the solution to safety and security challenges is not one-size-fits-all, and is not just always about more policing. Which is why we have taken an “all-of-the-above” approach to improving safety and security in our system. Here are some examples:

- To address the issue of recidivist criminals using our system to commit crimes and prey upon our customers, we worked with elected leaders to craft and pass legislation that would ban some career criminals from the transit system for a limited amount of time.
- When the subway system was deserted during the first wave of the pandemic, and MTA police and NYPD officers were out sick or quarantined, we hired uniformed security to act as additional eyes and ears in our system.
- As crime numbers spiked, we began collecting and reporting crime data in our system for the first time.
- As worker assaults have spiked, we have taken many steps, including tracking and reporting this data weekly (you can find the latest numbers [here: https://new.mta.info/safety-and-security/nyc-t-employee-assault-data](https://new.mta.info/safety-and-security/nyc-t-employee-assault-data)) and working with the DA’s office to hold perpetrators accountable to the greatest degree possible.

While these steps have been undoubtedly helpful, I believe the best way to ensure the safety of our customers and employees is to take a preventative approach, which places an emphasis on police presence. It is crucial that those who consider committing crimes see a uniformed presence in the system. In a best case, this provides a measure of deterrence, but, failing that, it helps ensure a swifter response. We also know that a greater uniformed presence is of critical importance to our riders: in customer surveys completed throughout 2020, additional uniformed police ranked as one of their highest priorities.

I ask that you please consider adding additional officers and resources to the NYPD Transit Bureau budget, or reassigning additional police from other areas to the transit system, or both. As our city starts to recover from the pandemic, it is of utmost importance that our customers feel safe, secure, and confident. Of course, I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and other members of your team to discuss this priority.

Adjacent to the issue of policing is the mental health crisis in the city, and by extension, in our transit system. On this front, I also seek your assistance. As always, our shared priority is ensuring a safe and secure environment for everyone in the system. Part of this important work includes connecting homeless and mentally ill New Yorkers, who seek refuge in the subway, with appropriate services.

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated our city’s homelessness and mental health crisis. I know these are issues that are paramount for you and your team, and I thank you for your focus on them. Sadly, these are challenges that have only worsened in the transit system in recent weeks. Just in the last month, we have experienced multiple instances of violent assaults, including one homicide, involving individuals suffering from mental health challenges. In stations in Upper Manhattan and on the Lower East Side, hundreds of needles are being disposed of regularly on the platform and on the track bed. And, just last week, morning rush hour trains

were held up for some time while police had to engage with an individual on the roadbed who refused to leave the right-of-way.

There have also been multiple suicides and attempted suicides over the last several weeks. These incidents are devastating to individuals, heartbreaking for families, and incredibly traumatic for customers and workers who witness these terrible events.

One thing we know that can be immediately done to help address this crisis is to ensure that city agencies are authorized and equipped to render services in subway stations. This is not currently the case. To date, the 311 system does not identify our stations as locations where help can be sent. Instead, an operator directs the caller to dial 911. While 911 is an appropriate solution in some cases – particularly when someone is in immediate danger – it is not always the best solution. We have been in talks with your team for years urging that this issue be resolved, and thus far have not made significant progress. The good news is that we believe this is a very easy technical fix for your 311 teams and can be implemented nearly immediately at your direction.

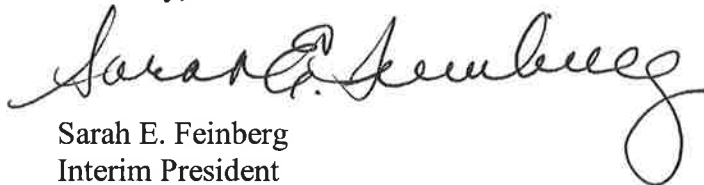
Anyone encountering a mentally ill, emotionally disturbed, or otherwise threatening person in our system should have the ability to call 311 and successfully report the issue, so that a team of homeless and/or mental health experts can be deployed to the station to offer assistance. There is no doubt the city can better serve the vulnerable homeless and mentally ill population by connecting them with trained professionals, instead of forcing bystanders to call 911, which inevitably results in repetitive police action – the individuals are ejected from the system only to return the moment police leave.

We, of course, stand ready to assist on this challenge and any other shared challenge, and look forward to continuing to work closely with your team.

In closing, I want to reiterate my appreciation and support for the work of the NYPD, and in particular the NYPD Transit Bureau. Commissioner Shea and Chief O'Reilly have been excellent partners to us, and we appreciate greatly their focus, their attention, and their diligence.

Thank you again for your partnership in keeping the subways safe, and please do not hesitate to be in touch to talk through these issues at any time.

Sincerely,



Sarah E. Feinberg  
Interim President

cc: Commissioner Dermot F. Shea  
Chief Kathleen O'Reilly