



THE CONDITION OF PUBLIC BATHROOMS IN THE NEW YORK CITY SUBWAY SYSTEM COULD BE IMPROVED

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New York City Transit Authority (NYC Transit) serves an average of 3.7 million subway riders per day across 472 stations. The agency maintains 125 public bathrooms located at 65 different stations for customers to use during their travel. Unlike the 24/7 subway system, the bathrooms are open from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., with an hour-long closure for midday cleaning.

Although heavily used, for most transit riders the public bathrooms are facilities of last resort; subway customers tend to use them in urgent circumstances when they have no time to leave the system to find another public or private facility. For many people, a public bathroom is a necessity rather than an optional amenity, but such facilities can be hard to find. A recent article published by the New York City Council stated that public bathroom availability is limited in New York City, with only about 1,100 public bathrooms for 8.6 million residents, or approximately one per 7,820 residents.¹ The NYC Transit subway system has 125, the equivalent of 11% of those city facilities.

The Office of the MTA Inspector General (OIG) sought to determine whether the subway bathrooms were reliably clean, safe, and available for public use. From December 2024 to April 2025, OIG staff members visited 32 of the 125 bathrooms to observe their condition. As part of this review, OIG also evaluated the effectiveness of NYC Transit's procedures to identify needed repairs and address deficiencies promptly.

A. Summary of Findings and Recommendations

- **Bathrooms were generally functional and available for public use.** OIG found that 27 of the 32 bathrooms visited were open and relatively clean; in addition, all 27 had working plumbing. The remaining five bathrooms were closed for various reasons, such as construction activity blocking the bathroom entrance. OIG found that the open bathrooms were frequently used.

¹ The [article was published](#) on April 10, 2025.

- **Some bathrooms would benefit from more attention and maintenance.** OIG found that 23 of the 27 bathrooms surveyed lacked at least one basic amenity – such as toilet paper or soap – or had a deficiency, such as litter, graffiti, or a broken stall lock. Defective locks are especially concerning because they can render the stall unsafe and essentially unusable. NYC Transit should reinstruct employees regarding their responsibilities to ensure the bathrooms are fully operational and in a better state of repair.
- **Some bathrooms had toilets without seats.** While the 27 bathrooms OIG visited had functioning toilets, 10 of 37 toilets did not have toilet seats. OIG observed these seatless, stainless-steel toilets in both men’s and women’s bathrooms.² As discussed below, toilets without seats contravene relevant plumbing codes and raise public health concerns. OIG did not receive a consistent explanation from NYC Transit as to why the agency has a lower standard for the toilets installed in some locations. Notably, OIG observed existing hardware on the stainless-steel toilets that would make the addition of toilet seats a simple, inexpensive fix. NYC Transit should include toilet seats in its standards for subway bathrooms and should add seats to all stainless-steel toilets as part of the agency’s routine maintenance cycle.
- **Needed repairs should be consistently categorized and prioritized to optimize resources.** OIG reviewed six months of bathroom inspection and repair data and identified several instances in which similar problems or defects were assigned different levels of severity – and therefore varied in the urgency of their repair. Two separate NYC Transit operational units categorize bathroom repair needs using a subjective rating system, which can result in too much or too little attention being given to a problem. To the extent possible, NYC Transit should ensure that similar defects are categorized consistently.
- **NYC Transit provides insufficient information to customers.** OIG found that the agency website does not give subway customers adequate detail regarding the locations of the 125 bathrooms and their availability. On three occasions, OIG arrived at a station to find that the bathrooms were closed, yet that information was not reflected on the NYC Transit website or posted on the locked bathroom doors.³ In addition, OIG found that there was little to no signage as to the location of bathrooms in the stations. OIG found that the location information on the website could be more descriptive, e.g., regarding which station entrance is closest to the bathroom.

² These stainless-steel toilets are of the kind that are commonly found in U.S. jails and prisons.

³ These three visits included two male, two female, and one unisex bathroom, equating to five bathrooms in total.

B. Agency Response

OIG provided NYC Transit with a draft of this Report in November 2025 and requested comment on the nine recommendations. A response was received in January 2026 indicating acceptance of most of the nine recommendations. NYC Transit's specific responses are summarized in the Recommendations section at the end of this Report.

