

New York governor announces L train will not shut down while repairs go ahead

Alan Whyte
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As public anger grows over the dysfunctional New York City mass transit system, Democratic governor Andrew M. Cuomo unilaterally proclaimed last month that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) long-announced plan to shut down the L subway line connecting parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn for a 15-month period would not take place after all.

The L line's Canarsie Tunnel that runs under the East River was damaged by flooding from Superstorm Sandy in 2012. The transit agency had developed a plan to completely shut down the L line in order to properly repair the tunnel.

Apparently without any consultation with the MTA, the governor suddenly announced that a less drastic plan developed by a panel of engineers from Columbia and Cornell universities would be implemented. Instead of a complete shutdown, this plan calls for work to be done on nights and weekends.

The governor's plan has been the object of numerous concerns and complaints. Carmen Bianco, the president of the NYC Transit division of the MTA from 2013 to 2015, wrote an op-ed piece for the *New York Times* asserting that the latest plan raises serious health and safety risks for both passengers and workers.

"In confined spaces like these, in a tube that is nearly a mile long, ventilation is complicated, and emergency egress is more difficult, with passengers and employees having to travel longer distances to safety in a complicated environment," Bianco wrote. "The space is also narrow, making it more difficult for employees to work."

He also noted that Cuomo's plan was not a serious attempt to fix the tunnel, but a "Band-Aid that does not fundamentally address the long-term structural needs of the tube. The result: We'll be right back here in the

same situation in 10 to 20 years ..."

In other words, while the governor relishes the opportunity to pose as the savior of harried commuters, Cuomo's plan is a potential disaster in the making.

According to the *Times*, "[T]he Metropolitan Transportation Authority considered a similar idea nearly five years ago and determined that it raised serious safety concerns, including the potential for the spread of cancer-causing dust that could affect commuters and workers, according to documents obtained ..."

Transport Workers Union Local 100 represents nearly 40,000 New York City transit workers. The union, which has become a slavish supporter of Cuomo, has not issued a statement about a plan that is potentially dangerous to the health and safety of its members and the passengers alike.

Cuomo's control over the MTA stems in part from the six out of 14 votes on the MTA's board from members he appoints. The governor would like to extend his power in this area. He developed this theme in his annual State of the State and budget address delivered last Tuesday, in which he asserted his desire to have the state legislature "establish clear authority over the MTA."

The governor, now in his ninth year in office, stated, "It [the MTA] was purposefully designed so that everyone can point fingers at everybody else, and nobody is responsible. Why? Because no politician wanted to be responsible. No politician wants to be the one that suggested a fare increase. I am telling you that is the fundamental problem with the MTA."

Cuomo now feels compelled to assert this very well-known fact because he himself has not been able to hide behind the allegedly independent agency, but instead has been blamed for the deteriorating service

and fare hikes every two years.

In addition to the New York Transit Authority's plan to replace and modernize an aging and antiquated signal system, costing an estimated \$37 billion over 10 years, Cuomo mentioned the need for a number of other necessary projects, such as linking the Long Island Rail Road to Grand Central Terminal, at a cost of \$11.2 billion.

In addition to projected shortfalls in its operating budgets for years in the future, the MTA has an out-of-control long-term bond debt, which according to one estimate is now about \$41 billion and, as observers who follow the agency's finances agree, is growing like a cancer. The MTA now projects an operating budget deficit of \$500 million in 2020, which will rise to \$1 billion a year by 2021, even with the two fare hikes expected in 2019 and 2021. In addition, New York US Senator Chuck Schumer has warned that the prolonged federal shutdown could cost the MTA about \$150 million monthly in federal funds.

Another part of Cuomo's Canarsie Tunnel repair plan emerged when the governor declared that the City of New York must pick up half the tab. This is only the latest chapter in the ongoing dispute between Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio, both Democrats, who have feuded over transit and numerous other issues, each blaming the other for spending shortfalls in order to cover up the role of the party they represent.

The big, ongoing question is: Where will the money come from? In one of the wealthiest cities in the world, the capitalist politicians all claim the resources are almost impossible to find.

Despite Cuomo's and de Blasio's animosity, both agree that it should not be the wealthy who pay for the crisis of mass transit. The mayor's progressive pretensions and Cuomo's image as a would-be savior of public transit are equally fraudulent, as recently revealed when the two "enemies" came together to give Jeff Bezos, the richest man on the planet, hundreds of millions of dollars as an incentive to establish a new Amazon headquarters in the Long Island City section in the borough of Queens.



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