# THE POST ASKED PETER SAMSON, THE MASTER PLANNER OF FAMOUS SUBWAY RACES, TO HELP YOU FOLLOW IN HIS TRACKS

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### The Golden Age of the All-System Subway Races

When most of America's young scientific minds dreamed of winning the space race, a band of computer whiz kids toiled at another contest here on the ground. Well, under the ground, actually.

Their challenge came from an unnamed 16-year-old "Flushing youth" - their Sputnik, as it were - who, according to a statement on a 1966 subway map, "rode all the lines on a single token" in 1957.

Peter Samson, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology student, read the map and had a brainstorm. Why not use a computer to chart the quickest route around the system?

That year, he and a group of schoolmates developed an elaborate, computer-generated itinerary that came oh so close to breaking the all-system subway speed record. (They would try again in 1967 with an even more elaborate plan involving runners, pay phones and a teletype machine, but that attempt failed when their computer crashed.)

The publicity they generated set off an underground craze that made the late 1960s the Golden Age of subway races. Dozens of competitors, mostly groups of adolescent males, tried their geeky best to claim the record.

In honor of the subway's centennial, The Post has asked Samson, now a software developer in San Francisco, to create a new route for New Yorkers who want to see the entire subway system and have only, oh, about 23 hours and 37 minutes to kill.

You can find his itinerary here. Peter used wetware (his brain), not software, to develop this route.

*To read Peter Samson's personal chronicle of the 1966 and 1967 MIT subway runs, and the rules his team devised for the competition, see his web page at http://www.gricer.com/anysrc/anysrc.html*

### What About the Record?

The question of what the all-system subway speed record is (or was) has always been clouded because the ground rules vary.

Real sticklers insist that record-seekers cumulatively ride every stretch of passenger track in the system, stopping at every station on each line. Others treat the system as a checklist of stations, not lines of track.

Some in this camp say riders must stop at every station, while others say they must merely *pass through* them.

Around the time of the Golden Age, contestants claimed various records near 21 and 22 hours, but major system changes in recent years have made these run times largely meaningless.

The current Guinness Book of World Records recognizes Kevin Foster of California as the subway-riding champ, with a trip of 26 hours, 21 minutes, 08 seconds in October 1989. The Guinness rules require contestants to stop at each station but not ride every stretch of track. They also permit contestants to exit and re-enter the system, a definite no-no among traditionalists.

Meanwhile, Mike Falsetta and Salvatore Babones claimed a ride of 25 hours 11 minutes in January 1998, using a different set of guidelines. They rode past all the stations, but did not stop at every one. And they never left the system. This is the record you might beat using Samson's itinerary.

If you want to take a shot at a record, be sure to clearly define your rules first. (It would be helpful to consult the MIT team's guidelines posted on Peter's web page at http://www.gricer.com/anysrc/anysrc.html, or the Guinness World Record rules.) Be prepared to document your ride with a strict logbook and signed witness statements. A video record wouldn't hurt, either.

**Tips for Doing It Yourself**

If you want to modify Peter's route, or build your own from scratch, consult the subway schedules and service changes posted online at:

http://www.mta.nyc.ny.us/nyct/service/schemain.htm

http://www.mta.nyc.ny.us/nyct/service/subsrvno.htm

It's standard practice to pick the longest branches to start and end on, so that they don't have to be covered twice.

Minimize the time spent riding in the dead of night, when service is at its lowest ebb.

Advice from Samson: Carry the train schedules with you. If you load them in a laptop computer, you can solve the route for changes in real time as you proceed through the system. Good luck!

**The Old and the New**

According to Rebecca Morris, a Manhattanite who rode the system and wrote about in 1974, the trip by that frugal Flushing teen - whose name was Jerome Moses - was not the first recorded bid to travel the whole subway. Two days before the IRT, BMT and IND were unified in 1940, Herman Rinke, an electric-railroad buff, did it purely as a "sentimental gesture" in some 25 hours.

A new generation of subway fans is bringing the concept of the all-system ride into the modern era. A 2003 attempt at a record, cooked up by the creators of the documentary "New York Underground," added a reality-TV twist: the seven teammates were essentially strangers. Their underground odyssey was as much an exercise in interpersonal diplomacy as in planning and stamina.

Even though their attempt fell far short, David-Paul Gerber, the skipper of the team, had no regrets. In words that Herman Rinke - and hundreds of others, no doubt - would agree with, he stated, "It was always my lifelong fantasy to ride the whole subway."

# The Guinness World Record for Traveling the NYC subway in the shortest time (as of Oct. 2004)

## Current Record

The record time for traveling the entire New York City subway system is **26 hours 21 minutes 08 seconds** by Kevin Foster (USA) on October 25-26, 1989.

## Guidelines

The following is a guide to the specific considerations and undertakings, in addition to the general requirements, for any potential attempt on traveling the New York City subway in the shortest time record. They should be read and understood by all concerned - organizers, participants and witnesses - prior to the event.

## Rules

This record is for traveling the entire MTA New York City subway system in the least amount of time.

1. All of the stations served by the subway system must be visited. To "visit" a station, the challenger must arrive and/or depart by a subway train in normal public service. It is necessary for a train to stop at the station for the visit to count, although the challenger does not have to leave the train at that station. If a station is normally open only at certain times of the day, this must be taken into account during planning. Only if a station is temporarily closed (e.g. for rebuilding or in an emergency) will a non-stop pass through a station be acceptable.

2. It is only necessary to visit all the stations on the network, not to travel every stretch of line. Thus, if a station is served by more than one line, it is not necessary to visit that station on each line.

3. Challengers may travel the same stretch of track (and visit the same station) more than once, if necessary.

4. Attempts on this record must be continuous (i.e. any breaks or stops that are taken must be included in the final time).

5. Transfers between subway lines must be made by scheduled public transport or on foot. The use of private motor vehicles, taxis or any other form of privately arranged transport (bicycles, skateboards, etc.) is not allowed.

## Authentication

For the purposes of verifying any claim, the following **must** be provided:

Witness Book

Any attempt must take place in view of the public, wherever possible, and a book made available for independent witnesses to sign. The book should be set up so that the following details can be included for each potential witness:

Date & Time Location Name Signature

For solo and unsupported attempts, we appreciate that it might not be possible to gain an unbroken line of witnesses, but one should try to obtain as many as possible. For an attempt that is supported by a backup team, we would expect it to be possible to gain sufficient numbers of independent witnesses to

enable verification for the entire duration of the attempt. Where possible, local dignitaries and police should be sought to sign the book.

Logbook

A logbook detailing every stage of the journey, i.e. the time of arrival and departure from each station, line changes, commutes between lines and stations, etc. must be maintained. This book should illustrate clearly the route followed.

All rest breaks or stoppages for whatever reason must also be fully detailed in the log.

To attest to the validity and genuineness of the claim, we require signed statements of authentication by two independent persons of some standing, one of whom should have attended the beginning of the event and, if possible, the end.

These statements should originate directly from the witnesses (in their own hand) and be submitted where possible on their own headed notepaper and include full contact details.

Statements should not take the form of documents prepared by those involved in the record attempt.

***NOTE:*** *This information posted here is for reference purposes only, and should not be relied on as the "official" Guinness rules. Contestants should consult with Guinness World Records before attempting this record.*

http://www.nypost.com/subway/subwayraces0.htm