

## New report blasts MTA mega-projects

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The MTA needs to get a handle on the skyrocketing budgets and crippling delays that face many of the agency's biggest-name projects, according to a report released today.

The Citizens Budget Commission highlighted several issues facing the agency's mega-projects -- pointing out that the Fulton Street Transit Center is above cost by 90 percent, the new South Ferry Terminal jumped 24 percent, and that the first phase of Second Avenue Subway is above by 13 percent.

Also, officials said both straphangers and agency officials have a poor picture of how those projects -- and other smaller items, like station rehabs -- are progressing due to poor reporting of information.

"We spend an enormous amount of money on this capital plan, and it's not well managed," said Charles Brecher, the author of the report. "Clearly this information is not available to the public and I think it's also true that [the MTA] doesn't have it themselves."

"It's not a good system to track the projects," he added.

To counter that, MTA chief Jay Walder today said there would be a new online feature -- available by the end of the year -- that will allow anyone to track the spending and schedule of any project in the agency's new \$28 billion capital plan, which still needs state approval.

The feature "will provide the public with clear, updated information about all of the projects in the upcoming capital program," said spokesman Jeremy Soffin.

"For the first time, you'll be able to search by project type, line or station to find out exactly where construction stands, why the work is necessary and whether it is on budget."

That next capital plan will include dozens of station rehabs and will also set money aside for the Smart Card, which will eventually replace the MetroCard.

The CBC report also said that chronic delays prevent the MTA from spending all the money that allocated to its past capital budgets.

The result of that, Brecher said, is that the transit system should be in a better state of repair than it is today.

"The purpose of most of the money in the capital plan is to get the system to a state of good repair and keep it there," Brecher said. "If we're not able to spend the money, not we're not going to get that."