

Under the Freedom of Information Law, the Coalition requested "Documentation of All Track Fires on the Lexington Avenue IRT Line, between 34th Street and Grand Central Terminal, from 1975 to 2016." Information on track fires prior to 1997 was unavailable.

The report contained documentation for 95 incidents since 1997, as follows:

1997: 4
1998: 8
1999: 3
2000: 1
2001: 6
2002: 3
2003: 1
2004: 2
2005: 1
2006: 3
2007: 3
2008: 2
2009: 1
2010: 6
2011: 7
2012: 5
2013: 11
2014: 6
2015: 17
2016: 5

The incidents are organized in three groups according to location:

- In Grand Central and North of Grand Central
- South of Grand Central (this group was created because it was not known where—i.e., close to Grand Central or closer to 33rd Street—the incident took place)
- In 33rd Street, South of 33rd Street, and North of 33rd Street

The number of incidents in each group is as follows:

- In Grand Central, North of Grand Central: 62 *
- South of Grand Central: 16
- In 33rd Street, South of 33rd Street, North of 33rd Street: 17

Almost all of the incident reports were quite detailed, giving the nature of the problem, the minute-by-minute sequence of communication to the personnel

involved, and the resolution.

After reviewing all of the incident reports, four categories of causation became evident: **vandalism, electrical, track fire, and other.**

There were two **vandalism** incidents, both at Grand Central. One was unexplained; the other involved youths setting off fire extinguishers. These two incidents were obviously not related in any way to "fire" or "smoke" conditions that would place subway riders in harm's way.

Except for one incident report South of 33rd Street (lights caught fire), all (eight) other **electrical** incident reports were confined to Grand Central or North of Grand Central. They involved sparking wire, the third rail cable, signal box, burning insulator, fuse box, water in contact with exposed wires, cable box, and melted insulators.

There were 34 **track fires** attributed to Grand Central and North of Grand Central, all of which appeared to be easily managed by MTA track personnel or the Fire Department. Four of them were self-extinguished. Most of the fires involved debris or paper; others were caused by a soda can welded to the third rail, trash bag, umbrella on third rail, rags, or "brown shirt and track grease."

There were 12 **track fires** attributed to South of Grand Central: One was self-extinguished; nine were caused by debris, rubbish, or paper; the other two by "ties burning" and "wood box burning." In five instances, the distance from Grand Central in feet was indicated: 100, 200, 200, 500, and 550. Depending on how this measure is interpreted, some of these incidents could be attributed to Grand Central.

There were 11 **track fires** attributed to 33rd Street, South of 33rd Street, and North of 33rd Street: Two were self-extinguished; seven were caused by paper or debris; and the other two by "grease and steel dust" and "debris fire caused by MTA workers." Unlike the South of Grand Central reports, there were no indications of how far north (towards Grand Central) these incidents took place.

The **other** incident report category included many instances where neither smoke nor fire was present. In Grand Central and North of Grand Central there were 17 **other** incidents, nine of which were benign: pot-filled cigars, smell of smoke (but no smoke), chemical spill from passenger, burned subway poster, incense, a passenger carrying a gas container, and three of smoke from street vendors' food carts. The other eight were: fire on passenger platform, garbage train (at 49th Street), smoke at shuttle, smoke from a broken elevator motor, smoke, train undercarriage hitting a manhole cover, exploding batteries, and third rail contact with train shoe.

There were four **other** incidents at South of Grand Central: three involved smoke, but no fire, and one from burning clothes.

There were five **Other** incidents in 33rd Street, South of 33rd Street, and North of 33rd Street: one involving the odor of smoke (but no smoke), train car defect, metal can on third rail, stuck brake, and freon leak.

In total, there were 13 incident reports that can be considered **benign, i.e. no actual smoke or fire**. In effect, they could also be considered mis-reports. If they are deducted from the actual incident reports in which either fire or a more serious smoke condition was present, **the total of incident reports over a 20-year period becomes 82, of which 50 were located in Grand Central and North of Grand Central**.

The incident reports also indicated on which **occasions the vent fans at Grand Central and 33rd Street were activated**. In 20 years, they were activated ten times:

- 1/4/05: Smoke at Grand Central shuttle platform. Source of smoke was unfounded.
- 10/7/06: Overhead track fire south of 33rd Street...cables burning...bank of lights by Survey Marker #136+50 had caught fire...the Fire Department had extinguished the flames.
- 8/28/07: Burning insulator located at approximately 1,000 feet south of 42nd Street at Survey Marker #24+47.... Colon...knocked out the burning insulator and the fire had extinguished.
- 4/16/10: Track fire approximately 50 feet south of 33rd Street.... The fire has self extinguished.... The track fire was track bags near Survey Marker #135+16.
- 12/9/10: Fire smoke condition on 1 track.... Fire/smoke condition is at Survey Marker #L1 11+50.... A fuse box under the third is the cause of the condition.
- 8/15/12: Small track fire adjacent to track 1 of Grand Central in the switch area of the Grand Central Shuttle.... The small paper debris fire was extinguished.
- 5/22/13: Smoke condition on track 1, south of Grand Central.... The fire department extinguished the track fire.... Debris, bottles, and cans were burning.
- 10/14/13: The train came in contact with an object on the roadbed, causing a loud unusual noise.... The train came in contact with an open manhole cover door.... Personnel secured the manhole cover door.... Smoke issuing due to the train coming in contact with something on the

- track.... Contact shoe on the train came in contact with some type of pipe on the track.... The smoke subsided.... No damage to track.... The conduit which came in contact with the train was secured.
- 2/21/15: A small track fire north of Grand Central.... Southbound tube is clear but there is an odor of smoke.
 - 8/28/15: A smell of smoke north of 42nd Street/Grand Central.... There was track fire that appeared to be spreading across #3 track.... There were rags and other debris on fire by Survey Marker #18+00.... The fire was extinguished.

Seven of those vent fan activations were in Grand Central. They appear to be arbitrary and inconsistent with the actual seriousness of the events, though MTA personnel may not have been aware of the degree of fire/smoke and took appropriate precautions.

It is obvious that in the past 20 years, the IRT line between Grand Central and 33rd Street has not had a single fire/smoke incident that would justify the Park Avenue Vent project. It would be a much better investment in taxpayer dollars to upgrade the vent fans at Grand Central and 33rd Street, not to mention preventing the unnecessary air pollution, noise, and vehicular/pedestrian congestion that such a project would create.

*Of the 62 incident reports for Grand Central and North of Grand Central, 22 of the incidents occurred North of Grand Central. It is doubtful that vent fans on Park Avenue would have any impact on a fire/smoke event so far away.