II. BACKGROUND

During the COVID-19 pandemic, NYC Transit closed the subway bathrooms for health and safety reasons. Prior to reopening the bathrooms beginning in January 2023, the agency performed necessary maintenance and upgrades to the facilities. NYC Transit was not required to bring the bathrooms up to current standards, including those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, because the upgrades represented a refresh and not an alteration.⁴

A. Work Groups Responsible for Maintenance and Inspections

Two divisions in NYC Transit's Department of Subways are responsible for the maintenance, inspections, and corrective actions needed to keep the bathrooms in a state of good repair. First, staff members in Stations Environment and Operations (Stations) are responsible for cleaning and maintaining the public bathrooms daily to keep them sanitary, secure, and available for public use. According to NYC Transit guidelines, during the regularly scheduled closure from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m., Station Cleaners should wipe down all surfaces, mop and disinfect floors, remove graffiti, and replenish supplies such as toilet paper and hand soap. Additionally, light cleaning should occur daily at 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m., when these items should also be replenished as needed. Station Cleaners are also responsible for ensuring the bathrooms are clean and fully stocked prior to opening in the morning and before closing at 7:00 p.m. Depending on the size or activity level of a station, Station Cleaners may be assigned to one station or several smaller, less active stations. When scheduled at one location for their entire tour, Station Cleaners are responsible for conducting periodic checks throughout the day to maintain adequate supplies and cleanliness. When assigned to multiple stations, it is part of their duty to check the bathroom upon entering the station.

Station Supervisors are supposed to conduct daily inspections of the station, following a detailed checklist, including any public bathrooms at the location. Additionally, the supervisors are supposed to note any defects requiring repair in the station and in public bathrooms – e.g.,

⁴ Per ADA Standards, "Alterations" do not include normal maintenance, such as reroofing, painting, or changes to mechanical and electrical systems.

leaks, clogged toilets, broken tiles, and malfunctioning light fixtures – and document them in the Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) database.⁵ NYC Transit uses EAM to schedule inspections and to enter, track, and issue work orders for defects identified throughout the subway system.

The second relevant division is Facilities Station Maintenance (Facilities), which reviews and repairs the defects entered in EAM by Stations or reported over the six-wire.⁶ Upon confirming that a defect exists, Facilities personnel are tasked with creating a work order in EAM to schedule the repair and document their progress. When the job is completed, Facilities staff close the work order.

III. FINDINGS

To document the condition of public restrooms in the subway system, OIG conducted a survey of 32 bathrooms (approximately 26% of the 125 bathrooms) across 14 subway stations from December 2024 to April 2025. OIG encountered five bathroom closures and were only able to collect data on 27 of the 32 bathrooms visited.

A. The Bathrooms Were Generally Functional

OIG evaluated several key elements before determining whether a given bathroom was in acceptable condition. The basic components that needed to be in good working order included at least one functional sink, toilet, urinal (if applicable), and light fixture. Other amenities OIG reviewed, while not essential, are expected by the public and serve the purpose of improving hygiene; these included toilet paper, hand soap, and hand dryers and/or paper towel dispensers. OIG developed a checklist of such items and used it to assess each of the 27 locations.⁷

OIG found that all 27 bathrooms that were open were generally in working order: available for use and reasonably clean. The plumbing for at least one toilet in each bathroom was operating well. Further, most of the bathroom stalls had working locks. In some cases, one of multiple stalls had a broken lock. OIG deemed the bathroom open and available for use if it contained at least one stall with a working lock. In a positive finding, OIG observed that the bathrooms were mostly clean and functional. (*See Photos #1 and #2.*)

⁵ This report uses the term “defects” to describe what NYC Transit calls “nonconformities.”

⁶ The six-wire is NYC Transit’s emergency communication system. When the Operational Control Center learns of a serious condition or incident, the six-wire allows them to notify the appropriate NYC Transit departments and emergency services agencies (e.g., NYPD, FDNY).

⁷ OIG used the criteria from a 2024 report from NYC Council’s Oversight and Investigations Division as a starting point for developing our checklist and then made certain adjustments.



