

# THE TWENTIES *IN* New York City Subway Posters

The New York City subway has taken its place as an icon of Americana—and for subway riders of the 1920s, the company posters displayed in the subway cars and elevated trains became iconic in themselves. Today the “Subway Sun” and the “Elevated Express” offer a unique perspective on the period 1918 to 1932, the sixteen-year span of the series.

Presented here are twenty of the 385 21x16” posters produced by the Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT) to encourage ridership after its first competitor, Brooklyn Rapid Transit, opened the first BRT line into Manhattan in 1917. Imagine reading the posters while riding the rumbling crowded subway in New York City in the years from the end of World War I to the beginning of the Great Depression.

- ❑ What major events and issues of the period were highlighted in the posters?
- ❑ How did the posters display prevalent attitudes of the period? How did they reflect a big-city perspective on the “modern age”? a business perspective?
- ❑ In what ways were the posters entertaining as well as informative or promotional?
- ❑ How did the graphic and text design change over the period? How did these changes reflect the period?
- ❑ Do you think the posters were an effective marketing device for the IRT? Why?
- ❑ Combine the subway posters with other single-source collections in *Becoming Modern*, Theme I: THE AGE, e.g., from another New York City source (*New Yorker* cartoons) or from another large city source (*Chicago Tribune* political cartoons). What unique insights can be gained by studying single-source collections from a period? What limits do they present?

Notes:

- “L”: elevated train.
- Brooklyn strike (Sept. 1920 poster): The August 1920 BRT transit workers’ strike was one of many postwar strikes for better wages and working conditions.
- Defense Test Day (Sept. 1924 poster): national radio broadcast by the federal government in 1924 and 1925 to demonstrate the nation’s defense preparedness.
- Emergency Unemployment Relief Committee [of New York] (1932 poster): city agency created to raise private donations for worker relief; initiated as part of Pres. Hoover’s campaign to stimulate volunteer aid for the unemployed.



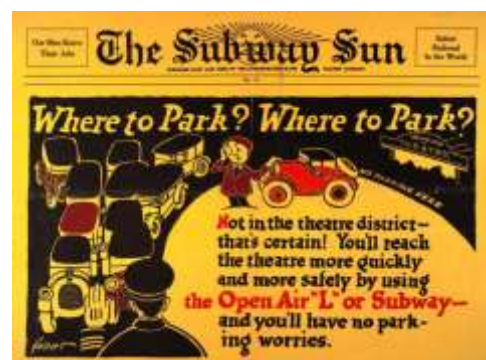
1920



1920



1924



ca. 1924



Published occasionally by the INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY

VOLUME 1

SEPTEMBER 27, 1918

NUMBER 3

## Shuttle Service in Operation

The shuttle service from Times Square to the Grand Central Station will be placed in operation at 6 A. M., Saturday, Sept. 28th.

Whenever possible avoid changing to the shuttle.

To Prevent the Spread of

## SPANISH INFLUENZA

sneeze, cough or expectorate [if you must] in your handkerchief.


You are in no danger if everyone heeds this warning.

By order of Board of Health  
ROYAL S. COPELAND, President

The direct route will save you time.

*Theodor P. Shonts*  
President

September 27, 1918



Published now and then by the INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY

VOLUME 1


NOVEMBER 25, 1918

NUMBER 9

## A Job and a Welcome to Our Men

2,426 Interborough men are in Uncle Sam's service. When they come home they will find not only a hearty welcome--but their jobs.

And our more recent employes will also be retained. The war so reduced our forces that there will



be work for men old and new,--even more.

Thanks to the women, it has been possible to keep up this service during the war; and we shall need them even after our men return.

