

# Mileposts

A Publication for MTA Metro-North Railroad Customers

January 2012



## A Tale Of Three Lines...

When it came to our service in 2011, your opinions told a tale of three lines.

For two, it remained the very best of times, but for one, it appeared to be... well, while it was not the worst, we'll let the numbers from our Customer Satisfaction Survey tell the story.

When it comes to our "Overall Service," customer satisfaction remained strong.

At least 94% of Hudson Line and 96% of Harlem Line customers were satisfied or very satisfied with service, about the same as in 2010. (In fact, close to 50% of you were very satisfied.)

But on the New Haven Line, 81% of you were satisfied or very satisfied (a 7 point drop from 2010).

And that score dragged our "Overall" average for all three lines down to an 89%. (It was 93% in 2010.)

In fact, the biggest factor contributing to the decline of the New Haven Line's score was the difficult operating conditions experienced over the winter of 2010-2011. (The survey was actually conducted right after the hard winter and right before the arrival of a significant number of M8s.) Roughly 85 New Haven Line customers wrote in negative comments about our winter performance. And we read them all.

The harsh and snowy winter caused so many breakdowns of the aging cars which make up the New Haven Line fleet (many are over 40 years old) that we were forced to take the unprecedented step of implementing a reduced service schedule. The schedule, which contained a 10% service reduction in both the AM and PM peaks and 16% fewer trains on weekends, was in effect from February 7 to March 7.

At the worst point of the winter, half of the New Haven Line's electric cars were out of service, resulting in overcrowded trains and diminished on-time performance.

On the Hudson and Harlem Lines, service throughout the winter fared much better, since much of their fleets consist of new M7 cars.

The continuing arrival of new M8s will help the situation on the New Haven Line. As we go to press, 50 of the new, highly reliable M8 rail cars have been accepted for service (but the majority of the line's fleet this winter will still consist of older cars).

Delivery of the M8s will continue at a rate of about 10 per month throughout the winter and they will be put in service as they complete testing. All the M8s are due by April 2015.

Also, the upgrades we have made to our snow-fighting arsenal of specialty

equipment (*see the next article*), and improved customer communication and storm response protocols after last year's record snowfalls should make things better this winter on all three lines.

**(You can read our [Guide to Winter Weather Travel at mta.info/mnr](https://www.mta.info/mnr) for more details on how we prepare, and how you can get ready for winter's worst, too!)**

Getting back to the survey, it's the same Overall story in most of the key service categories we measure.

The Overall Satisfaction rating for On-time Performance dropped 3 points to 88% satisfied. While it remained virtually unchanged on the Hudson and Harlem Lines (both at 96% satisfied), it dropped 7 points on the New Haven Line (only 78% satisfied).

The rating for Overall Train Service was subject to the same: 95% of Hudson and Harlem Line customers were satisfied with this category; only 80% of New Haven Line customers were satisfied.

Two categories did see improvements—Overall Environment at Boarding Stations and Courtesy and Responsiveness of Employees each went up a point (89% and 95% satisfied). And the rating for Grand Central held steady at 97% satisfied.

We appreciate your response to the Customer Satisfaction Survey, which is a key tool in helping us target our efforts to provide you with the best service possible.

## ***Jet Powered By Rolls Royce***

We've added some key weapons to our snow-fighting arsenal of specialty equipment just in time for this winter's worst. And some are real "Rolls Royces."

To combat accumulations on our tracks and in train yards, we've added three new jet turbines to blow snow.

Over the summer, the railroad's three jet-powered snow blowers were completely rebuilt. Each received a new Cummins diesel engine (for traveling over the rail) and a new, high-efficiency Rolls Royce Viper aircraft turbine engine for melting snow. The engines produce

exhaust that's 600 degrees Fahrenheit, which virtually vaporizes snow.

If the jets do the job right, all you see is steam coming off the steel. They produce 2,500 pounds of thrust, which makes them very good at getting under heavy, wet slush, ice and crusty snow.

