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## M.T.A. Told It Must Focus on Repairs, Not Growth

By Patrick McGeehan

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The Metropolitan Transportation Authority should concentrate on improving the condition of its existing transit systems before plowing ahead with the second phase of the Second Avenue subway and other expansion projects, a watchdog agency said on Thursday.

In a report that called the authority's priorities "misplaced," the **Citizens Budget Commission** called for more emphasis on safety and increasing the capacity of the New York City subway system. The subways have been carrying heavier and heavier loads, exceeding six million riders on four separate days last month.

The analysis comes as the authority is seeking aid from Albany to cover a huge funding gap in its \$32 billion capital plan for the next five years. The authority's available money would cover only about half of the proposed spending, leaving transit officials to borrow heavily or find other sources of revenue to close the gap.

But Charles Brecher, the consulting research director for the budget commission, said the authority should reconsider its quest for additional money. "Let's be sure we're spending the money on the right things," he said. Mr. Brecher said the authority was "paying too much attention to these new-start projects and not enough to fixing what we have and putting in modern communications and signals."

In response, Adam Lisberg, a spokesman for the authority, said the transit agency hoped that the capital program, which it released last month, would "spur a wide-ranging conversation about capital priorities as well as capital spending." But he added that the spending plan "makes clear that expanding the network, as well as providing enhancements such as countdown clocks and next-generation payment systems, are very important to the M.T.A. and to our customers."

The authority operates two commuter networks, the Long Island Rail Road and the Metro-North Railroad, as well as the city's subway and bus systems.

In its five-year plan, most of the money — \$22 billion — would go toward subway cars and buses and improvements to tracks and signals. The rest would pay for new technology and expansion projects, including extending the Second Avenue subway and connecting the Long Island Rail Road to Grand Central Terminal and Metro-North's New Haven line to Pennsylvania Station.



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Expanding the system should be postponed until more of the authority's equipment is returned to "a state of good repair," Mr. Brecher said. Among the deficiencies, he said, are many of the pumps used to keep the subways dry, as well as the underground fans and ventilation systems.

"They're going too slow on state-of-good-repair work," he said. " They've done a good job in terms of things that are visible, like subway cars and tracks. But there are other hidden assets that are very important that have gotten less attention."