

The Best Subway Map in Years

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Not all the news about New York's subways is bad. The M.T.A. has taken a giant step backward — and produced a readable subway map.

The transportation people returned to the subway cartography of the 1930's to show the relationship of train routes to city streets, and to the techniques of the 50's to distinguish express and local stops. The new map replaces the schematic 1972 model that emphasized graphics over information; it offers simplified color coding for major lines, indicates free transfer points and other train and bus connections and, for a unique improvement, identifies neighborhoods.

It's now possible to find the subway nearest a given street and to tell whether trains there run at all hours.

It's possible also to pick up bits of useful subway-schedule lore: the D-train bypasses Yankee Stadium during the rush hours; a subway-bus link puts LaGuardia Airport within reach for \$1.

All that remains is to color-code the stations to match the map — a process said to be under way — and, of course, to get maps to token booths, visitors' bureaus and to hotels, which have preferred to let their newsstands sell their own. There is no doubt the map will be popular: an M.T.A. team took 5,000 to Grand Central the other day and they were gone in an hour. With many New Yorkers coming back to the subways, this sleek new guide couldn't be more timely. All we need now are some trains to match.

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