



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR
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JESSICA CHAIT
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

February 28, 2024

Richard Davey
President
New York City Transit
2 Broadway
New York, NY 10004

Dear President Davey,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4), on the recommendation of its Transportation Planning Committee (TPC), and by a vote of 36 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible, voted to request that funding for elevators at the 23rd Street / 6th Avenue Station be included in the MTA's next capital plan, due to lack of transportation accessibility in Chelsea. Further, MCB4 supports accessibility advocate Ms. Miriam Fisher's detailed funding request letter to the MTA (annexed hereto).

At TPC's January public meeting Ms. Fisher spoke on the numerous reasons why an elevator at this station is needed, including its proximity to many senior and people with disabilities centers and the lack of efficient alternative options.

As you know, there is a legal commitment that the subway would be 95% accessible by 2055, to be completed more than 30 years from now. While many underserved communities take precedence, we believe that the particular circumstances of the Chelsea neighborhood call for a higher priority in this plan, in order to serve the many seniors and disabled persons in our district.

While we continue to assess if additional locations should also be prioritized, the 23rd Street and 6th Avenue stop is our top priority for the Chelsea neighborhood.

Ms. Fisher has been a tireless advocate on behalf of the Chelsea residents with disabilities; we commend Ms. Fisher's initiative and thank her for her selfless work.

Sincerely,



Jessica Chait
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Christine Berthet
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee



Jesse Greenwald
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee

Enclosure

CC: Hon. Tony Simone, NYS Assembly Member
Hon. Erik Botcher, NYC Council Member
Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
Miriam Fisher

Ms. Miriam Fisher Letter to MTA

Subway elevators serve us all, from those with disabilities, parents with strollers, pregnant women, seniors, people with bad backs and knees, tourists, travelers with luggage. Only about 29% of NYC's 472 stations are accessible. There is now a legal commitment, after a 5-year lawsuit initiated by disability transportation activists against the MTA, settled in 2022, that the subway would be 95% accessible by 2055, to be completed more than 30 years from now. Currently, the outer boroughs are being given priority on accessibility and new elevators, on the premise that Manhattan has more elevators than the other boroughs, and there are more transit deserts and gaps in the outer boroughs. I am a resident here in Chelsea and struggle with steps, after multiple back and knee surgeries and don't want to wait 30 years for an elevator. I am submitting this request to the MTA for the 2025-2029 capital plan for an elevator on 23rd Street / 6th Avenue, due to lack of transportation accessibility in Chelsea.

I am working with the guidelines for approval shared with me by members of ACTA, Advisory Committee for Transit Accessibility. If Chelsea groups don't fight for this in the next MTA 5-year capital plan, it is unlikely to be in the foreseeable future.

Concern that the Manhattan neighborhood of Chelsea has a paucity of accessible subway stations, leaving the residents in dire need of accessible, efficient transportation for medical issues, everyday needs, work, leisure. Along 23rd Street, Hudson River to East River, are five subways, only one with an elevator, on 23rd Street / Park Ave South. These are all separate train lines which do not connect with the one accessible station, and do not comply with the guidelines of former Transportation Authority head, Andy Byford, that accessible subways should not be more than two stops apart. The station on East 28th Street is only partially accessible, and I don't believe full accessibility is currently planned.

Chelsea is a diverse neighborhood, with many low-income stretches along 8th / 9th Avenues, approximately 5000 residents of the NYCHA houses, and approximately 2000 NYCHA apartments. There are social needs services in these facilities, which extend from approximately 16th Street to 27th Street, approximately half a mile, connected with two Hudson Guild Neighborhood Houses.

It is an ethnically diverse area, 66% of Latinx in the NYCHA houses. This is an area of low-income residents who rely on efficient, reliable, accessible public transportation as a means to get to work, medical appointments, social connections. There is a current evaluation of a plan to replace the NYCHA buildings deemed poor quality and unable to be repaired.

An article in the NY Times was entitled, "In Chelsea a Great Wealth Divide." Joanna Moniuszko of Penn South Senior Center informed me that 49% of senior residents there are receiving food stamps and many classified as disabled.

According to the website, The Niche, the population of Chelsea is 55,400. The population is composed of 63% Caucasian, 17% Hispanic, 11% Asian, 5% African American (US Census).

There are numerous senior centers in the area: Penn South, a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC); two branches of Hudson Guild, on 17th and 26th Streets; Sage, a center for the senior gay community, 7th Avenue / 27th Street; Stein Center on 23rd Street; Senior Planet, a technology/computer learning center, West 25th Street between 6th / 7th Avenues. The Bowery Residents Committee, 25th Street / 6th Avenue, serves those with drug and homeless issues.