The Rolls Royce turbines use half the fuel of the engines they replaced--1950s-era General Electric/Westinghouse J57 turbines that were used in B-52 bombers. The Vipers burn about 100 gallons of kerosene per hour at 70% capacity - the optimal level for fuel efficiency.

With fuel tanks that hold 1,800 gallons, these new jet blowers can run continuously without having to stop to refuel in the middle of a storm.

The Rolls Royce engines, sold as surplus, once were used in military aircraft, including drones. These turbines produce less smoke, "spool up" (get up to speed) quicker, run cooler, and are more reliable.

The turbines have directional controls that allow the operator to point the turbine's 600F degree exhaust straight ahead or sweep from side to side. This specialized, self-propelled, 30,000-pound rail vehicle travels no more than 30 miles an hour to move from place to place, but much slower when the jet engine is engaged.

The turbines make noise (imagine an airport runway) so the operator's cab has sound-deadening insulation and ear protection is required. This is one reason these machines are intended for use in the rail yards and remote locations. In densely populated areas, the railroad relies on cold-air snow blowers.

We've also added two new cold-air snow-blowing trucks.

The cold-air blowers are heavy-duty, rubber-tire trucks that also have steel wheels that enable them to travel over the roads and the rails. They are designed to blow snow off tracks and even platforms and are most effective against fluffy snow. This year, the railroad expanded its fleet of cold-air snow blowers from three to five.

In our ongoing efforts to improve the New Haven Line's performance in brutal winter conditions, one of the three old cold-air snow blowers was shipped back to its manufacturer in Canada (where they know from cold) to be retrofitted.



In this pilot program, the truck was fitted with a blower on the roof that is designed to blow snow off the tops of New Haven Line train cars, which have pantographs on their roofs.

(For you non-nutmeggers reading this, pantographs are the spring-loaded arms that press up against the catenary wires to provide propulsion power. Pantographs are particularly vulnerable to icing because of weather-exposed mechanical systems, including latches and springs.) This pilot vehicle is due to return to our territory just around the time you are reading this.

Finally, we've also installed 150 modern switch heaters along our right of way and purchased an additional front-end loader and a backhoe to better plow the tracks and create access to our interlockings and substations.

### ***Sbhhb.... It's Gotten Quiet On The New Haven Line***

Now you can enjoy a "Quiet CALMmute" on the New Haven Line, too!

On Monday, January 9, we expanded our Quiet Car pilot program to include select peak-period New Haven Line trains. Some 18 trains operating between Grand Central Terminal and Danbury, Waterbury, and New Haven now have Quiet Cars.

(Those of you who ride the Hudson & Harlem Lines have already been taking advantage of Quiet Cars on approximately 31 trains that operate between Grand Central and Poughkeepsie, Beacon, and Wassaic.)

Quiet cars are available on trains indicated by a "Q" in the timetable. Keep in mind:

- During the **AM Peak**, the **LAST CAR** of these trains will be designated a quiet car.

- During the **PM Peak**, the **FIRST CAR** of these trains will be designated a quiet car. (Reverse-peak trains are not included in this pilot program.)

Customers traveling on Quiet Cars should:

- Not use cell phones.
- Disable sound features on computers & other electronic devices.
- Conduct conversations in a sub-

dued voice.

- Use headphones at a volume that cannot be heard by fellow passengers.

To spread and reinforce the message about Metro-North's "Quiet CALMmute" cars, conductors will hand out on an "as needed basis" specially designed "Shhhhhh" cards that explain the rules of etiquette in English and Spanish.

**Please note:** All regular announcements will continue to be made in the designated quiet cars. For those of you who wish to commute in our quiet cars, we say enjoy the "CALMmute." Metro-North continues to evaluate reaction to this program to determine if it may be expanded.

