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Ho-Hum Commute on a Union's 'Day of Outrage'

By [MICHAEL M. GRYNBAUM](#)

It was billed as a "Day of Outrage" and accompanied by rumors of a slowdown to be staged by angry transit workers. But subway and bus riders in New York City called it something else: Wednesday.

Sure, two trains got stuck in a tunnel for 25 minutes. A sick passenger caused one line to be shut down in Queens. Doors stayed closed for too long, trains bunched together, and the waits seemed endless. Service announcements were scarce and delivered in the native squawk of the antiquated public-address systems.

But for the nation's biggest transit system and its jaded denizens, "that's every day," as Carmen Maisonette of the Bronx put it.

"There's train congestion, or a stalled train, and then they just sit between stations," Ms. Maisonette, 44, said. "They're always giving you excuses."

As commuters headed home on Wednesday evening, with few major service disruptions reported, the question remained whether a slowdown had taken place — or if one had been planned at all.

The confusion began after [Transport Workers Union](#) Local 100 announced a "Day of Outrage" over a contract dispute with the [Metropolitan Transportation Authority](#). An arbitration panel awarded big wage increases to the workers this summer, but the authority is appealing the decision.

The provocative name, along with promises of a "transitwide" protest, prompted memories of the paralyzing [strike of 2005](#). But in a "rule-book slowdown," transit workers stay on the job, exploiting any opportunity to decelerate trains, take buses out of service, remain idle in stations and generally make getting around a pain.

The last rumored slowdown was in 2005, weeks before the strike. On Wednesday, union leaders held rallies

and asked members to distribute leaflets, but they said service disruptions had never been proposed.

“It’s designed visually for people to see we are incensed at what’s going on,” said Curtis Tate, acting president of Local 100. “Slowdowns were not a part of our Day of Outrage.”

A union spokesman clarified its intent: “To express their outrage, Local 100 members will don union T-shirts, hats, buttons and bandannas.”

A rally at a bus depot in East New York, Brooklyn, was sparsely attended, although megaphones helped amplify the cries of “No contract, no peace.”

“We are not trying to inconvenience people; we are fighting for justice,” said Jerry Archer, a transit agency electrician.

But some commuters were convinced that a conspiracy was afoot.

Bryan Vargas, a guitarist from Fort Greene, Brooklyn, usually takes the No. 4 train into Grand Central Station around 10 a.m.

“Usually the trains are pretty quick and not very crowded,” he said. But on Wednesday, “the first thing I noticed was the train was packed to the hilt.” His trip took 15 minutes longer than usual.

“I don’t think anybody noticed besides me,” Mr. Vargas added. “I think they just assumed it was the usual random slow train.”

James Gonzalez of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, found himself stuck on a L train beneath the East River for 25 minutes, making him late to his job in the music industry. The previous train had been so packed he could not squeeze on.

“This rarely if ever happens,” he wrote in an e-mail message. “Most N.Y.C. commuters like myself have their commute down to a science.” He added, “Any wrench thrown in this is quite obvious.”

Officially, the service disruptions fell within the norm.

“It was a run-of-the-mill rush hour,” said Paul J. Fleuranges, a spokesman for [New York City Transit](#). A sick passenger caused the E train to be rerouted along the Avenue of the Americas track for 15 minutes. No. 7 trains were suspended for 10 minutes. Emergency brakes engaged on two L trains. “It’s the usual things that can happen,” Mr. Fleuranges said.

At Union Square, several riders said they had not noticed any problems. “If the train stops for a minute, you don’t really ask why,” said Aryanne Demone, 30, a freelance designer, who had come downtown to meet a friend for lunch. “It seemed the same to me.”

Some riders even sounded a bit let down that a potentially adventurous commute had turned into another hum morning.

“I am on a B61 bus,” Amy Langfield, editor of the [NewYorkology.com](#) travel blog, wrote on [Twitter](#) during the morning rush. “Driver does not appear outraged.”

Ravi Somaiya contributed reporting.

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