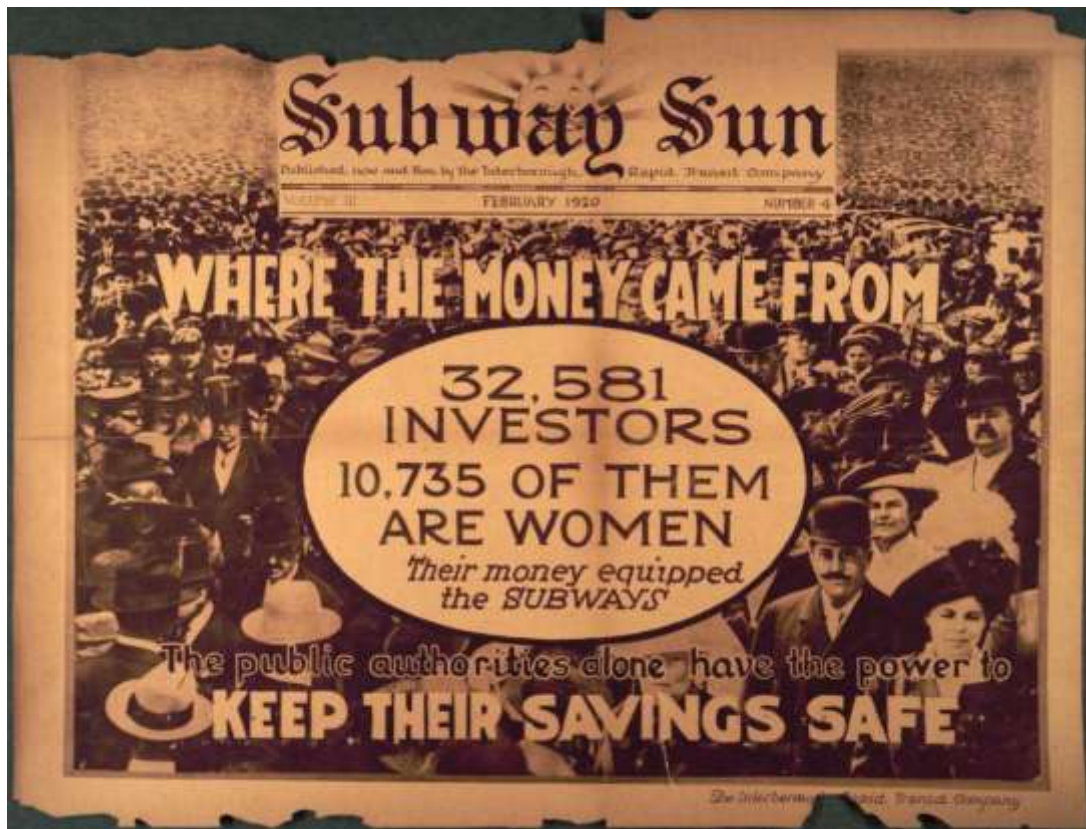
We believe the great riding public appreciates their service as fully as we do.

INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY  
*Theodor P. Shonts*  
President

World's Safest Railroad

November 25, 1918





February 1920



May 1920





# The Subway Sun

World's Safest Railroad

VOLUME 10
AUGUST, 1920
NUMBER 32

From The New York World, August 2, 1920

## 68 KILLED, 632 INJURED, BY AUTOS IN CITY LAST MONTH

List Compiled by Medical Examiner Shows Thirty-Nine of the Dead Were Children Under Age of Thirteen—Fatalities in June Numbered Ninety-Two.

Sixty-eight persons were killed and 632 others were injured by automobiles in New York month. In June, ninety killed.

Included in the July thirty-nine children over the age of the June forty-three mentioned were The death Charles N. der, 6

### DEATH TOLL OF AUTOS IN THIS CITY AND STATE

Death list in city for first seven months this year..... 378

Included in the seven months' list were children under thirteen years ..... 194

The June death record in this city ..... 92

Killed last month ..... 68

Killed in State in last five years ..... 4,685

Killed in this city in same period ..... 3,525

More Street Traffic - More Danger /  
More Subways - Streets Safer /  
**THINK IT OVER!**

Interborough Rapid Transit Company.

