

New Jersey Department of Transportation
Bureau of Research

Technical Brief



Customer Perceptions of Transit Security

Customer perceptions of transit security vary across demographic and socioeconomic groups, transit modes, and from one geographic region to another. This study investigates how NJ TRANSIT customers feel about transit security issues and the measures used to enhance security. It concludes with recommendations regarding which elements of a transit security public awareness campaign may be the most successful.

Background

Nationally, transit agencies employ a range of safety/security strategies to address the threats and vulnerabilities unique to each public transit system. The strategies vary widely by agency and are associated strongly with mode. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the northeast blackout of 2003, and the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) subway bombings, NJ TRANSIT (NJT) has invested significant operating and capital resources to improve the security of its transit system. While these measures have undoubtedly improved the security of NJT facilities and services, what is not known is how these measures have affected NJT customers' perceptions of safety and security.

Research Objectives and Approach

- Examine which NJT security measures make customers feel safe/secure.
- Identify which security measures enhance customer perceptions of safety.
- Examine which elements of a transit security awareness campaign would be successful.

To achieve these objectives the research team reviewed national literature on transit security implementation, perceptions and public awareness campaigns; analyzed NJT customer complaint data; and, conducted a series of five customer focus groups.



Findings & Conclusions

- NJT customers report feeling safe most of the time while using NJT facilities and services. At the same time, customers remain anxious overall about security issues and the threat of terrorism. This was especially true for commuters who travel into and out of Manhattan on a regular basis.
- NJT Customers are more concerned with general safety issues such as crime and passenger misconduct than terrorism.
- The security measures most visible to NJT customers are presence of police personnel and the use of security cameras. These measures appear most effective in shaping customer perceptions of safety and security.
- NJT customers understand that transit riders play a role in keeping NJT secure. However, there is significant confusion about what to look for as well as when and how to report suspicious activity or objects.
- Customers were very familiar with the security awareness slogan “If You See Something, Say Something.” They agreed that the elements of a successful awareness campaign must include a catchy slogan and memorable imagery repeated over and over at multiple times in multiple locations with information such as telephone numbers displayed in large print.
- This study made clear that many NJT customers are also at least part of the time customers of other New York metropolitan area transit agencies. This blurs the line between different agency efforts related to transit security and suggests that it would be beneficial for NJT to work closely with the other transit agencies in the region to ensure security initiatives are coordinated well. NJT should explore the potential for implementing joint public awareness campaigns with shared slogans, imagery and media strategies. Cooperating agencies should consider creating a universal reporting procedure and phone number.

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A final report is available online at: <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/refdata/research/>. If you would like a copy of the full report, send an e-mail to: Research.Bureau@dot.state.nj.us.

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