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Transit Cuts, an Agony Without End

By CLYDE HABERMAN

Wednesday was Bastille Day, a fitting day for public hearings on the latest cuts planned for the subways. You just knew there was a guillotine around, poised to drop on a lot of people.

The necks immediately on the line were those of more than 200 subway station agents [destined for layoffs](#) as the [Metropolitan Transportation Authority](#) swims against a rising tide of red ink. The authority had simply planned to hand these workers their walking papers and close dozens of station booths. But [a judge intervened](#) last month. You can't do this, she told the agency, until you've held public hearings.

Her order had the ring of an old western movie — the scene where the townspeople are about to string up a guy, until someone like Gabby Hayes cries out: "Now hold on, dadgummit. We've got to give this man a fair trial before we hang him!"

So there were four public hearings this week, one in each borough where the subway runs. But nothing is likely to change, dadgummit. The agents and their booths do not seem long for this world.

At the hearing in Brooklyn on Wednesday, half a dozen members of the authority's board, led by the chairman, [Jay H. Walder](#), sat at a long table in a ballroom of the New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge. There were about 100 people in the audience, easily half of them transit union members and

their allies. What they lacked in vast numbers they more than compensated for in anger and vitriol.

They denounced the board members as sexist, racist, cowardly, incompetent and heartless. “Human garbage,” one man shouted. One woman went so far as to suggest that Mr. Walder somehow showed moral bankruptcy by not being in New York on Sept. 11, 2001. Through it all, the chairman sat almost frozen, hands clasped on the table. He knew the onslaught was coming, and put on a stoic front. To some in the audience, his mien was merely further proof that he was indeed heartless, cowardly, etc.

Points raised by speakers had been previously explored: Won't layoffs affect subway safety? Who will help riders with malfunctioning MetroCards? Who will buzz those in wheelchairs or pushing strollers through the emergency gates? They were legitimate concerns, all. They just were not new.

Whether or not one likes the transportation authority — and for many New Yorkers, it is Darth Vader — there is no reason to believe that its leadership derives pleasure from any of this. Nothing was said about elected officials and their slow, steady starvation of mass transit.

All the same, the pain for riders is real, and it keeps coming in ways large and small.

ALLAN ROSEN, who worked for the authority for many years, called my attention to a little-discussed aspect of changes that led to the closing or altering of dozens of bus routes. Some New Yorkers may now be forced to pay double to get from Point A to Point B. They have in effect been placed in two-fare zones.

Until recently, for example, people traveling in Brooklyn from Bushwick to Crown Heights might have taken the B52 bus along Gates Avenue and transferred at Franklin Avenue to the B48, heading south toward Empire Boulevard. But the southbound B48 no longer goes that far. To get where they want, riders who transfer from the B52 to the B48 must switch again at Fulton Street to the B49, running on Bedford Avenue.

That means three buses. For those with per-ride MetroCards, that second transfer costs them an extra \$2.25.

Similar situations exist on other routes. Are vast numbers of riders affected? Probably not. “But the point isn’t how many people,” Mr. Rosen said. “It’s the fact that it’s unfair and no one should have to suffer like this.”

Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz made a similar point about route changes that hurt some of his constituents in Riverdale and Woodlawn in the Bronx. “Not everyone has an unlimited [MetroCard](#),” he said. Mr. Dinowitz proposed, without success, that the authority issue free transfers to riders who face the prospect of double fares. “I’m not saying do anything special for them,” he said. “Just don’t increase their cost more than the rest of the city.”

No doubt, the worst is not over. Increases in the basic fare or in the cost of MetroCards, or both, seem imminent. Limits may be placed on those unlimited cards.

Bit by bit, riders are learning what death by a thousand cuts feels like. At least with a guillotine, you were sliced only once.

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