

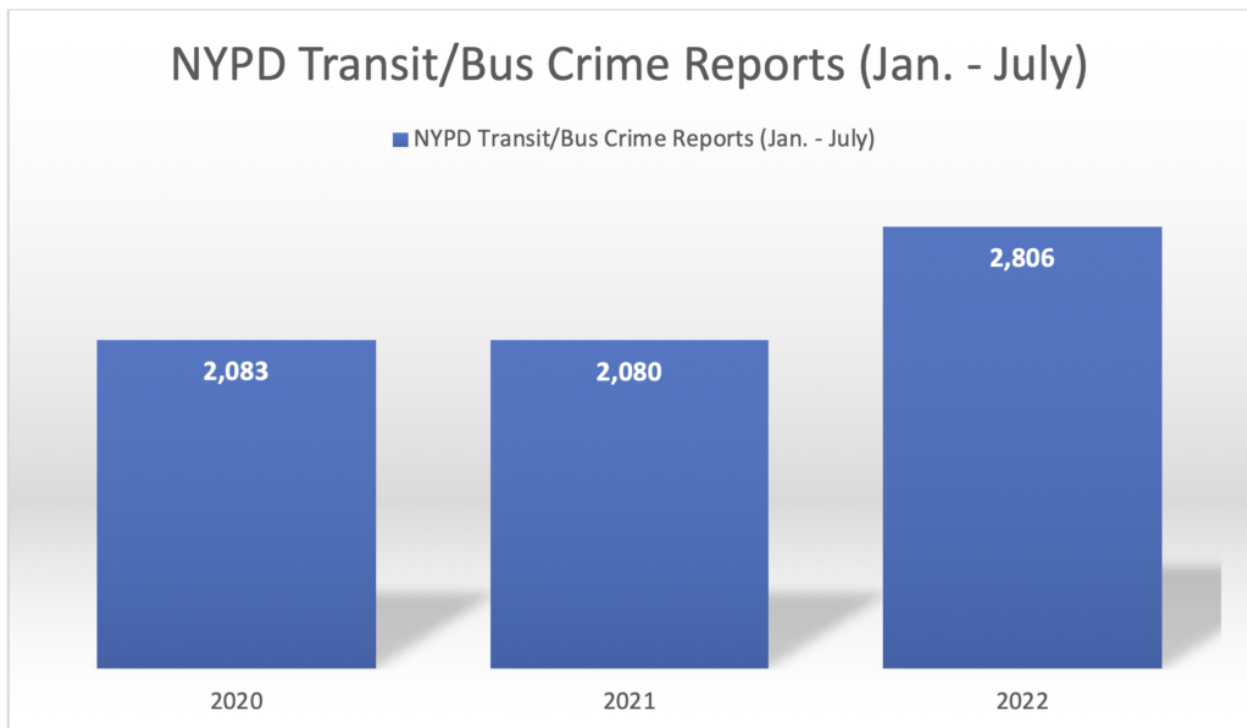
Uptown Subway Riders React to Surveillance Camera Proposal
By Alana Galloway
Publication [Link](#)

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This is the Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s plan to enhance security and surveillance. Over 10,000 cameras already operate in the city’s 472 subway stations. New York City Gov. Kathy Hochul has proposed that all cars have surveillance cameras by 2025, a \$5.5 million effort paid for, in part, by federal funds from the Urban Area Security Initiative, a Department of Homeland Security program.

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Complaints of transit offenses increased 14.86 percent from 3,411 in 2020 to 3,918 last year, according to [NYPD Transit/Bus Crime Reports](#). The NYPD recorded 2,806 transit offenses from Jan. through July 2022, the most recent data available. In Jan. through July 2021, the NYPD recorded 2,080 and in Jan. through July 2020 it recorded 2,083.