Photos #1 and #2:
The clean and
fully functional
men's bathroom
at the 14th Street
Station on the
A/C line.

B. Bathrooms Could Still Benefit from More Attention

The report by the NYC Council's Oversight and Investigations Division emphasized the significance of improving the condition of park restrooms. The report suggested that prioritizing the maintenance and enhancement of these restrooms would help New York City's parks remain enjoyable for all residents and visitors. Additionally, in 2001, this same Division conducted a more extensive review of NYC bathrooms which included NYC Transit subway stations. This earlier report found that 100% of the 52 subway station bathrooms reviewed were in unsanitary condition, and many had missing amenities, such as hand soap and toilet paper. While OIG found that NYC Transit has improved its maintenance of its bathrooms since this report was issued 24 years ago, many of the same issues persist.

In its survey, OIG found that 23 of the 27 bathrooms lacked basic amenities or needed some repair to make the facility fully functional and acceptable to customers. Specifically, the survey revealed the following deficiencies:

- 14 bathrooms lacked a garbage container
- 13 of 37 toilet stalls had no toilet paper
- 10 of the 37 toilets lacked seats
- 8 bathrooms had litter on the floor or elsewhere
- 6 stalls had broken locks
- 6 stalls were marked with graffiti
- 5 dispensers had no hand soap
- 1 hand dryer was broken
- 1 light fixture was not working

As previously mentioned, NYC Transit’s guidelines require Station Cleaners to make three separate checks to ensure bathrooms are equipped with the necessary amenities: in the morning, at midday, and in the afternoon. Despite this schedule, OIG observed multiple bathrooms where supplies were not available, potentially rendering these facilities unusable to some customers.

Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) and Metro-North Railroad (MNR) have developed an efficient way to collect input on the state of their bathrooms: In 2024, the agencies posted QR codes on the walls of station and train bathrooms.⁸ Customers can scan the QR code and complete an online survey to make comments or report issues regarding cleanliness or missing amenities. LIRR staff informed OIG that customers can also upload a picture to help LIRR personnel locate the defect when inspecting the bathroom. This customer feedback allows LIRR to learn of concerns at a specific location in real time and address them promptly.

Although NYC Transit already provides customers with avenues to make complaints about the subway system generally, the use of QR codes would permit the agency to get information from customers in real time regarding the state of their public bathrooms and make prompt repairs or remedy an unsanitary or unsafe condition. NYC Transit should consult with LIRR and MNR about their use of QR codes and consider affixing them to a wall in the bathrooms.

C. Some Toilets Lacked Seats

In American public bathrooms, each toilet typically has a seat attached to the top of the toilet bowl. This hinged piece of metal, wood, or plastic allows a customer to sit on the toilet without directly touching the toilet bowl. New York State and City plumbing codes, using the term “water closets” to refer to toilets, require that “water closets shall be equipped with seats of smooth, non-absorbent material. All seats of water closets provided for public, or employee toilet facilities shall be of the hinged open-front type.”⁹ Such requirement does not apply unless a new bathroom is constructed or an existing one is extensively renovated. However, the code defines the standard that is expected and that standard includes toilet seats.

⁸ A Quick Response or QR code is a two-dimensional barcode that stores information, such as website addresses, text, contact details, or Wi-Fi credentials, in a grid of pixels.

⁹ NYS Plumbing Code, Sec. 425.3. The NYC code includes identical language.

Of the 37 toilets OIG observed, 10 were made of stainless steel and lacked a toilet seat. (See Photo #3, below.) These toilets were in the men's and women's bathrooms at 125 Street (4/5/6 lines), 161 Street (4/B/D lines), Jackson Heights-Roosevelt Avenue (E/F/M/R lines), Jamaica 179th Street (F line), and the men's bathroom at Forest Hills (E/F/M/R lines). Each of these 10 toilets had two capped bolt assembly holes where a seat could be attached.



Photo #3 (left): A stainless-steel toilet without a seat in the women's bathroom at 161st Street on the 4 line.

Photo #4 (right): A porcelain toilet with a seat in the women's bathroom at Hudson Yards on the 7 line.

