New York City subway train derailment leaves 34 injured

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On June 27, a subway train in New York City derailed near the 125th Street Station injuring 34 riders, including 17 who were taken to the hospital, creating service delays on multiple lines.

Following a preliminary investigation, officials from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) stated that two cars on a southbound A train hit the wall of the tunnel around 9:48 a.m. The train cars screeching against the tunnel tore open part of the train, allowing sparks and smoke from the accident to pour into the cars as the train came to a halt.

Passengers climbed out of the train and used their cell phones as flashlights in order to navigate through the dark tunnel and exit through the platform. MTA emergency crew had shut off power to the track to prevent the riders from being electrocuted.

According to an initial statement by the MTA, "[T]he cause [of the derailment] was an improperly secured piece of replacement rail that was stored on the tracks," and it elaborated: "Storing equipment in between tracks is a common practice employed by railroads across the country to accelerate rail repairs. The key to this being an effective and safe practice is making sure that the extra equipment is properly bolted down, which does not appear to have happened in this case."

MTA Chairman Joe Lhota, also made a public statement explaining that the train derailed after the "emergency brakes automatically went on." He also specified that the cause of the accident was a "human error, not a track defect."

On Wednesday, an MTA spokesman also disclosed that supervisors responsible for oversight of the repairs had "been suspended without pay pending a formal review process."

MTA workers and transit experts have already raised questions about the MTA's claims that the derailment was caused by "human error" as well as about the lack of information provided by initial statements.

Contrary to the MTA's claims, John Samuelsen, president of Transportation Workers Union (TWU) Local 100, reported that the replacement rail was secured correctly in the center of the track.

Zachary Arcidiacono, the TWU Local 100 vice chairman for workers on the lettered subway lines and a train operator since 2007, stated in a *New York Daily News* article that "A brakes-in-emergency [which Lhota claimed caused the derailment] wouldn't cause a derailment at any speed. It's not designed to derail a train whether at a high or low rate of speed."

He also stated, "If you were going too fast in the area, that could cause a derailment but not in this particular case. I don't see any evidence of that."

A professor of civil engineering at City College and former head of the Chicago Transit Authority, Dr. Robert Passwell, told *CBS New York*, "It's an unusual kind of derailment. First instinct is—did somebody pull the brakes? I mean, that's the way they would normally go on. Or did the train hit something, did it go through a red signal [which would automatically stop the train]? Or was there debris on the track?"

"Any time you have to replace track and replace signals, it's not good. Replacing track—it takes time."

The MTA's current decision to replace the tracks, however, comes after decades of insufficient funding for public transportation in New York City that has generated a crisis within the MTA.

Delays on the subway system have increased to more than 70,000 per month from about 28,000 a month in 2012. There has also been an increase in incidents in April and May of this year with several serious mechanical problems, including two power failures, which caused serious delays and rerouting of seven lines.

The subway's cars have also been breaking down more frequently. Currently, the average distance traveled by a

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car before it breaks down is roughly 112,000 miles, compared to 200,000 miles in November 2010.

Regardless of the immediate cause of the derailment in Manhattan, the lack of funding for basic infrastructure has created conditions in which malfunctions and accidents can occur regularly in one of the wealthiest cities on the planet.

Many New York City residents and MTA workers voiced concerns about the subway system to the WSWS.

Jack, an MTA worker with six year of experience, stated, “The system is old. Sometimes the rails tend to pop in hot weather, they expand. When weather goes bad for the subway where it goes outside, switches freeze over. Some trains are put in the yard for repair and come out the next day not working. I had two ICs [the intercom used between the conductor and operator] that did not work. You can reset a circuit breaker but it is still out. We need new equipment. Instead, they are blaming the crews, the operator, the conductor.”

Sophie, a realtor who regularly commutes on the A train, said, “Besides long waits, I have not been in any subway incidents myself. But they are doing extensive work on the tracks over each weekend, and then they are having problems during the week anyway.

“The real question is why do they have problems so much of the time? The banks are getting the money owed by the MTA, and it is unfair. I know people who went broke from 2008 and lost all their investments, 401Ks, their investments for retirement, lost their homes.”

Mercedes Medina, a home care attendant who takes the subway for work, said, “I did not get stuck on the train from the derailment, but I have a problem on the train every time. The C and the A train are slow, late. Everything else is a problem, but this is every day. The service is no good. Every year, the cost of the MetroCard is more and more. So is everything, especially medicine, and the rent is more and more. So why do they say they have no money?”

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