UNDERGROUND STATIONS OF THE NEW YORK CITY SUBWAY SYSTEM: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRESERVATION AND MAINTENANCE

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Abstract

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Even though the New York City subway system has been open for over one hundred years, concern for the preservation of its historic subway stations has only become an issue of discussion and importance in the past two decades. There are several reasons for this lack of awareness for preservation in the subway stations, including the lack of funding, lack of guidelines and protocol, deferred maintenance, and the prioritization of other station issues. The deferred maintenance of the subway stations for several decades in the 20th century pushed the stations into a system-wide state of disrepair.

The process of repairing the badly damaged stations started in the early 1970's and has continued into the present. The need to repair the damaged stations was a top priority, with the worst stations given first priority for repair. Now that the New York City Transportation Authority (NYCTA) has the subway system largely renovated and running more efficiently than in the 1970's and 1980's, it has been able to approach the issue of preserving its historic subway stations. Station expansions and the minor day-to-day repairs that occur on a regular basis in the subway stations often cause minor damage to original materials, which can accumulate over a period of years until the entire station is in need of a complete renovation.

The time period from the late 1960's into the 1980's was a time of significant loss of original materials in the historic subway stations. Over time, there have been important changes in the NYCTA's approach towards station rehabilitation, resulting in a greater respect and sensitivity for original materials and station design. This approach is shown in the NYCTA's creation of the Station Planning & Design Guidelines in 1992 for station rehabilitation and incorporation of preservation into capital projects, among other developmental changes. The NYCTA has to prioritize several important issues, such as safety, accessibility for the elderly and disabled, technology upgrades, and passenger service on top of keeping up with station maintenance and rehabilitation. This thesis is working within this context of complications for station preservation and rehabilitation that arise out of the process of dealing with many different issues within the same station.

This thesis will answer the question whether the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and NYCTA in their capital and maintenance programs address the preservation issues of their historic subway stations. The goal of this research is to show how the NYCTA needs to plan for preservation of stations more comprehensively by providing recommendations, primarily concerning preservation and maintenance, for how to improve stewardship of the New York City subway system's historic stations.

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