NYC Transit officials gave varying explanations as to why some toilets did not have seats. One common response was that the seats had been removed to reduce vandalism. While this may be the case, OIG found no evidence of toilet seat vandalism at the locations that currently have stainless-steel toilets. In reviewing the EAM database and additional data provided by Facilities, OIG could not find documentation of repeated toilet repairs, vandalism, or replacements at those locations. A Facilities official also told OIG that the type of toilet installed in bathrooms is based on availability; that is, the agency will install any type of toilet that it has in inventory.

NYC Transit has installed different types of equipment in its public bathrooms throughout the system. Notably, Hudson Yards, with the newest bathrooms, has porcelain toilets and seats, which adhere to current plumbing codes. (See Photo #4, above.) Ultimately, OIG could not determine why, or for what period, NYC Transit chose to install stainless-steel toilets, and why those toilets in our sample did not have seats installed.

Toilet seats are not a luxury but rather a necessity, as explained by Hugo Aguilar, senior vice president of Codes and Standards at The International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO), in an article published in 2024: “Open front seats and elongated toilet bowls for public restrooms reduce the risk of users coming into contact with possible

contamination from previous users.”¹⁰ Notably, a BBC article also stated that according to a 2023 research poll, “around 63% of Americans sit down when they use a public toilet.”¹¹ OIG is concerned that the lack of toilet seats will make a public bathroom less sanitary for customers to use.

Installing seats on the small percentage of toilets that currently lack them would require minimal cost and effort and would improve hygiene and customer satisfaction. In one privately maintained bathroom at Times Square-42 Street Station, OIG observed hardware on the stainless-steel toilets that would easily allow toilet seats to be installed, as shown in Photo #5 below. This demonstrates that it is possible to affix a toilet seat to a stainless-steel toilet.¹²



Photo #5: A stainless-steel toilet with a plastic seat affixed to it in a unisex bathroom.

D. Defects Were Not Categorized Consistently and Appropriately

When NYC Transit Subways identify defects, they categorize them into five different severity levels. Each severity level has a different response time associated with it, as Figure 1 shows.

¹⁰ “[What is the purpose of an open-front toilet seat?](#)” Fox 4 KC, October 13, 2024. For additional discussion, see remarks by Lynne Simnick, Director of Code Development for IAPMO, [Slate](#), April 23, 2013, and “[‘Open front’ toilet seats serve an important purpose you probably don’t know about.](#)” *NY Post*, Brooke Kato, October 15, 2024.

¹¹ Article published on August 18, 2025, titled “[Can you catch a disease from toilet seats?](#)” citing a survey by YouGov.com.

¹² Because this bathroom is serviced by a private developer, it was not included in the sample of NYC Transit bathrooms that OIG reviewed.

Figure 1. Severity Ratings for Categorizing Subway Asset Defects

Severity Rating	Description	Response Time Required
Level 1	Catastrophic hazard	3 hours
Level 2	Hazard that may affect safety, security, or revenue	24 hours
Level 3	A severity level 2 defect that is made safe but not completed	30 days
Level 4	Hazards that are not safety- or security-related	60 days
Level 5	Non-safety work that requires a longer duration to complete	Monitor only

Source: NYC Transit Bulletin No. 012-24.

Both Stations and Facilities can enter information about the condition of assets into the EAM database. Stations personnel are supposed to enter the results of their daily cleanings and inspections (e.g., defective lights, inoperable toilets). Once this information is entered, the system forwards it to Facilities. Facilities staff are then tasked with evaluating each reported defect, confirming or adjusting its severity rating, and creating a work order for the necessary repair. Once the work is completed, Facilities should enter any comments, photos, or supporting documentation into EAM and designate the work order as completed. In some cases, information about defects may be relayed to Facilities more directly; for instance, a defect rated severity level 1 must not only be entered into EAM immediately but must also be communicated over the six-wire to ensure that the hazardous condition is addressed in its required response time of just three hours.

OIG reviewed EAM data from October 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025, and identified several similar defects that had been categorized at different severity levels. For example, the condition of a clogged toilet was rated differently in various locations: once at level 2 (response time of 24 hours) and the other at level 4 (response time of 60 days).