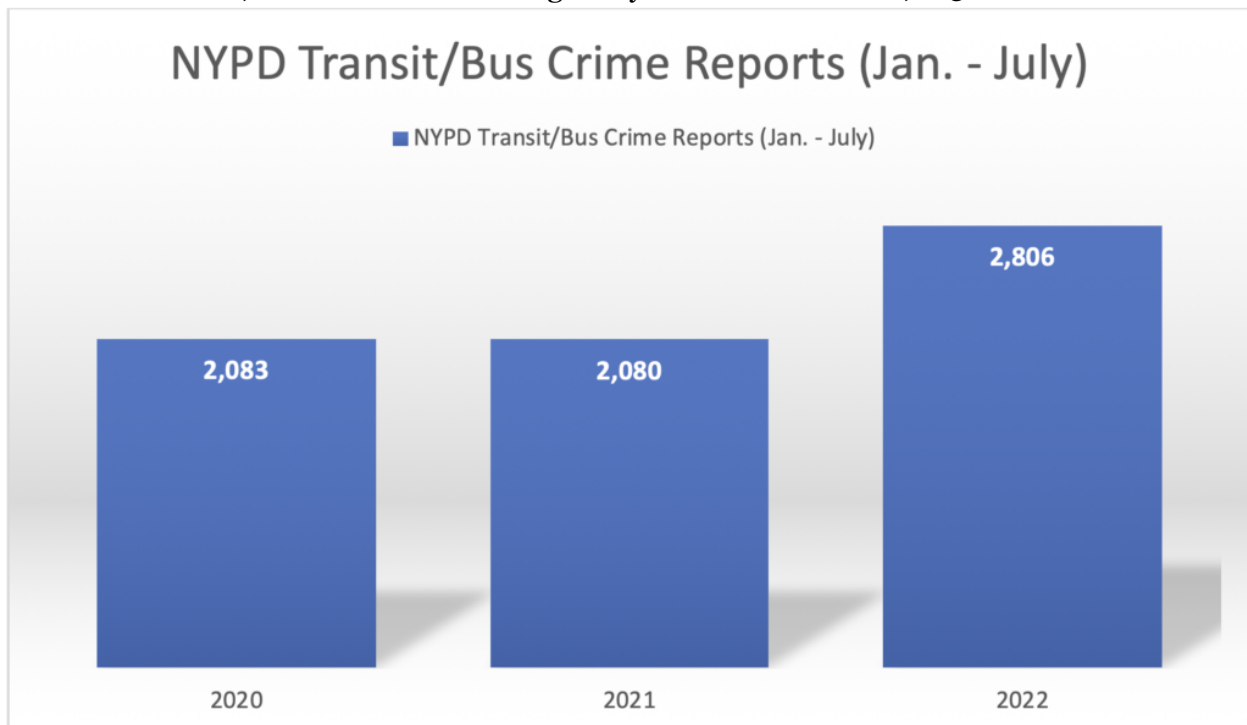
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Despite evidence of rising crime and safety concerns, public safety researchers, privacy advocates and riders express mixed opinions on the prospect of increased subway surveillance.

Nancy La Vigne, Urban Institute Justice Policy Center director and researcher, wondered about the feasibility of such a large-scale plan.

“I would posit that there’s no way the city has the resources available to conduct active monitoring of the cameras,” La Vigne said, referring to footage being watched by humans around the clock. “The volume’s too great for that to be possible, from both a human resource perspective and a financial perspective. And, if there are two cameras on each and every subway car, then we’re talking about a huge amount of data that’s very expensive to store.”

Footage might later be extracted to investigate crimes, but without active monitoring, “the cameras are almost capturing moments after the fact,” La Vigne said. “It’s conceivable that some people will choose not to commit crimes because they know they’ll be caught on camera, but in order for that to be persuasive, people will need to sense that the cameras are a real threat.”

Uptown residents had varying perspectives on the cameras and whether they’d deter crime.

“I’m all for it,” Juan Hernandez, 32, said, waiting for the 1 train at 137th Street. “Crime’s getting bad and I have elderly parents. More safety is always a good thing. They’re already watching us anyways, so why not?”

Devin Bowles, 24, concurred, “I can see where there are benefits for crime.”

On the 1 train platform at 125th street, Harlem resident Esperanze Méndez, 46, said, “I like them. It’s the best for everybody.”

Other uptown subway-riders were less certain. “I don’t know if it’ll change anything,” said Gerard Peza, 47, riding the 3 downtown from 135th Street. “I don’t think it will.”

Aaron Estrella, 31, hadn’t heard about the plan before. “I just don’t know what to think,” he said.

“I don’t like it,” Kyara Brown, 27, said. “What are they gonna do with the videos? Who are they trying to get in trouble?”

Daniel Schwarz, a New York Civil Liberties Union Privacy and Technology Strategist, said the MTA has long been secretive about its surveillance technology and hasn’t disclosed its existing policies about sharing footage or information. The NYPD is mandated to disclose its surveillance technologies, he added, but information from police and the MTA is limited.

Asked to comment or provide further information, the MTA declined.

“We don’t know the scale or the scope of the CCTV [closed-circuit television] cameras,” Schwarz said. “The MTA funded a category in their budget for passenger ID which may or may not include video analytics, such as biometric surveillance – especially face surveillance.”

Privacy organizations have criticized the MTA's practices and lack of transparency for years, Schwarz said. "We've seen the enforcement and police harassment on the subway system, specifically for unhoused people, result."

"There is no evidence that cameras will decrease crime," Schwarz added, "Cameras might deter crime if they were visible, but these will be undetectably small. Cameras are plastered all over our streets and that hasn't necessarily brought down crime. Increasing CCTV is not deterring crime."

Schwarz particularly worries about facial recognition technology and biometric surveillance, shown to be flawed and racially-biased, which could lead to false allegations and arrests.

"It's notoriously inaccurate; for black and brown people, for young people, for women, nonbinary people, and all the people," he said.

Hochul and the MTA have not specified which software systems they will use or who will have access to the footage.