

Subway Parties

by newmindspace <http://www.newmindspace.com>

Subway parties are underground celebrations! They can take many different forms and follow many different models, so we will lay out the two we are most familiar with.

The Rush Hour Party

The rush hour party seeks to brighten the days of commuters: hardworking strap-hangers who are the economic engines of the city. These parties are thrown during the morning rush (beginning around 8:00 AM) or the afternoon rush (beginning around 5:00 PM). These parties frequently feature giving gifts to passengers, sprinkling them with glitter (at their request), playing music and wearing costumes, all for the purpose of spreading joy. They can make a positive difference in somebody's day, at the very least giving them something to talk about at work.

Limited numbers of party-goers, potentially endangering passengers and a general lack of humor during rush hour are some of the drawbacks to this kind of party.

The Late Night Subway Party

The late night party is a subterranean adventure in wild abandon, taking over a subway car and converting it into your playground.

Choosing a theme

A theme is a good focal point of a party because it allows you to appropriately guide the kinds of decorations and costumes you want to employ. For our Toronto party *ridetherocket*, we chose the theme of "space". NASA had just completed its first mission in two years, "space tourism" was on the tip of everybody's tongue, Sprite was offering a trip to space under the caps of their soft drinks, and we can't possibly forget that silver was whooshing into storefront windows in the form of purses, shoes and belts all over the city's fashion district. We decorated the subway car with glittery stars and encouraged people to come dressed as astronauts.

Transit love (railfandom) is also a tried and true theme. Parties in New York, such as *Q Diamonds Aren't Forever* and *One More Time for the 9* (9:00 PM, dressed to the 9s, love potion number 9, nine lives of a cat, etc.) were in celebration of the life of subway lines that were being discontinued. Mass transit is the very lifeblood of a true city, and in the greatest of cities, people love their railways (and the transit workers love us for it.)

Look at other subway parties to get ideas. Google "subway party". When you look at your subway's map, imagine it as a party instead!

Choosing a subway line

Ride from one end of the subway to another and time your trip with a watch or cellphone. Is the line long enough for a subway party? Half an hour is probably not long enough (sorry Houston). If people could join the party at every stop, would they? Does

the transit authority use different (newer) models of trains for different lines that are more comfortable or visually appealing? Is the route mostly elevated or underground? Are the police more likely to be concerned about some lines than others? Does your transit system have passenger safety alarms on it?

Choosing a time and place

Most subways in the world close. If you live in such a city, the subway party should allow enough time for people to get back home after the party (which can end up being another party in itself!) Try to choose a night when there won't be many people on the subway (avoid club nights, celebrity concerts and large sports games) unless you want to interact with a drunk crowd.

Some subways do not close. In such subways, there is very little vigilance in the system, ever. Such systems make for very good middle-of-the-night kinds of parties, around 3 AM or so.

Decorations and music

It's not a party without **music**. What kind of music do you want? You may want to consider getting a soundsystem or boom box for the event. Some very clever people have managed to get power from trains. You can also use real instruments, such as guitars, drums or accordions. If you do use instruments, try to choose songs that people can sing along to. There was once a subway party where participants loudly read passages from the Bible to 1920's jazz tunes.

Rolls of paper **streamers** give a very good visual "party" vibe. They are cheap and can be hung from the train's handrails. Do not use toilet paper because it gives a very "trashed" look to the subway; the transit authority will not invite you back and you could face littering fines.

Everybody loves **bubbles**! Consider buying a bubble gun or dollar store-sized bubble bottles for your participants. Their carefree, temporary existence brings joy to all from children to seniors, and represents the liberty we all long for.

Wings are great costumes. Why don't people have wings? We obviously want to fly!

The best place to get decorating ideas, quite fittingly, is a party store.

Getting the word out

Most people don't actually know what a subway party is or what it might look like, even if the subway system in their city is more than 50 years old.

Do not post paper flyers: the probability that the information will fall into the wrong hands is greater. Use the internet and be very clear that **this is a subway party**. It is a party. On the subway. City-specific blogs, forums, message boards and mailing lists are more

than happy to spread the word for you. You may consider setting up a website and collecting e-mail addresses. Yahoo! Groups (<http://groups.yahoo.com>) may help if you don't have time to make a website and mailing list yourself.

In most transit systems, it is not only illegal but impossible to pass between cars (except in case of an emergency). If you have too large a crowd, you may not fit into a single car, thereby dividing the party.

Let people know that it is possible to join the party at any point in the route, just wait by the last car. Make sure to meet at the end of the platform so that you may board the last car of the train, a useful tradition as the last car of a train doesn't usually contain a conductor.

Drugs and alcohol

Depending on the transit system, you may be able to get away with drinking and perhaps even smoking. This is generally inadvisable, however, as it gives the transit authority a very legitimate reason to halt the party. We have seen people removed from trains or ticketed for drinking in the past. There is nothing preventing anybody from taking care of their substances beforehand, though. Also keep in mind that in some cities, bags and other large containers are subject to search by the police.

The cops and transit workers

If the police show up, be cooperative and courteous. **You have all paid your fares** and are entitled to ride on the subway (technically, you have dramatically increased ridership). The constitution of your country probably guarantees the right to assemble. Be familiar with the transit bylaws of your system and the laws of your country, which are often available online or at a subway station. Try not to get arrested. The police are different in every city; some of them are effective and to be taken seriously, some of them are amiable and harmless, and some are racist, brutal and have no sense of humor.

Respect transit workers. They make the city run! Clean up after the party, do not deface the subway car, do not press the passenger safety alarm unless there is an emergency and do not heckle conductors! If you can, you might consider making a sign that says "I [heart] MTA/TTC/RATP/etc." and replace "MTA/TTC/RATP" with the name of the local transit authority. They will definitely appreciate it!

Please be responsible. Don't ruin it for everyone! Transit systems talk to each other all the time. The last thing we need is a discussion called "How to Stop Subway Parties". Some systems, such as the MTA in New York, actually grow to enjoy subway parties. At *One More Time for the 9*, workers actually dug up old NYC Subway signs and posted them in the station for our enjoyment! We should aim for this as the ideal.

Ready? Go!

When you get to the platform, decide what train you are going to take. When it seems like just about everybody has arrived, **get on the train!** Quickly decorate the subway car and start up the music. Sing, dance, celebrate your existence! Make your party unique and fun, brilliant and beautiful! Take lots of pictures and put them online once the night is through so everyone can enjoy them. Nights like these are why we live together in cities!

This guide is in its first version. If you have any suggestions, let us know at <http://www.newmindspace.com>