



PCAC

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Oversight Hearing on Riding Safely: Addressing the Dangers of Subway Surfing New York City Council Testimony November 18, 2024

Good afternoon and thank you for accepting this testimony on behalf of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC). PCAC was created by the state legislature in 1981 to be *The Official Voice of Riders* on subways, buses, the LIRR, Metro-North, and Staten Island Railway.

We appreciate your holding this hearing on subway surfing, a deeply upsetting and deadly trend that must be stopped. We're glad to see the MTA taking steps to reduce subway surfing, including working with social media companies to have videos taken down before they can influence young people; launching an advertising campaign with students to publicize the dangers of subway surfing; and working with the NYPD to limit repeat surfers. We are also glad to hear about the steps the NYPD is taking to use drones to capture footage of those responsible.

We're disturbed that the average age of subway surfers is just 14 years old, with some children as young as nine. These are young lives being lost to a dangerous trend, and it's clear that current efforts are failing. It is reprehensible that some of the teens are led to this deadly activity by older New Yorkers who should know better. When caught, they should be charged with endangering the welfare of a minor at the very least.

To combat subway surfing, it's essential to use messengers that young people listen to most. We urge the Department of Education—often the city agency that young people interact with most—to share the dangers of subway surfing with at-risk students and monitor those who may be skipping school or participating in unsafe activities, and to work with parents to ensure that children are not falling into this deadly activity. Children trust their teachers; therefore, teachers should have all the tools they need to educate their classrooms on the life-threatening dangers of subway surfing.

The “ride inside, stay alive” campaign was a great start, but more needs to be done to share the dangers of subway surfing. Harsher language is clearly necessary—“subway surfing kills” would be more in line with the reality—and sharing the stories of young people killed or injured by subway surfing may help humanize this dangerous activity. We suggest putting stickers or posters on the doors that lead between train cars and at the end of train sets saying that “subway surfing kills— it killed [subway surfing victim name], age 13” may help shock and dissuade would-be surfers by showing the real-life victims close to their own ages. Showing the graphic aftermath of subway surfing incidents that take limbs and lives may also make an impact.

We also know that young people don't always listen to authority figures, but they may listen to other young people or influencers and public figures they respect. The MTA made a good effort in its audio campaign in stations recorded by students, but it's also important to take to social media and have figures already listened to by teenagers post about the dangers and stupidity of subway surfing.

Lastly, we urge the MTA to look at physical ways and engineering methods to stop subway surfing, potentially by altering the design of train cars. Some ideas include adding sensors on top of subway cars to quickly alert train crews when surfers are present, and making it more difficult for people to access the top of the train from between cars and the rear of the train. The Transit Tech Lab may be a good partner to further explore options.

Thank you for taking this important topic seriously.

CC:
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