

# How the F Train Breakdown Hit Social Media

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Subway riders are often frustrated by the lack of notifications about long and unexpected delays, despite the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's efforts at using social media.

The MTA's official subway Twitter page (@NYCTSubway) is monitored twenty-four hours per day and primarily posts service alerts. The subway Twitter feed has less than 700,000 followers, about 12 percent of the daily ridership. Furthermore, each post is rarely retweeted more than twice, limiting the reach of information. The MTA announces planned work on its Facebook page, but is only followed by 40,000 followers, less than one percent of riders. The MTA's social media broadcasts do not reach most subway riders with essential information. The chart below shows that the MTA has the largest number of Twitter followers of the major mass transit systems in the United States (690,336), but only represents 12.3% of daily subway riders. Here is how the MTA's social media compares with that of other major U.S. transit systems:

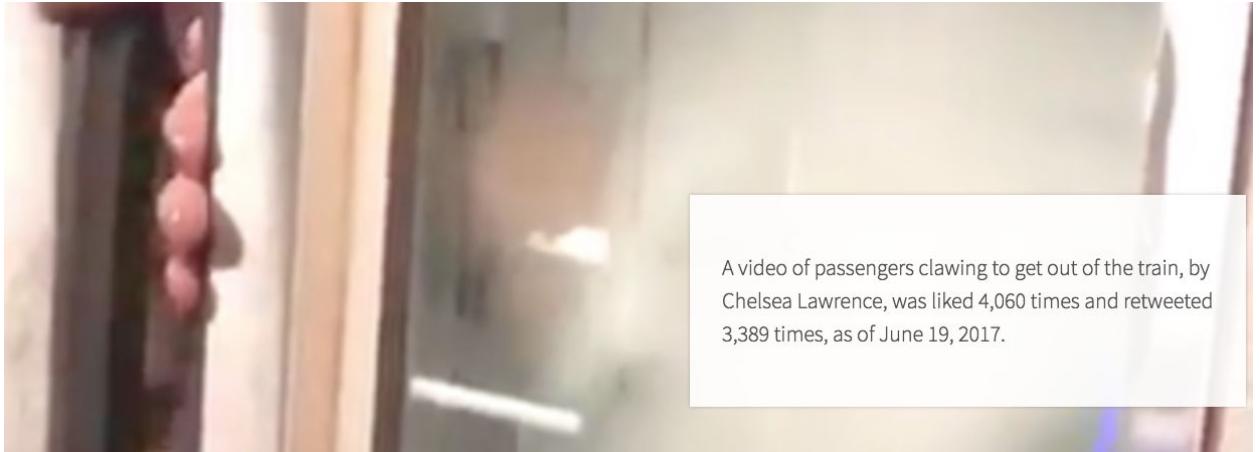
Transit System	Twitter Handle	Daily Ridership	Twitter Followers*	Twitter Followers as a % of Daily Riders
MTA Subway	@NYCTSubway	5,700,000	690,336	12.3%
Chicago Transit	@cta	1,660,000	188,492	11.4%
Boston MBTA	@mbta	1,277,200	271,936	21.3%
Washington Metro	@wmata	748,800	239,389	32%
Bay Area Rapid Transit	@sfbart	433,394	260,269	60.1%

\* As of June 19, 2017

The need for rider information was highlighted on June 5, 2017, when a rush-hour F train was stuck underground in a tunnel for nearly an hour between the West 4th Street and

Broadway-Lafayette Street stations. Riders were told that the delay was due to “train traffic,” although they later learned the train was stopped due to mechanical issues.

As passengers waited in a train without lights or air conditioning, they shared their experiences on social media. Their social media posts vastly surpassed any information provided by the MTA. More than 100 Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter posts were made from passengers on-board the train or at the Broadway-Lafayette platform. They reported “People...clawing at the windows trying to breathe the air” and the experience as “pure hell.” One post, retweeted nearly 4,000 times, described “passengers dripping with sweat begging to get off.”



A video of passengers clawing to get out of the train, by Chelsea Lawrence, was liked 4,060 times and retweeted 3,389 times, as of June 19, 2017.

This account of the train's interior posted on Facebook by Sandy Claus Michael was shared 2,500 times on multiple networks:



Michael Sandy Claus Sciaraffo added 2 new photos.

June 5 at 7:27pm · New York, NY ·

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Just had a very memorable, yet not so fun experience on the train ride home. I was taking a packed F train home, that had no working AC, when we abruptly stopped in a tunnel. The engines shut down, the lights go off and with no exaggeration, we were stuck there for 45 minutes in what felt like 120 degree heat.

First, we were told it was train traffic ahead of us (we all know that lie all too well). As we waited with no further communication, people started getting very worried. Almost everyone began fanning themselves with paper, as it felt as if it was just getting warmer and warmer. Beads of sweat began rolling down people's faces. We started to tell everyone to open the side windows and open the doors the three inches we could pry it open to, with books, to get the cross ventilation from the passing trains. Coats started getting removed, and then people were sweating so much from standing in this crowded oven, that people starting taking off shirts and some pants. One lady disrobed while others covered her with a jacket so no one could see. Some people started getting faint, and we started to try and see if we could identify any elderly people or pregnant women on the car who were standing or needed water to see if they needed to sit and drink. Claustrophobia, panic and heat exhaustion began to set in for many folks. At this point, the windows started getting steamed up.

Then after about 30 minutes of heightened anxiety, they told us the truth. We had experienced a severe maintenance malfunction and the train was unable to move. At this point, we began to discuss making decisions about how we were going to evacuate, who would go first and who would need help. Suddenly, we felt the train jerk oddly forward and backward, which didn't feel right. It turned out there was another train behind us, and started to push our train ahead into the next station, at about 1 mph.

Once we pulled into the station, a mob of people had filled the platform waiting for our train, which left no room to get us off. We had to wait another 10 minutes, sweating, in the dark, before we could get off, while the people on the platform took pictures of us dripping sweat through the windows while we were trying to pry the doors open, as it was getting dangerously hot in the train car. People started to yell things like "Please get me out" and "I feel sick".

Finally, they had cleared people off the platform and opened the doors for us to get off. The feeling of remotely cooler air felt amazing compared to how it felt on the train. I never enjoyed the dank, smelly aroma of a train station more in my life.

It was a terrible experience to endure, no doubt. But I am very grateful that despite how terrible this experience was, it wasn't something more serious, like a terror attack, and that ultimately, we will all be making it home to our families safely. God bless.

UPDATE: Just had an impromptu press conference on my lunch break with NY1, CBS 2, NBC 4, FOX5, ABC 7, PIX11, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Associated Press, 1010 WINS, Village Voice, amNY and Gothamist regarding the MTA's lack of regard for its riding public and to demand accountability. I was joined by the President of the Riders Alliance. This has to be the last straw. Tune in.

UPDATE # 2: If you were on the "F train from hell", I will try and reach out to start gathering names, numbers, emails, your story and any evidence of your experience and others around you on the train, based on who is in this "viral" post. Tag yourselves and your friends in this post, and I will reach out with a link to a Google form.

We need to force this issue to get results once and for all for the people of NYC.

Thank you.

However, the MTA's only social media post about the incident was a standard delay bulletin about 30 minutes later, leaving those on-board the train and at the stations uninformed.

The one-hour F train mechanical breakdown was an extreme, but not rare, incident. The MTA must improve its social media communications systems. The MTA has released a statement indicating that the issues experienced in this event are a major priority for mechanical improvements. However, the MTA should also focus on its communications with riders. With the onset of overdue repairs and maintenance activity, the MTA should also improve its social media outreach to riders.



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