

Homeless Outreach Program at Penn Station, Grand Central, and Outlying Stations within New York City



NYS COMPTROLLER
THOMAS P. DiNAPOLI

Background

Metropolitan Transportation Authority

- The largest transportation network in North America
 - Two constituent agencies - the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) and Metro-North Railroad (Metro-North) – provide rail service throughout the region, carrying an average of nearly 600,000 customers daily to their destinations via Pennsylvania Station (**Penn Station**) or Grand Central Terminal (**Grand Central**) in Manhattan

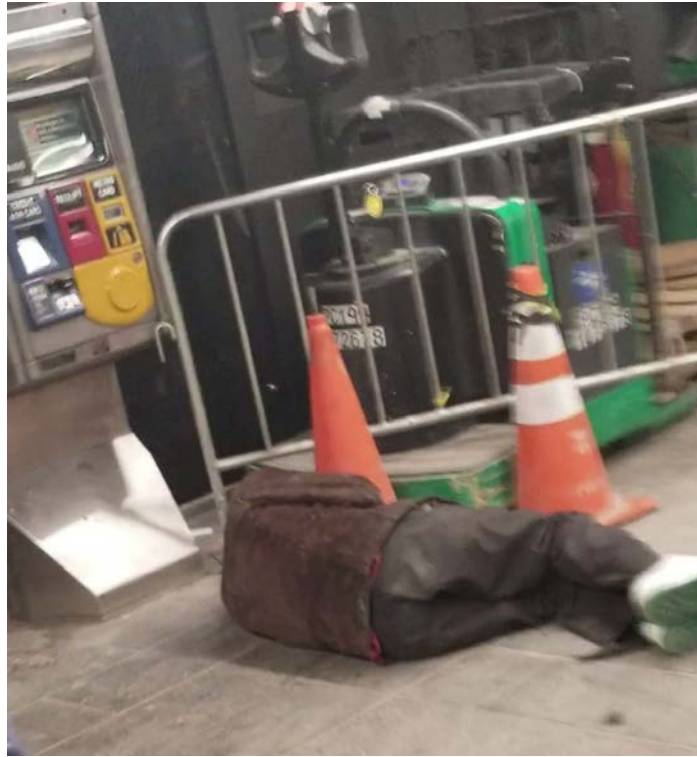
Background

Homeless Problem

- Homeless sheltering within public transit has been a growing concern
- Presents a challenge to the MTA's goal of maintaining safety, security and comfort for all
- Negatively impacts taxpayer's investments in the transit system



Background



Background

Reasons for the Audit

- Recognizing the magnitude of this issue, OSC examined the MTA's oversight of homeless outreach at two hubs (Penn Station and Grand Central) and several outlying commuter rail stations within the metropolitan region



Homeless Outreach Program

Contracts

- Since 2010, the MTA has spent about \$21 million in contracts with a non-profit homeless outreach provider to deliver outreach and placement services
- Despite this significant investment, there is little evidence of progress 10 years later



Homeless Outreach Program

Audit Objective

- To determine whether the MTA has appropriate oversight and monitoring controls over its homeless outreach services contract, and whether the MTA has met its goal in assisting homeless clients to appropriate shelters off MTA property

Homeless Outreach Program

Audit Results

- MTA failed to monitor the contractor's actual outreach activity and verify the contractor was accurately reporting outreach activity data
 - Outreach workers were not providing an adequate level of outreach services, thus not moving clients off MTA property
 - Reported data was inaccurate and incomplete
 - Outreach work spent a considerable amount of time on Amtrak level - at expense of the MTA

Homeless Outreach Program

Penn Station/Grand Central Contract

- Contractor was required to:
 - Conduct site visits to observe and record homeless outreach activity, collect data, and produce reports
 - Use reported data to produce standardized reports related to established performance measures
 - Use staff observations and reported data to modify outreach strategies



Homeless Outreach Program

Observations

- Performed both announced and unannounced observations
- Witnessed multiple scenarios where outreach workers appeared to intentionally close office and shut down services inside the stations





Homeless Outreach Program

Coupling of Technology

- The team used optical character recognition software and formulas to transform handwritten daily activity logs into an electronic format



