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Report Questions MTA's Priorities in Its Capital Program

By Jose Martinez

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The Metropolitan Transportation Authority envisions pouring more than \$30 billion into the transit system improvements over the next five years, but a new report says the MTA's priorities are out of whack on how it spends that money. NY1's Jose Martinez filed the following report.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority has big plans for the transit system over the next five years: keep building the Second Avenue Subway and East Side Access, put countdown clocks on the lettered lines, and buy new buses and subway cars.

However, the Citizens Budget Commission thinks the MTA's priorities in the not-yet-fully-funded \$32 billion capital program are out of whack.

"The questions we ought to be asking about the MTA's proposed plan are not just where the money's going to come from, but what are we going to spend the money on?" said Charles Brecher of the Citizens Budget Commission. "And I think it's really important that whatever money is available be spent in the right way."

On Thursday, a new report by the group criticized the MTA for moving too slowly to upgrade what the public doesn't see in the system.

"There are many other hidden assets - the fans that ventilate it, the pumps that keep it dry, some of the structures that support it - that are not fully in a state of good repair," Brecher said. "And the issue should be is, 'Are we doing enough to get it to good repair?' And our answer is no."

Another complaint is that the MTA needs to get going on installing more modern signal technology that will allow trains to run more closely together. Only the L currently has it, but other lines will eventually.

For all those weekend shutdowns on the 7 between Manhattan and Queens, you can thank the improvements being made to the line's signaling system. However, that work won't be completed until 2017.

"It's a trade-off that in order to be able to provide these communities with better and more frequent train service, we need to do some shutdowns in the meantime to install that kind of equipment," said MTA spokesperson Adam Lisberg.



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Since launching its first capital program in 1982, the MTA has spent more than \$100 billion on rebuilding a once-battered system.

"Everybody can have different opinions about what's important to spend money on in the next capital program and how do we generate that revenue, but I think everyone agrees it is vital to keep funding the MTA so we can keep New York going," Lisberg said.

Now, if only the agency can find a way to fill that \$15 billion funding gap.