### ***Speaking (Softly) Of A Quiet CALMmute...***

We conducted a survey in mid-November about our Quiet CALMmute program, which launched in October on select Hudson and Harlem Line trains.



### ***Courtesy Corner***

Oh, the resolutions we make for ourselves in the New Year... promising to lose weight, pay

off our bills, learn how Facebook works...

Why start the year under stress? Instead, try **not** doing some simple things to make you look good in the eyes of others, such as:

- Not putting your bags on the empty seat next to you;
- Not leaving your garbage behind you when you exit the train;
- Not putting your bags, or feet, on the seat across from or next to you.

By following these simple courtesy rules, even if you are 10 pounds heavier after all that holiday feasting, you'll still be looking good in the eyes of your fellow commuters! Courtesy counts...



## November 2011 On-Time Performance\*

Line	AM	PM	Off-peak		Total	YTD**
			Weekday	Weekend		
<b>Harlem</b>	95.8%	97.8%	97.4%	97.7%	97.1%	97.6%
<b>Hudson</b>	96.9%	98.9%	98.1%	97.9%	98.0%	97.9%
<b>New Haven</b>	95.8%	96.0%	97.4%	98.0%	97.1%	95.3%
<b>System</b>	96.1%	97.3%	97.5%	97.9%	97.3%	96.7%

\*Arrivals within 5 minutes, 59 seconds of schedule.

\*\*Year to date.

According to you, the pilot program is a resounding success! Roughly 90% of the 4,388 customers surveyed (860 were riding in a Quiet Car at the time of the survey) were satisfied with the program (42% were very satisfied).

Based on the survey, it seems that you appreciate the Quiet Car option—whether you use the cars or not! Satisfaction was almost equal between customers riding in the quiet car when surveyed (92% satisfied; 50% very satisfied) and those who were not (90% satisfied; 41% very satisfied).

In fact, 82% of you thought the program should be expanded to all AM and PM peak trains. This sentiment was somewhat stronger among those in the quiet car (88%) than those who were not (80%).

So let's all give a big (silent) cheer for our "Quiet CALMmute" program.

### ***New Year, "New" New Haven Line Station***

Train service is now available at the New Haven Line's new Fairfield Metro Station, located between Fairfield and Bridgeport. In fact, every train that stops at Fairfield also stops at Fairfield Metro, and they are in the same fare zone.

Built by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Town of Fairfield, Fairfield Metro has 1,400 parking spaces. The station is fully ADA accessible with elevators on each platform. In addition, it features two, high-level platforms with full-length canopies that can accommodate 12 rail cars each.

Other station amenities include ticket machines, benches, shelters and a fully enclosed pedestrian overpass for easy passage between platforms. Recycling centers also are available on the platforms.

Beginning this month, bus service to and from the station will be provided by Greater Bridgeport Transit. Taxi service is also available at the station, which is located at 61 Constant Comment Way in Fairfield.

The station and parking lot are operated and maintained by CDOT though a property management firm. Fairfield Metro is the first new station on the New Haven Line since State Street Station opened in New Haven in 2002. Prior to that, the last station to open was Merritt 7 on the Danbury Branch in 1985.

### ***Safety Rule Of The Issue***

While walking in a winter wonderland, always remember to put your "Best Foot Forward" when traveling on Metro-North. Winter's ice, snow, and sleet can create some slippery situations during your commute, so:

- Watch your step and watch for icy conditions in station parking lots, and on station sidewalks, stairs, and platforms. Remember: Ice tends to form more quickly on train platforms than on other surfaces. Even if a platform looks clear, it can have icy patches.
- Use stair handrails. Water dripping from overcoats, boots, and umbrellas can ice up with the slightest temperature drop, making stairs very slippery.
- Watch for slippery conditions even after you board your train. Snow, slush, and ice from boots make train floors slippery.
- Avoid moving from car to car. Icy conditions can exist in the areas between cars.

We bring you these reminders because in rain, snow, sleet (and in good weather, too!), your safety is always our first priority.

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