Stations and Facilities personnel told OIG that these inconsistencies are primarily caused by the subjectivity of the rating system when applied by numerous NYC Transit personnel with varied backgrounds and training. These factors can result in employees rating a similar defect differently. More generally, the two divisions may have differing perspectives on how significantly a defect might affect customers' experience and thus may assign the defect a different severity rating when entering it into EAM.

Inaccurate defect ratings can have a variety of impacts. If a less severe defect is “over-categorized” – that is, documented as more serious than it really is – this might cause Facilities staff and resources to be diverted away from a more critical condition elsewhere. Conversely, if a significant defect is given an inappropriately low severity rating, it will not be addressed and repaired as quickly as NYC Transit standards require.

OIG found that the Department of Subways’ current guidelines lack adequate instructions on how to rate defects identified in public bathrooms. NYC Transit should establish a standard methodology for rating defects and documenting them in EAM to ensure that the appropriate priority and resources are given to repairing each defect. In a positive development, OIG learned that Stations and Facilities have begun working together to ensure the rating of defects is completed more accurately and consistently.

E. Customer Communication Was Insufficient

OIG found that NYC Transit did not give subway customers adequate detail regarding the specific location of bathrooms and their availability or location.

1. Bathroom Availability

On three occasions, OIG staff arrived in a subway station to evaluate its bathrooms but discovered that they were closed; however, the MTA website listed the facilities as open. Additionally, at two of the three locations no “*Out of Order*” sign was posted, and the third bathroom was inside a construction zone, clearly inaccessible to the public for an extended period of time. Upon reviewing bathroom complaints received by NYC Transit from September to December 2024, OIG found that there were few – just 27 in total – but 30% of them concerned the bathroom closures.

NYC Transit’s Customer Experience department is responsible for all digital content channels, including what is posted on the MTA website. The website includes a page entitled “Bathrooms in Subway Stations,” which provides customers with specific details about the public bathrooms, including when they are open, when they are closed for cleaning, and – perhaps most importantly – which stations have bathrooms. When a Stations manager or supervisor learns that a bathroom is going to be taken out of service, it is their responsibility to inform management in Stations, who would then inform Customer Experience. Customer Experience staff members are responsible for removing the bathroom listing from the website until further notice.

In discussing this process with both Stations and Customer Experience personnel, OIG learned that the procedure is in place and understood by both groups. However, Stations does not always inform Customer Experience when a bathroom is taken out of service or reopened to the public; this lack of communication prevents Customer Experience from keeping the website up to date.

2. Bathroom Locations

In preparation for its site visits, OIG consulted the bathroom webpage to find the locations of the selected facilities. However, the location information was not as descriptive as it could have been. For example, the website did not state whether a bathroom was near a station entrance – and if so, which entrance – or instead could be found in the middle of the station. In addition, customers with certain medical conditions might rely on the MTA website when planning their trips and knowing the location of a working bathroom is of significant concern to them. These customers should be able to gather all the information they need before leaving home and that information should be both accurate and complete. This is especially important because OIG found that there was little to no signage as to the location of bathrooms in the stations.

The shortage of public bathrooms in New York City is well documented and often lamented by its residents, tourists, elected officials, and advocacy groups. While NYC Transit is not responsible for filling this gap, the facilities it provides to subway users are an important amenity for millions of people each day. Moreover, others dependent on these facilities include individuals with medical conditions and marginalized subway customers, such as people with low incomes, who may not be welcome at businesses requiring a purchase before allowing use of their toilet facilities. NYC Transit is doing its part in meeting this public need. However, because the need is significant, when a bathroom lacks supplies, appears unsanitary, or is unexpectedly out of service, this shortcoming presents a challenge for people who consider these facilities to be necessities rather than luxuries. OIG has identified several opportunities for improvement, as outlined below. By building on its considerable efforts thus far, NYC Transit can keep its 125 bathrooms fully functional and in line with customer expectations.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. NYC Transit Stations should reinstruct Station Cleaners via a notice or bulletin that bathrooms should be checked regularly and supplies should be replenished as needed.

