NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

DAILY NEWS, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2001

Subway service ventures farther into downtown

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The subways of lower Manhattan — the pipeline to work for throngs of commuters — rolled into service again yesterday after transit crews cleared soot-choked stations, switches and turnstiles.

Straphangers greeted the first service since Tuesday's disaster with a mixture of relief and apprehension and struggled to keep up with shifting schedules and station stops.

The 4 and 5 lines, a primary transit artery through the Financial District, were running again to the ravaged area, making all stops except Wall St. That station will remain closed indefinitely at the request of the NYPD.

The A line was again stopping in lower Manhattan, with the exception of Chambers St. Officials extended the service hours of J trains, which run to Broad St.

Transit workers were draining water from tunnels used by the 2 and 3 trains, hoping to open those key lines to lower Manhattan by the morning rush tomorrow.

The Transit Authority was working on a major service plan to zip commuters into lower Manhattan despite the loss of the 1, 9, N, R and E stops near the remains of the World Trade Center.

But after a week of subway changes and delays, there was still confusion.

At one point yesterday the 4 and 5 lines were bypassing Fulton St., a change Transit Authority spokesman Al O'Leary said was caused by a "temporary situation." He would not elaborate. Service was later restored.

A conductor aboard a Q train from Brooklyn at 9:30 a.m. said the train was bypassing downtown stops, but it stopped at Canal St. anyway. After a long pause, the conductor announced that service was normal again, and the doors opened, but pink tape still blocked stairwells. Water poured from the ceiling on the outbound platform.

Mayor Giuliani wants to reopen as much of lower Manhattan as possible east of Broadway by tomorrow, and crews were racing to flush streets caked with chalky soot and restore phones and power to thousands of businesses and homes.

Access by car was limited, and numerous streets were blocked by police barricades. The Battery Tunnel and the Brooklyn Bridge were restricted to emergency vehicles, although people could walk across the bridge.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority resumed service on two local bus routes south of Canal St., along West St. to South Ferry and Park Row by City Hall.

Relief was on the way for Staten Island commuters, who spent the week without a connection to lower Manhattan and endured frequent bridge closings and major gridlock.

The ferry will resume service at 6 a.m. tomorrow with three boats rather than the usual four. The Manhattan terminal was not damaged in the Trade Center attacks.

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