August 1920



# The Subway Sun

World's Safest Railroad

VOLUME 10
SEPTEMBER, 1920
NUMBER 35

## THANK YOU!

To The Public - The Brooklyn strike brought much discomfort and trial to our patrons, but they bore it all with patience and consideration.

To Our Men And The Police - To you the strike brought extra long hours and harder work. We wish to express our sincerest appreciation and thanks to the public, the police and our men.

Interborough Rapid Transit Company

September 1920



Going In



ENTRANCE

# The Elevated Express

PUBLISHED NOW AND THEN BY THE INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT CO.

VOLUME IV      DECEMBER, 1921      NUMBER 40

Going Out



EXIT

These two pictures were taken from opposite sides of the same gate.

## Plenty of Gates at Every Station

The new FEATHER-WEIGHT PRESSURE GATES make handling of crowds easier. At all Subway Stations now using them the crowding is less and no standing in line for tickets.

Every gate is for either entry or exit.

*Interborough Rapid Transit Co.*

December 1921

OUTINGS IN NEW YORK No 1

Interborough

# The Elevated Express

PUBLISHED NOW AND THEN BY THE INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY

Always Dependable

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VOLUME V      JUNE, 1922      NUMBER 31

## WHY COUNTRY BOYS ARE STRONG

Nearly all our great men were country boys. Sunshine and open air gave them strength.

Every New York child can get a bit of real country life for the next five months in our great parks.

Build up the Babies! No need to spend large sums for railroad fare. The Interborough lines take you to any one of five of the largest and most beautiful Parks in the World for a nickel.

**Interborough Rapid Transit Co.**

June 1922



OUR WONDERFUL CITY NO.1 BOOST NEW YORK

**Our Men  
KNOW  
Their Jobs**

**Elevated Express**  
Published now and then by the Interborough Rapid Transit Company

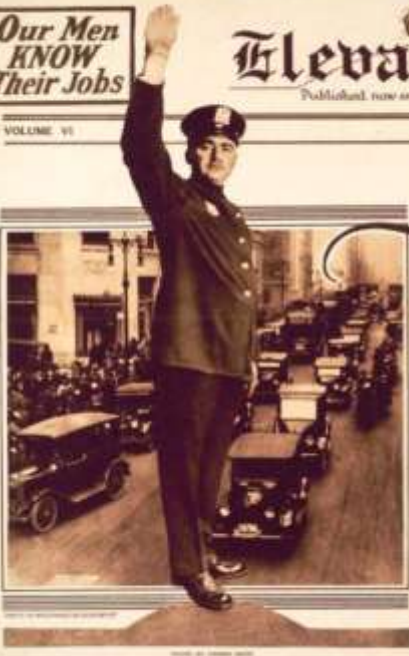
**Always  
Dependable**

VOLUME VI APRIL NUMBER 12

**Boost Her Police**

They deserve it. They protect us day and night.  
They make about 27,000 arrests yearly. But that is only a small part of their work.  
For example, they regulate daily traffic for nearly half a million motor vehicles.

Interborough Rapid Transit Co.



ca. April 1923

**Our Men Know  
Their Jobs**

**The Subway Sun**  
PUBLISHED NOW AND THEN BY THE INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY

**Safest  
Railroad  
In the World**


No. 25

**A Word from President Coolidge**

"Nearly every city is making large appropriations for parks and play grounds.  
"Get the children out of the alleys and off the streets into open places.  
"Teach them true sportsmanship, right living and the love of being square."

—PRESIDENT COOLIDGE, in an address before the National Conference on Outdoor Life at Washington, May 21, 1924.

**Any Interborough Line Will Take You To The  
Parks and Other Outing Spots**



ca. June 1924

**RIDE ON THE ELEVATED AND SUBWAY**

Our Men Know  
Their Jobs

# The Subway Sun

PUBLISHED NOW AND THEN BY THE INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY

Safest  
Railroad  
In the World

No. 28

## To Every Boy and Girl

The  
End  
of a  
Glor-  
ious  
Day



This picture is especially for you. It is a Fourth of July story of Americanism.

