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MTA asks passengers to document travel

By NOAH ROSENBERG

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The majority of New Yorkers probably aren't up at 4 a.m. let alone using public transportation and keeping a log of their pre-dawn Metropolitan Transportation Authority experiences. Yet, 4 in the morning is precisely when the MTA is asking city dwellers to begin documenting a day in their life via their NYC transit encounters.

During the week of April 30, the MTA began sending out 170,000 letters to a random sampling of city residents, asking them to participate in the MTA 2008 New York Customer Travel Survey. The MTA hopes the survey, which continues through June, will help the agency better understand New Yorkers' travel patterns, leading to improvements in the city's transportation system.

While a copy of the questionnaire and a pre-paid envelope will be included in the mass mailing, New Yorkers will also have the option of participating in the survey via a telephone call with independent survey firm NuStats / PTV Datasource. NYC residents can also participate in the survey by calling a toll-free number.

The survey takes about 15 to 20 minutes to complete and comes in two parts. The household survey portion aims to provide the MTA with a demographic breakdown of each responding family.

"The point of the survey is to document actual behavior," said Jeremy Soffin, Deputy Director of Media Relations and Press Secretary of the MTA, who explained that the other major component of the survey is a form of travel diary.



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The Travel Reporting Log, which the MTA asks each household member to fill out, starts off by asking customers if they traveled outside of their home "yesterday." For those who stayed home, the survey experience is over.

Those who traveled, however, are asked a range of questions - their responses purported to be confidential - including how they paid for their fare and what serial number is on the back of their MetroCard, information that will "help the MTA develop a more cost efficient way of collecting trip information in the future," according to a note on the survey.

Latter parts of the Travel Reporting Log instruct customers to provide a location by location map - including manner of transportation, arrival time, reason for visit and departure time - of their day beginning when they woke up in the morning and ending when they went to sleep at night.

While some New Yorkers may be put off when asked to divulge such detailed accounts of their day, those who respond will help the MTA in "understanding how New Yorkers travel and how we can better meet their transportation needs," MTA Chief of Metropolitan Planning Lawrence Fleischer said in a statement. The survey also allows the MTA to remain eligible for millions of dollars in federal capital funding, the statement noted.

If assisting the MTA is not enough of an impetus, the agency will randomly select one participant a week throughout the course of the survey to receive a \$500 prize.

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