

Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee

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Study Finds That MTA Mismanages Customer Communications in Several Areas

The Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (PCAC) today released "[Mixed Signals: An Assessment of the MTA's Handling of Customer Inquiries Received Via Mail, Phone, and Web](#)". The report details the results of a comprehensive examination of the MTA's handling of customer inquiries, and highlights several deficiencies in customer communications policies and practices at the MTA and its operating agencies.

The PCAC corresponded and spoke with key MTA and agency officials regarding the structure and performance of the telephone and correspondence units at each agency and policies surrounding the provision of information over the Internet. The PCAC also spoke with officials from other major transit agencies. In addition, travel-information inquiries were made of agency telephone and correspondence units to determine whether performance and quality control data provided by the MTA actually bore out in practice from the customer's perspective.

The report found wide disparities in telephone waiting and correspondence hold times among the MTA's three transit agencies: the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR); Metro-North; and NYC Transit. Metro-North's performance rated highest, being the only agency to consistently meet its telephone waiting and correspondence turnaround goals 100 percent of the time, even though the agency has the most stringent performance goals of the three MTA transit agencies. NYC Transit was found, on average, not to meet its telephone waiting goal, and was also faulted for allowing fully ten-percent of its telephone and written inquiries (approximately 800 phone calls per day and 9 letters per week) to go uncovered by any performance goal. The LIRR was found, on average, not to meet its telephone waiting goal, even though this goal (90 seconds) is 50 percent longer than the industry standard (60 seconds).

Metro-North also performed best in the PCAC's telephone and correspondence survey, responding to calls, letters, and customer comment cards in an accurate and timely manner. One call to the LIRR resulted in a 14-minute wait on hold, and several calls to NYC Transit received busy signals. Worse, both LIRR and NYC Transit simply did not respond to several written customer inquiries.

In terms of the Internet, the study found the MTA to be behind the industry curve for not accepting e-mail communications from customers, since many other major transit

agencies already do accept customer e-mails. As well, the provision of LIRR, Metro-North, and NYC Transit travel information on the MTA website was found to be poorly integrated, and the address for the website, itself, (<http://www.mta.nyc.ny.us/>), found to be too long and cumbersome for the average customer to remember.

The PCAC attributes most of the problems found in the study to the fact that the MTA has never implemented an all-agency customer communications policy, instead allowing each agency to succeed or fail in this area on its own.

At a press conference held by the PCAC to discuss the results of the report, PCAC Executive Director Beverly Dolinsky called on the MTA to improve the performance of its agencies in the area of customer inquiries, saying, "It is unacceptable to find such wide disparities in the way that customer inquiries are handled by different parts of the MTA family. Metro-North has set the standard for quality in customer communications, and the MTA should work to ensure that LIRR and NYC Transit meet this same standard. The MTA should also follow the lead of most other major public transit agencies and begin allowing its agencies to correspond with customers via e-mail. It is the year 2000, after all."

The full report may be downloaded via the below link, or may be requested directly from the PCAC.

[DOWNLOAD THE REPORT](#) (PDF format).