★ ★ ★

Boys and girls can make holiday travel safer and more comfortable by not shoving or rushing.

INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY

ca. July 1924

Our Men Know  
Their Jobs

# The Subway Sun


PUBLISHED NOW AND THEN BY THE INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY

Safest  
Railroad  
In the World

No. 14A

## DEFENSE TEST DAY

Friday, September 12th.



A peace time test and demonstration of the organizations and resources that may be brought to the protection of our country.

*Meetings of Citizens in all parts of New York.*

See Newspapers for Time and Place

All conveniently reached by Subway or Elevated ~

September 1924





ca. 1924



ca. 1925



Our Men Know Their Jobs

Safest Railroad In the World

PUBLISHED NOW AND THEN BY THE INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY  
No. 34

# Why I Use the Interborough

—From the Secretary, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

**I** USE the Interborough because it enables me to spend fifteen minutes longer over my breakfast table uptown and fifteen minutes longer at my desk downtown, without being late going or coming.

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

ca. 1925

Our Men Know Their Jobs

Safest Railroad In the World


PUBLISHED NOW AND THEN BY THE INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY  
NUMBER 42

## The Season's Greetings to all our Patrons

INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY

ca. December 1925

Our Men  
Know  
Their Jobs



# The Subway Sun

PUBLISHED NOW AND THEN BY THE INTERBOROUGH RAILROAD COMPANY


Safest  
Railroad  
In the World

VOL. 11 No. 14
1928

## HORSE CARS vs. RAPID TRANSIT

If the fare was 5 and 6 cents in the old days,  
IS SEVEN CENTS TOO MUCH NOW?

In New York City street car fares advanced from 5 to 6 cents after the Civil War . . . . Except in New York City they have gone up similarly since the World War.




WHY SHOULD NEW YORK'S TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT BE  
STIFLED BY AN INADEQUATE FARE?

© 1928 BY INTERBOROUGH RAILROAD COMPANY

1928

Interborough





# The Elevated Express


PUBLISHED NOW AND THEN BY THE INTERBOROUGH RAILROAD COMPANY

Ride on the  
Open Air  
Elevated

VOL. 12 NO. 15
1929

## The "L" Is Your Air Line



It has

Regularity

Speed

Dependability

Out In the Open -  
Away From the Heat  
Of the Crowded Streets

© 1929 BY INTERBOROUGH RAILROAD COMPANY

1929





1931

This poster for 'The Subway Sun' features a large block of text in the center. The text reads: 'Every employed New Yorker is urged to share, promptly and liberally, to provide relief to the thousands in distress... heads of families, lone women, single men, our neighbors... facing the winter with no work and no funds. The need is far greater than a year ago.' Below this is the heading 'Emergency Unemployment Relief Committee'. Underneath, it lists addresses for various locations: 'MANHATTAN: 70 Pine Street, DIghy 4-9800', 'BROOKLYN: 215 Montague Street, TRIangle 5-6377', 'BRONX: 384 East 149th Street', 'QUEENS: 29-27 41st Avenue, Long Island City', 'RICHMOND: 30 Bay Street, St. George, S. I.', and 'HARLEM DIV: 129 West 135th Street'. At the bottom, there are two black boxes with white text: 'we'll see it through!' on the left and 'SHARING... doesn't hurt like SUFFERING' on the right. The top of the poster includes the title 'The Subway Sun' in a large, ornate font, flanked by two boxes: 'Our Men Know Their Jobs' on the left and 'Safest Railroad In the World' on the right. Below the title, it says 'PUBLISHED NOW AND THEN BY THE INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY'. At the bottom, it reads 'INTERBOROUGH RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY'. The poster is dated 'VOL. XIII No. 20' and '1932'.

1932