

Phone service finally penetrates New York Subway

September 27 2011, by Sebastian Smith



A man speaks on his mobile phone in May 2011 in New York City. New York's antiquated subway system finally entered the cell phone age Tuesday, but the surprise sight of signal bars popping up on screens didn't please all the Big Apple's harried commuters.

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Years after other major world cities and even US rivals like Boston or San Francisco began enabling phone use underground, New York's estimated 4.3 million daily straphangers can now make calls. Or at least a few can.

Just six stations in the west side of Manhattan have been given coverage,

with the rest of the system, first built a century ago, due to take at least until 2016 to wire up.

Still, for New Yorkers used to seeing their beloved [smart phones](#) die as soon as they pass through the turnstiles from the street, the change is hot news.

"It's a good thing, of course. We need this," said construction worker Victor Simoni, as he headed on the L line to a job in Manhattan.

"We come all the way from the Bronx so to get there it's about an hour," his colleague Benny Djoni said. "We need it for arranging our work. It's a busy life."

Some well traveled New Yorkers expressed amazement that the city was only now taking first steps toward spreading high-tech communications below street level.

"I come from Germany and there it's very advanced. I'm not surprised, because the United States is very far from being an innovator anymore. That was last century," architect Thomas Winter, 47, said.

"Just look at the [subway](#)," he added, gesturing at the dank, dirty tunnel on the L line. "When it rains, it drips through the ceiling."

Not all New Yorkers were phoning home to spread the good news about the arrival of [fiber optic cables](#) in a few of the 277 underground stations, however.



People ride the New York City subway into Manhattan during the morning commute on September 9, in New York City. New York's antiquated subway system finally entered the cell phone age Tuesday, but the surprise sight of signal bars popping up on screens didn't please all the Big Apple's harried commuters.

Already some subway riders are feeling angst about the prospect of being in close proximity to annoying ring tones and lengthy conversations about the weather between people and their mothers.

Gawker.com published a helpful etiquette guide, starting with: "No talking. We do not want to hear your phone conversations.... Shut up!"

Another pointer: "Get out of the way. If you have to talk on the phone, do it somewhere people aren't going to bump into you." And: "Screaming does not improve reception."

Others point out that the subway will no longer be that rare haven from your boss.

Ruben Collado, a 32-year-old film maker using his phone on the L line, said his native city of Barcelona in Spain introduced phone service a decade ago and the boss issue came up there too.

"Everyone was complaining in Spain. It was the first thing they said," Collado said. "But you just keep coming up with a different story."

For Monica Santana, an actress, the end of the no-phone zone poses the almost existential threat of technology taking over life.

"I make a conscious effort not to check my [phone](#) too much, because you become a slave," she said.

New York's underground system has a way to go before becoming a full-on chat zone, but nostalgia is already creeping in.

"It was great knowing you could just walk into the subway and you were cut off," Collado said.

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