

“Amenities” at Interborough Express Stations

By John Pegram¹

The word “amenities” has been defined as things that contribute to physical or material comfort, or that help to provide convenience or enjoyment.²

In this article, I will discuss “amenities” that the MTA might provide at stations on the Interborough Express (IBX) line, such as elevators, escalators, heated platforms (for ice removal), platform doors, platform size, roofs (canopies) and shelters.

Some people may object to my calling these features “amenities,” because they consider them necessities. But—at least in the case of some of them—the MTA apparently does not.

Stations – Elevated and Underground

Transit riders in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and uptown Manhattan suffer more from the heat of summer and windy chills of winter than those in central and downtown Manhattan, because many of their stations are open and exposed to the weather. Indeed, the winter situation is worse than it was 60 years ago, when many elevated stations had a heated waiting room with a pot-belly coal stove, serviced by a roving attendant.³

Typically, only part of an outdoor platform is covered and—even in those parts—the wind penetrates the side wall openings, and rain and snow blow in from the track side. Ice forms on the platforms and stairs. (My compliments to NYC Transit employees who work to keep them clear and safe).

Imagine the greater winter comfort, for example, at the fully enclosed Second Avenue 72nd Street subway station, part of which shown below:

¹ © John Pegram 2024.

² See <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/amenities> and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/amenity>.

³ Author’s personal experience.



Proposed IBX Station Amenities

Elevators and Escalators

The Light Rail and Conventional Rail cost estimates in MTA IBX reports propose a single elevator at each station platform, running between platform and street level.⁴ That should satisfy ADA requirements, but it offers no benefit to most riders.

The MTA plans to use side platforms at most stations;⁵ therefore, there would be two elevators at each such station. A better arrangement, from a riders' perspective, might be to provide a single, central platform for at least some stations, with an elevator near each end.

⁴ See, e.g., MTA, *The Interborough Express - Planning and Linkages Study* (Jan. 2023) (*PEL Report*), Appendix 1.3 "Prototypical Station Platforms"; Appendix 1.11 "Capital Cost Estimate," at its Appendix A, pp. 6, 8, 10 [18, 20, 22/67]. The copy of this report with many appendices, posted by the MTA at <https://new.mta.info/document/114891>, lacks Appendix 1.11. Therefore, I have posted that appendix here. Citations to pages of Appendix 1.11, as indicated by a PDF reader, are in the form [##/67].

⁵ *Id.*

As compared with typically small and slow NYC Transit elevators, escalators can provide a benefit for a large number of transit riders. They are particularly desirable for persons with a mild disability (who are more likely to use a transit line than wheelchair users), for riders who are tired and for those who are in a hurry. However, the MTA does not plan to provide any escalators at IBX stations.⁶ If a station has a central platform, it might be possible to provide one escalator and one elevator at each station without significant additional expense, as compared with two elevators at side platforms.

The IBX estimates do not include elevators (or escalators) to the platform levels of other subway stations at the same location. For example, the IBX station at Atlantic Avenue would be approximately 30 feet below street level. The LIRR East New York station is at near street level there and the L train platforms are about 44 feet above street level, but no elevator or escalator above street level is in the IBX plans. We can only hope that elevators and escalators are built all the way between IBX platforms and existing subway station platforms as a part of the ADA compliance program, and that they are located in coordination with IBX station plans. Sadly, no through elevators from IBX platforms to both street level and the level of other lines appear to be planned.

Heated Platforms

The MTA's cost estimates for the Conventional Rail mode included a "Platform Snow Melt System" for each exposed platform.⁷ Great ! However, the MTA has selected the Light Rail mode. The Light Rail mode estimates do not include any "Platform Snow Melt System." Bad.

Platform Doors

Platform doors are becoming common around the world. Outside, they can reduce cold winds. They make riders feel more secure. Here, for example, is a picture of half-height platform doors in Delhi, India:⁸

⁶ *See id.*

⁷ *Id.* at [26/67].

⁸ From <https://themetrorailguy.com/2020/07/10/ncrtc-invites-eoi-for-indigenous-platform-screen-doors/>.



The MTA does not plan to provide platform doors at the IBX line stations. However, they currently plan to use low floor Light Rail Vehicles (an unnecessary, bad move in my opinion). The argument might be made that platform doors are less necessary in the case of a low platform. However, intentionally stepping onto tracks from a low platform is much more likely than from a high platform, for example, to look for a train. Therefore, the argument can be made that platform doors would be at least equally desirable in that case.

Platform Size

The MTA's Conventional Rail proposal included platforms 510 feet long, suitable for 10 car trains of 50-foot-long cars or 8 car trains of 60-foot-long cars. The Light Rail proposal would have stations that are only 270 long; 53% of the length of the proposed Conventional Rail platforms.⁹ They would be suitable, for example, for Light Rail trains of three 90-foot units or less.

The subject of platform size is intimately related to train and system capacity. In my opinion and that of a number of other transit riders, the MTA's Light Rail plan is likely to be near or at capacity when it opens. (The original IRT platforms had to be expanded in 1910, a few years after

⁹ PEL Report, Appendix 1.3, *supra* note 4; *see* Appendix 1.11 at [26/67].

that system opened, to be longer than those that the MTA now plans for Light Rail on the IBX line, much longer in the case of IRT express platforms).¹⁰

Roofs (canopies)

The MTA plans to have canopies cover only 2/3 of the platforms for both the Conventional Rail and Light Rail modes. That means that riders waiting for less-crowded parts of trains are likely to be more exposed to the weather.

Drawings in the PEL Report show a gap between covered stairs and the platform canopy. That may have appealed to the artist, but is unlikely to satisfy passengers.¹¹

Shelters

The MTA does plan to provide a shelter on each platform for both the Convectional Rail and Light Rail modes. No details of the proposed shelters have been provided in MTA reports and appendices. Will they be fully enclosed or open, like bus “shelters”?

Conclusion

The stations being planned for the IBX line are inferior to existing subway stations, especially new stations, like those of the Second Avenue Subway.

IBX riders in Brooklyn and Queens deserve better, modern stations.

This article expresses the personal views of the author and does not express the views of his employer, or any client or organization. The author has degrees in law and physics, and has taken several engineering courses. After five years of work as an engineer, he has practiced law

¹⁰ Wikipedia, “Early history of the IRT subway,” at “Modifications” (“On January 18, 1910, a [contract] modification was made . . . to lengthen station platforms to increase the length of express trains to eight cars from six cars, and to lengthen local trains from five cars to six cars”). Later, local platforms were lengthened. *See, generally, Wikipedia*, “New York City Subway stations,” at “Station platforms and configurations.”

¹¹ PEL Report, *supra* note 4, pp. 22, 24.

primarily in the field of patents for over 50 years, dealing with a wide variety of technologies. He is a life-long railfan and user of public transportation in the United States, Europe and Japan.