

New York City flooding exposes failing infrastructure

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During the afternoon of Thursday, July 8, a series of powerful thunderstorms moved across the New York City area. These storm cells produced heavy downpours which in turn led to localized flooding in northern Manhattan, the Bronx and suburban Westchester County. The storms also resulted in thousands of homes without power in nearby New Jersey.

These storms are not unusual in the northeastern US during the summer months, although a number of scientific reports have suggested that such weather may become more frequent and more severe in the years ahead due to climate change. What is significant is how quickly vital infrastructure failed under the pressure of a routine weather event.

As the storms hit, social media was quickly filled with disturbing images. One post on Twitter which has nearly 5 million hits, shows desperate commuters wading through filthy, waist-deep water in an underground passageway which serves as an entrance to the 157th street train station.

Other images depicted flood waters rushing across station platforms as commuters tried to board trains and water cascading down stairways and falling from ceilings in stations creating unsafe and unsanitary conditions.

Only about half of New York City households have an automobile, which means many people have no alternative to public transport. Those wading through waist-deep water likely had no other means to get home and thus felt compelled to take the risk.

In addition to creating unsafe conditions in subway stations, the flooding resulted in massive rush-hour delays throughout the aging subway system which is among the busiest in the world.

The Major Deegan Expressway, an important highway connecting New York City to points north was

closed, as were several other north-south arteries including Harlem River Drive which connects to the George Washington Bridge, the city's busiest Hudson River crossing. Images on social media showed stranded motorists standing atop stalled vehicles in water up to the vehicle's roof, as rescue crews helped them to safety.

This comes nearly a decade after so called "super storm" Sandy caused widespread flooding to low-lying areas across the New York/New Jersey region. Following Sandy, Democratic politicians pledged billions to harden and upgrade infrastructure to make it more resilient. One organization charged with doing much of this work is the Metropolitan Transportation Authority or MTA which operates subways, commuter rail services, vehicular tunnels and bridges.

According to the *New York Times*, the MTA has spent roughly \$2.6 billion since Sandy to protect against flooding. Given these recent events, some questions arise: Is this level of funding sufficient to protect one of the largest transit systems in the world, with 472 subway stations alone? What work has been done thus far? Have the private contractors performing much of the work met storm standards? Why is the work taking so long?

The MTA, which is beholden to bondholders and thus the dictates of Wall Street, continually claims there is "no money" for projects needed to bring the system up to level where it can meet the needs of the population. In the last few years, trillions of dollars have been made available to Wall Street by the federal government, dwarfing the sums allotted for mass transit, or for disaster recovery and protection.

To put the \$2.6 billion spent over the last decade since Sandy in perspective, a single new station, built for the extension of the Number 7 line one mile to the

Hudson Yards development in Manhattan in 2015, cost \$2.4 billion. When it was determined by the Bloomberg administration that the \$25 billion Hudson Yards real estate project, largest private development in American history, could not move forward without a transit hub, the money was quickly found to build it.

The \$2.6 billion spent on storm resiliency in the nation's largest city is only one sixth of the \$12.4 billion expended by the Pentagon building a single new Gerald R. Ford class aircraft carrier. To meet social need, we are told there is "no money," while nearly unlimited resources are available for the military projection of power on behalf of American imperialism.

The issues facing New York City are no by no means unique to that city nor are they limited to subways and highways. Public infrastructure across the US, and indeed around the globe, is starved so that money can be funneled to the financial oligarchy. In Detroit, flooding damaged homes and closed highways after pumping stations failed. Power grids have failed, notably demonstrated in Texas earlier this year. Parts of the Southwest are being devastated by drought and aging water infrastructure. The collapse of a residential condominium in Florida leading to numerous deaths.

Politicians at all levels of society have been weighing in. Eric Adams, the likely successor to Bill de Blasio as mayor of New York City, used the flood to call for a congestion pricing, a scheme for charging motorist fees to drive into the city's central business district. In Michigan, Governor Whitmer acknowledged "decades of underinvestment," then sidestepped the issue, deferring to the federal government. President Biden's highly publicized infrastructure bill is a handout to corporations that does little to meet social needs.

The numerous high-profile infrastructure failures in recent months are not mere accidents. They are an indictment of the irrational capitalist profit system which places the accumulation of private wealth in the hands of a financial elite above the social needs of the vast majority of working people.

As climate change and environmental degradation exacerbate existing conditions caused by failing infrastructure, capitalist politicians offer no way forward. The only way for humanity to marshal the resources to contend with these issues is to eliminate the profit system and replace it with a planned socialist economy.



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