Homeless Outreach Program

Reported Data

- The daily activity log data was used to conduct analysis, such as a time study, which found:
 - Outreach workers were providing minimal outreach, averaging only 2.2 hours per 8.5-hour shift, while also misreporting their activities



Homeless Outreach Program

Reported Data

- We found discrepancies between reported activity and actual activity:
 - Claiming to assist homeless individuals they had not assisted
 - Logging hours they were not actually present
 - Reporting visits to locations they had not visited

Homeless Outreach Program

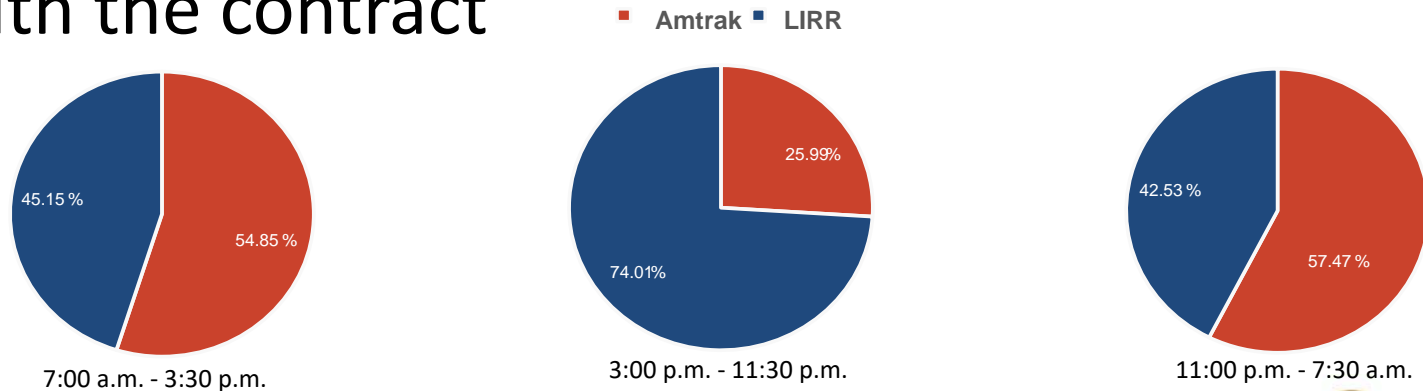
Reported Data

- We found that standardized reports – the basis for data analysis and informed outreach decision making – to be unreliable
 - Based on inaccurate and/or incomplete data.
 - We found discrepancies between reported activity and actual activity
 - The MTA did not have a process in place to verify reported data.

Homeless Outreach Program

Reported Data

- Data also showed that outreach workers were spending significant time in areas not associated with the contract



Audit Impact

Unprecedented Response

- MTA officials acknowledged the audit results as,
 - “shocking and disappointing”
 - Took prompt action
 - Strengthened oversight



Audit Impact

Unprecedented Response

- New York's Governor called for the State to develop a plan to measurably reduce homelessness within the transit system
- In response, the MTA formed a Task Force which issued swift and significant recommendations



Audit Impact

Unprecedented Response

- MTA Office of the Inspector General launched an investigation
 - To include an inquiry into the outreach provider



POLITICS NEWS

Nonprofit contracted by MTA to conduct homeless outreach ignored people in need at Penn Station and Grand Central: state comptroller report



By DENIS SLATTERY
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS | JUL 23, 2019 | 4:41 PM





METRO

MTA contractors meant to help homeless are slacking on the job

By David Meyer

July 23, 2019 | 12:23pm | Updated



State Comptroller: Firm 'Unresponsive to Clients'

Report: Homeless Outreach Group Took MTA for a Multi-Million-Dollar Ride

By BOB HENNELLY Aug 7, 2019 1



Homeless Outreach Program

Conclusion

- Exposed gross negligence and faulty performance metrics – igniting immediate, action to address this issue
- Created unprecedented level of coordination and resources to help these homeless individuals and improve MTA ridership experience

Contact

Office of the New York State Comptroller
110 State Street
Albany, NY 12236
(518) 474-4040
www.osc.state.ny.us

Prepared by the Division of State Government Accountability.

Like us on Facebook at facebook.com/nyscomptroller
Follow us on Twitter @nyscomptroller