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City Closer to Reopening Train Stations

Lines N, R expected to be restored sooner

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The subways may return to four disabled stations in lower Manhattan sooner than anticipated, transit officials said yesterday.

The restoration of service on the N and R lines, pegged as a priority in the wake of last month's terrorist attacks, was previously believed to be as much as six months away.

New York City Transit President Lawrence Reuter said at a committee meeting yesterday that trains could return "earlier than our earlier projections," suggesting that the City Hall, Cortlandt, Rector and Whitehall Street stations may reopen within weeks rather than months.

"The vibration test that we did is negative," said transit spokeswoman Deirdre Parker, referring to recent measurements of above-ground activity. "Reuter is anxious to return the N and R to service as soon as possible."

Though only four stations on the line were shuttered, ripples of confusion have been felt from Forest Hills to Coney Island. Consider: the N has been replaced by the M in Brooklyn and by the W in Manhattan and Queens. The R train has become the J in Brooklyn and the Q in Queens.

Damage was contained primarily to the Cortlandt Street station, which sits a block east of the World Trade Center. Debris from 4 World Trade Center punctured the ceiling; a communications room on the station's west side was destroyed.

But tests designed to measure vibrations from cranes and other heavy machines above ground came back negative, and engineers have shored up the station with thick timbers.

The city will construct a 165-foot retaining wall at the station's south end, Parker said, "to maintain the integrity of the station and the tunnel."

Transit officials said a more precise timetable will be available next week, after they meet with city engineers and the mayor's Office of Emergency Management.

Once N and R service is restored, only five stations in lower Manhattan will remain closed because of damage from the attack: the Cortlandt Street, Rector Street and South Ferry stations on the 1/9; the Park Place station on the 2/3; and the World Trade Center station on the E.

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