

5 reasons every subway needs Wi-Fi

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It's tough to imagine in the 21st century: a musty, dimly-lit, underground tunnel — crammed full of people — that's essentially a black hole of wireless signals.

Behold the glory of the NYC subway system.

London just rolled out their new Virgin Media-sponsored Wi-Fi at two of their Tube stations with 80 more stations to go before the summer Olympics comes to town. Other cities with underground Wi-Fi systems include Tokyo, Singapore, San Francisco, and Berlin.

In 2012, NYC hasn't made the list, despite its *1.6 billion* subway riders.

In fact, NYC is *just* announcing a plan to install Wi-Fi in stations over the next five years through Boingo. To be clear, they're not going to put Wi-Fi on the trains themselves, just in the stations. It's not a perfect proposal, but definitely a step in the right direction.

As a frequent ride of the PATH train and subway—New York, I salute you. Frankly, if I'm going to be forced to travel underground like a mole person, you could at least throw some free Wi-Fi my way.

1. When is this train coming?

Wi-Fi- can and should serve as a stop-gap technology while NYC implements digital boards in ALL of its many subways. Improving the subways is an ongoing process and it's subject to the delays and bureaucratic red tape like any other city project. It's expensive and it takes a long time to make changes. Wi-Fi and a decent Subway app could serve as a short (and long) term alternative for expensive infrastructural improvements.

2. It's for emergencies

With a bad economy comes budget cuts and fewer employees. For the Subway, that means fewer guards in stations and on trains. With Wi-Fi, it would be easy for a commuter to contact authorities in case of emergency. If someone falls on the

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tracks, passes out on a hot station, or falls, it's important that passengers can get help. As an added bonus, it would become significantly easier to report crimes or suspicious behavior.

3. Commuting is boring

Honestly, there is nothing entertaining or fun about commuting. The average NYC commuter spends 34.6 minutes commuting each day, according to the 2010 American Community Survey. As people cram more and more work into their day, it would be nice to be able to answer emails or use the time productively, instead of being held captive by the lack of technology. No work to do? Play an online game, read the news, or chat with friends. By implementing Wi-Fi, officials could reduce a lot of transportation stress—particularly if they decide to run the Wi-Fi throughout the trains.

4. Lost people need maps

If you've ever tried to navigate a subway system in an unfamiliar city, you've probably wished for a map of the system while you're standing trackside. I lived in London for five months and still had to look at the map for certain destinations. I went through about a hundred of those paper maps and always forgot them.

Officials estimate 51.5 million people will visit NYC in 2012. That's 51.5 million potentially lost subway riders. They should be able to pull up a map on their phone when they accidentally end up in Queens in an attempt to get to Times Square. It happens.

Consider, if you will, the influx of tourists into London during the 2012 Olympics who will be able to take a quick peek while they try to figure out how to get to Waterloo station. The Tube is going to be on overload when the games are in town; officials were smart to make Wi-Fi available to underground tourists and commuters alike.

5. Call me, maybe

It's the subway, delays happen. Wouldn't it be nice if you could let someone know you're going to be late or if there was a signal problem and the train is running 40 minutes behind schedule? Maybe even meet up with someone on a platform? The fact that I can't contact someone "on the outside" when I'm riding the subway seems antiquated and easily fixed.

That's not to say the government should stop improving the physical infrastructure of the subways with newer trains, more digital screens announcing arrival and wait times, and perhaps even some façade improvements. But, think of Wi-Fi as a bone thrown to the bored masses traveling underground. It's not going to fix ALL of the problems in the subway, but it would make commuting a tad less unpleasant and a little safer.

Some of these reasons are just for entertainment, some are for the sake of convenience, but Wi-Fi is a worthy investment in the infrastructure and future of the city. It's a cost-efficient way to deal with budget cuts and waning project funds while still moving in the right direction.

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Next stop? Wi-Fi trains.

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