

The Editorial Notebook

Remodel the Subway Remodeling Plan

Security and squalor are not unrelated. Beyond the disputed statistics about crime in the New York subways is the indisputable fact that their evident decay and sordid stations do nothing to make people feel safe.

For once, however, money is available, at least to do something about the stations. A combination of Federal grants and Port Authority funds has created a kitty of almost \$500 million, with a chance of \$300 million more in the next few months.

Much of this money is earmarked for "station modification," meaning anything from partial rehabilitation to total modernization. The first year's work is scheduled for 14 stations, including Herald Square, Grand Central and 42d Street at Eighth Avenue.

Subway planning and design — in this case, radical, remedial redesign — deals with such things as layout, circulation, lighting, temperature and noise control, information services

and, of course, appearance. Design contributes in a very real sense to safety by eliminating trouble spots and improving visibility, pedestrian patterns and surveillance systems.

But the design signals of the Transit Authority are mixed. It plans to do a lot of the rebuilding itself but to call in consultants to pretty up some stations in a variety of styles. Architectural firms are now being chosen for the cosmetic work.

This is no way to do the job. Spot beautification is not subway redesign; the current Operation Facelift, in which stylish colors are applied temporarily to cover grime and decay, is a stopgap measure. The improvement of stations must be coordinated system-wide. One well-qualified firm should be selected to sit down with the T.A. and work out everything from station layouts to equipment. Such things as noise and temperature control, traffic rerouting and platform rebuilding are

tied to the choice of wall, floor and ceiling materials, and the placement of booths, barriers, entrances, exits, seating and signs. The skilful planning of these elements will determine the quality of the subway environment. That is the integrated approach the T.A. should be taking.

The job will also be done a lot better if the T.A. closes stations wherever possible during major renovation, instead of following its present procedure of maintaining an obstacle course for users and workers, with inevitable delays and increased costs. And it is to be hoped that political pressure to spread the money around will be resisted — there are 456 stations in the subway system — with work concentrated in critical areas.

For the money at hand, New York can have a subway with style. The Transit Authority just needs to get on the right track.

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