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Second Avenue subway takes first ride just before New Year's Eve ball drop in Times Square

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Motorman Joey Morales eased the throttle forward and the silver subway car, wrapped in blue and orange, lurched north, beginning a journey nearly 100 years in the making.

Morales, who has operated trains for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority for 20 years, was at the controls of the inaugural Q train that rode the newly laid rails of the Second Ave. subway Saturday night.

The ceremonial trip took place for an invitation-only crowd of dignitaries, about 90 minutes before the New Year's Eve ball drop in Times Square.

A few cars back, conductor Charlie Feliciano was joined in his cab by Metropolitan Transportation Authority boss Tom Prendergast and poet Billy Collins, who read his poem "Subway" over the announcement system.



The new Second Avenue subway station opens to the public at noon on Jan. 1. (KEVIN P. COUGHLIN/OFFICE OF GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO)

CRISTIN TIERNEY

“I have 27 years and 10 months working with the transit department and it’s a privilege today to be the conductor on this train,” Feliciano told the Daily News after the train rolled to a stop at the immaculate new 96th St. station.

During the ride, Prendergast grabbed the mic from Feliciano and did the honors: telling the distinguished riders to stand clear of the closing doors and give up their seats to the elderly.

The general public will get their first chance to ride at noon on New Year’s Day, an opening date Gov. Cuomo swore he would stick to.



Gov. Cuomo, joined by MTA Chairman and CEO Thomas Prendergast, dedicates the brand new Second Avenue subway line. (KEVIN P. COUGHLIN/OFFICE OF GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO)

“You could say, ‘You were late. It started a hundred years ago,’” Cuomo said Friday at a tour of one of the new stations. But, he added, “we wanted to make a new and different statement as we start this new year.”

The launch party, which at times had the feel of a gallery opening, kicked off at the 72nd St. station before the select group of construction workers, business leaders, and public officials hopped on a spotless subway car.

The dress code was cocktail attire, the lights were low, and attendees snacked on hors d’oeuvres while sipping New York-produced wine, beer, cider and spirits.

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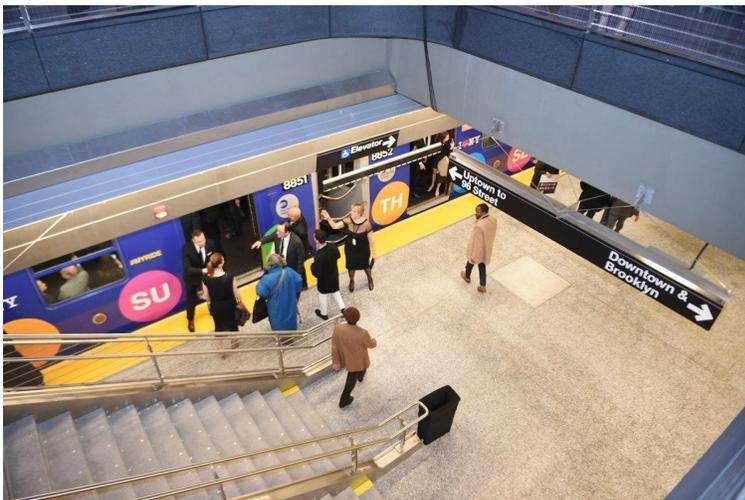


Sandra Lee and Gov. Cuomo celebrate the completion of the Second Avenue subway and New Year's Eve inaugural ride. (ELIZABETH SHAFIROFF/REUTERS)

“It’s just so out of this world,” said Mary Temple, a Williamsburg installation artist. “This station will never be this clean again.”

Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio rode in the same car, taking in the historic subterranean experience.

Jean Shin, whose work is featured at the 63rd St. station, was awed by the enormity of the finished product.



The ceremonial trip took place for an invitation-only crowd of dignitaries, about 90 minutes before the New Year’s Eve ball drop in Times Square. (KEVIN P. COUGHLIN/OFFICE OF GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO)

“It’s an epic moment to be part of history,” she said.

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The \$4.5-billion project, which finally broke ground in 2007, was first proposed in the 1920s.

Work on the line started and stopped several times, derailed by the Great Depression, World War II, and the city's glum financial situation in the latter part of the 20th century.



The two miles of track along Manhattan's Upper East Side stretch from 96th St. down to 63rd St., where it connects with the rest of the system. (KEVIN P. COUGHLIN/OFFICE OF GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO)

The added service is meant to reduce overcrowding and delays on the Lexington Ave. line.

The two miles of track along Manhattan's Upper East Side stretch from 96th St. down to 63rd St., where it connects with the rest of the system.

It's unclear when the remaining three phases of the project, connecting East Harlem to the Financial District, will be completed — or just how much they will cost.

“It's like the New York story: you have a great idea, it takes a lot of work, but there's a lot of barriers and obstacles to making that a reality,” Shin said.