



Background


391 subway elevators serve as critical lifelines for wheelchair users, seniors, and parents with strollers—yet the system fails 25 times daily. The stakes are spatial and inequitable. Bronx residents face double the citywide disability rate (24% vs 12%) yet have the fewest accessible stations. Meanwhile, Manhattan—with more able-bodied residents—concentrates the majority of elevators. When these scarce access points fail repeatedly, the problem extends beyond inconvenience to erode trust: riders avoid entire station complexes, fearing entrapment or being stranded.


 “At one point, I was overshooting my neighborhood and going to a different neighborhood on the subway because my neighborhood has zero elevators.”

 “I have particular stations throughout the system that I will avoid because of either bad platforms or horrendous elevators. I will not go to Fulton Street on the 2 and the 3. I will not go to Simpson Street on the 2 and the 5 in the Bronx. I will not go to Grand Central, Dekalb, Franklin, Jamaica Center in Queens. **This is just to name a few.** These are no exceptions. **I will not go to these stations at all.**”

 “I have a fear of the subway because most times I encounter problems with elevators not working... **I feel much safer above ground.**”

 “It takes three hours to get to a destination... and then **I get to the elevator after checking the status and it’s broken...** Now I’m stuck looking for somebody to help me get out.”

 “**I walked farther just to get to this elevator** so I wouldn’t have to wake my sleeping child in the stroller. Now that it’s broken, I have to find another way in to the subway.”

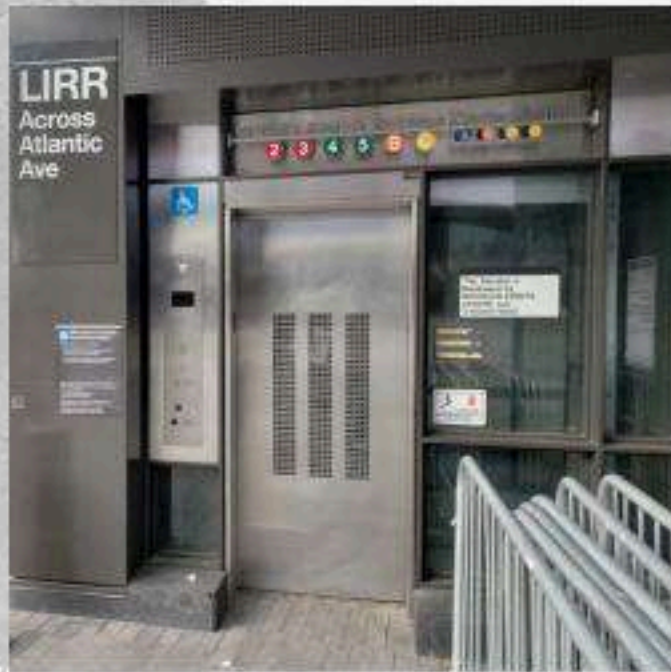
 “I found myself waiting for people to ride the elevator with me. Because of my claustrophobia and the poor maintenance on these elevators, I didn’t feel comfortable riding them by myself... There was a point where every time I used the subway, there was always a broken elevator, and I had to call the NYPD to carry me out of that station. The police came and said ‘**Aren’t you that guy from the other day that we had to carry up?**’”

“There is no sure way for riders to know when a breakdown has occurred. There are no intercom announcements, and the listings on the MTA website are unreliable. Last month only two of the eight elevator failures I encountered were listed, making it likely that official statistics are an undercount.”

— Sasha Blair-Goldensohn, Rise and Resist Elevator Action Group, “New York Has a Great Subway, if You’re Not in a Wheelchair” in NYT



EL277 at Columbus Circle accumulated 200+ outages and 60+ entrapment incidents in 4 years from 2021-2025.



The elevator at the Atlantic Avenue-Barclays Center was in service and functioning just 52% of the time in the first half of 2018.



Color by total disability population (Unit: k)

 7-12	 14-15	 17-18.5	 20-24
 12-14	 15-17	 18.5-20	 24-35