

# MTA to roll out cell service in subway tunnels, Wi-fi at above-ground stations

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July 25, 2022



## Transit

**am** By Kevin Duggan

It's a different kind of signal upgrade.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority plans to roll out cell service to its subway tunnels and install free Wi-fi connections at its above-ground subway and Staten Island Railway stations, agency officials said Monday.

To build out the technology over 10 years, the MTA plans to tap New York City firm Transit Wireless for the project, which has been setting up cell service in the sprawling subway system for 15 years.

“People today they want to be able to send emails, or texts, or look at their news feed or do whatever through their entire trip and not have their connection phase in and out as they’re going through the tunnels from one station to another,” said MTA Deputy Chief Development Officer for planning Fredericka Cuenca at an agency board meeting on July 25.

Transit Wireless will foot the more than \$600 million bill to roll out the system and recoup those costs through revenues from the infrastructure, like licensing fees, monetizing data analytics, and renting out fiber to private companies, according to [MTA board documents](#).

After it has covered its construction costs, the company will have to start sharing those proceeds with the transit agency.

“It’s a great opportunity to make our customers’ trip better, to bring private investment into the system, and to generate revenue,” Cuenca said.

The contract, which the MTA’s Finance Committee approved Monday but still needs full board approval Wednesday, covers 20 years of operation by Transit Wireless with two five-year extension options.

“It’s a massive undertaking. To get cell service to every subway track between every station, a couple hundred miles of tunnel will be fitted out with fiber and cable antenna,” said Cuenca. “It’s gonna take time.”

The MTA contracted the company in 2007 to install cell service at its subway stations and set up wifi and phone service [along the L line in 2020](#).

The company also worked on the subway’s Help Point intercoms and its digital countdown clocks on the lettered lines.