Many in the community are seniors and people with disabilities with mobility difficulties and restrictions limiting travel and use Access-A-Ride.

There are several medical facilities in the 23rd Street area: Mt. Sinai Doctors West; two CityMD centers; Northwell Health Center; several physical therapy sites, Orthology, NY Physical Therapy, etc.

There are two public libraries serving the community on West and East 23rd Street, Muhlenberg/Epiphany Libraries; and the Heiskell Braille and Talking Books Library, West 17th Street, 5th / 6th Avenues. Also in this community, on 23rd Street / 6th Avenue, is Poster House, a well-attended museum that offers workshops on disabilities and has a disability coordinator. Other area highlights are the Rubin Museum, Joyce Theater, the High Line, art galleries, Irish Repertory Theater, School of Visual Arts, Fashion Institute of Technology, Baruch College, shopping and restaurants.

The transportation history of 23rd Street is shameful, with Selis Manor on West 23rd Street / 6th Avenue, a residence/facility for the Visually Impaired and Disabled on the same physical block as the subway, a meeting place for various disability organizations, events such as the recent displays of new voting equipment for people with disabilities (August 2023). The subway station was closed for months in 2018, for renovation, but no elevator was added. This discriminatory practice is now a violation of the 2022 class action suit, DeLaRosa v. MTA Case No. 19cv 4406. "Defendants have a discriminatory practice of renovating stations without installing stair-free routes, a violation of federal and local law." The law applies going forward only, no retroactive installation of elevators, confirmed to me by lawyers representing the complainants. This illegal practice can be rectified now by installing the elevator requested. A similar situation in Bronx Middletown Road Station, extensive renovation without including an elevator, is now being addressed with an elevator, with legal action by disability groups.

I believe that 23rd Street / 6th Avenue has a strong need for an elevator, especially because of its connection with the disabled users of Selis Manor and the MTA neglect history mentioned.

The Rider Usage report indicates more riders at 6th Avenue than either 7th or 8th Avenues stations. Latest available data: May 2023, 6th Avenue had daily Entry 7,704, and Exit 16,746. Monthly Entry 99,477 and Exit 200,225. The PATH Train from New York City to New Jersey is also at 23rd Street / 6th Avenue and could be a future accessible connection between the two states.

A connection to the nearest accessible subways beyond Chelsea are bus rides, with bus stops without seating or shelter from weather, heat and rain, long waits. The bus up 8th Avenue is further impeded by slowdowns from traffic as the bus approaches and inches along slowly, slowly, to two major NYC transit hubs, Penn Station and Port Authority. Buses uptown and downtown to accessible subways are on alternate lengthy avenues, long walks for strugglers with mobility issues. I shiver when I recall being unable to get luggage down the subway steps to catch the AirTrain, (Train to the Plane), waiting for the bus, thinking I could have made my trip and returned home by the time I arrived at Penn Station for an accessible elevator train.

I have solicited support from organizations in Chelsea such as Penn South Senior Center, Hudson Guild, disability groups, activists, local elected representatives, all very supportive. The Visions Program Director and Tenants Assn. President at Selis Manor are very enthusiastic and discussed the accessibility needs of residents who certainly would benefit from a subway elevator. The population of subway users for accessible elevators could expand from the present usage and be a transformative model for those with visual impairments.

The list of endorsements is included in this request.

The current MTA capital plan (2020-24) had 70 new elevators, and the MTA announced it hoped to increase the number in the next plan. Chelsea is currently an accessibility transit desert, and in need of help. Accessibility includes attention to the travel needs of the diverse disability community, the mobility restricted, the blind and visually impaired, hearing impaired, cognitive difficulties, mentally ill and autistic.

Transportation is a human right, not to be impeded and denied to those with disabilities. All of us will benefit from an elevator.

Miriam Fisher
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Footnotes

The F & M subway lines on 23rd Street / 6th Avenue station connect with major centers and tourist attractions: Rockefeller Center; St. Patrick's Cathedral; Bryant Park, with its regular events; branches of City University of NY and Graduate Center; Museum of Modern Art; 42nd Street Library; Central Park; Carnegie Hall, (and the new accessible elevator at 57th Street); Herald Square; Macy's and adjacent 5th Avenue shopping; Fashion Institute of Technology; Baruch College; public and private schools, both elementary, middle and high schools including PS 11, PS 33, Avenues, Lab School for Collaborative Studies, Chelsea Career and Technology High School, James Baldwin & Bayard Rustin High Schools, IS 70, Liberty High School; NY Life Insurance Company; the Flatiron Building and Flatiron District; Madison Square Park; the Indian restaurants and business area along Lexington Avenue; Greenwich Village and Washington Square Park. These connections listed aren't exhaustive.