Agency Response: Accept. “The Station Division will reissue an updated bulletin by end of Q1 2026 to reinforce the requirement for Station Cleaners to regularly inspect restrooms and replenish supplies as needed to maintain cleanliness and service standards.”

2. NYC Transit should consider the use of posted QR codes so that customers can give real-time feedback to Stations when a bathroom needs to be cleaned or resupplied.

Agency Response: Accept. While the agency agreed to consider using QR codes, the determination was made that no further action is deemed necessary. “The department of Stations maintains multiple channels through which customers can report restroom conditions in real time. These tools offer effective and accessible means for customers to provide real-time feedback. Any further duplication of systems may create confusion and slow down response times.”

3. NYC Transit Facilities should ensure that the default design standard for newly installed or replaced toilets includes a seat.

Agency Response: Accept. “When Construction & Development (C&D) undertakes projects that impact the public bathrooms, those facilities are automatically brought into compliance with current NYS and NYC codes. NYC Transit will work with C&D to explore the feasibility of establishing a default design standard for future work...”

4. NYC Transit Facilities should install seats on existing toilets that lack them wherever feasible, meaning locations that do not require extensive/expensive retrofitting.

Agency Response: Accept. “Where feasible, NYC Transit will explore installing seats on existing toilets that can accommodate them without requiring retrofitting or significant structural modifications.”

5. NYC Transit Stations and NYC Transit Facilities should reinstruct personnel on how to properly categorize defects commonly found in bathrooms.

Agency Response: Accept. “The Division of Facilities will be reissuing [its] Reporting of Station Nonconformities Bulletin (Bulletin #068-25). The updated bulletin will provide revised guidelines on the appropriate categorization of defects, including those commonly found in the public bathrooms.” NYC Transit Stations also explained to the OIG that it will circulate Bulletin #068-25 to all Station Managers and Supervisors which covers how to properly categorize defects found in bathrooms.

6. NYC Transit Stations and NYC Transit Facilities should establish a regular communication channel to identify contradictory or inaccurate severity ratings for bathroom defects and develop strategies to reduce these occurrences.

Agency Response: Reject. NYC Transit explained that their existing procedures are sufficient; management just needs to remind staff of the procedures. “The Stations and Facilities Divisions maintain regular communication at both a leadership and staff field level. These ongoing interactions help ensure alignment in defect reporting and support efforts to minimize discrepancies in severity ratings. The Division of Facilities will be reissuing the Reporting of Station Nonconformities Bulletin (Bulletin #068-25). This Bulletin will provide guidelines for reporting station non-conformity defects including those commonly found in the public bathrooms.”

7. NYC Transit Stations should reinstruct personnel to inform Customer Experience of the status of bathrooms in real time.

Agency Response: Acknowledges. NYC Transit explained that their existing procedure to post outages lasting 72 hours is sufficient and posting for shorter timeframes is not feasible. “There are already established processes in place to manage long-term restroom outages, including coordination between Stations and Customer Experience for appropriate updates. NYC Transit will reissue the procedure in Q 1 of 2026. For short-term outages, defined as those lasting less than 72 hours, real-time updates to the website are not feasible... In cases of short-term outage, standard on-site signage is used to inform customers of temporary restroom closures.”

8. NYC Transit Customer Experience should update the MTA website to add more detail about the exact location of public bathrooms in the subway system (e.g., by identifying the station entrance nearest to the bathroom).

Agency Response: Accept. “Customer Experience is currently collaborating with the Station team to gather detailed information regarding the exact location of public restrooms within the subway system. Once this information is obtained, Customer Experience will update the MTA website accordingly. This update is expected to be completed by the end of Q2 2026.”

9. NYC Transit Stations should establish procedures to ensure that signs are posted on bathroom doors when they are out of service.

Agency Response: Accept. “The Division of Station will issue an updated notice by the end of Q1 2026 to reinforce the requirement for Station Cleaners to ensure standardized ‘Out of Order’ public restroom signage are posted on bathroom doors when the public restrooms are out of service.” The OIG regards the update and distribution of the notice as sufficient to address this recommendation.