

# Transit Stories

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## Kim Yancey

New York City, NY

My name is Kim Yancey, I'm 45, and I'm a licensed social worker living in East Harlem near the 125th St 4/5/6 subway station. I have a disability and access the subway system using a power wheelchair. Having lost my job shortly before the pandemic, my efforts to reenter the workforce were complicated by the pandemic and the unreliability of elevators at subway stations.

Here's an example – my old commute to work at Park Avenue and 20th Street would take 36 minutes if all station elevators were operational; if not, the length of my trip could stretch to 1.5 hours or more because of the diversions I need to make, and it can cost me three times more in transit fares to get home.

Even if the elevators are working, passenger overcrowding – even during COVID-19 – can mean that reaching the street level from the train platform could take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour because it takes two elevators to exit

Given that I have worked in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx, I've encountered broken elevators across the city. It was constant. Multiple times a week, multiple times a day. Sometimes it's a problem getting to work and sometimes it's getting home.

This affects my job, and my livelihood. One time when traveling to downtown Brooklyn for an important meeting, a broken elevator at Fulton Street caused me to reroute further into Brooklyn, making me late to a meeting that was then

cancelled. This caused one of my clients' benefits to be placed on hold. I felt like I was incompetent at my job.

Frequent and random encounters with broken elevators creates an unreliable transit system that adds stress to an already stressful career as a social worker. I am considering finding a job nearer her home so I do not have to rely on the subway. I currently live around the corner from the train station. It shouldn't have to take me a whole another hour and a half to get home because of broken elevators and unreliable service.

The one thing that the MTA did that was wonderful was the pilot program where they offer a cab to pick you up and take you directly to your destination. It was on demand, if you need it you got it. You didn't have that plan ahead of time or worry about, "Is the elevator gonna work when I get to the other end of the station?" It is more reliant and convenient than the current state of public transit, and right now I'm using that.

The prospect of returning to the subway is killing me – because the elevators are broken so frequently, it severely impacts my commute and my life. Not only do I need to worry about transit service, many times I worry about being able to access it. Do you know how hard it is for a person with a disability to find a job? It doesn't matter if I have a master's degree. I have student loans; who is going to pay those if I can't find work?

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