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Circ: 14,008,884

PHONE SMART

Help in Shaving Minutes Off Your Underground Commute



A question for New Yorkers: How much would you pay for another 10 minutes with your family after work?

If the answer is \$5 or so, you are in the sweet spot of a few mobile apps that will help you find the right subway — and the right spot in the right subway car — to get you where you need to go in the shortest possible time.

As usual, iPhone users have a leg up, because mobile software developers have built far more useful apps for the platform than for, say, Android or BlackBerry. But people with those phones at least have a few options.

On the short list are Exit Strategy NYC (\$4, iPhone and BlackBerry; \$3, Android), HopStop (free, only on iPhone), KickMap (\$3, iPhone; \$5, iPad; not available on Android or BlackBerry), CityTransit (\$3, only on iPhone), and NYC Bus and Subway Maps (free, only on Android).

None of the apps do everything well, unfortunately, but

I found CityTransit to be the best for quickly directing

Like the others on my list, CityTransit includes a stored

At street level, the “locate” function relies on GPS to find

Press a button and the app takes you to the iPhone’s “M

The app also had an updated “Service Advisories” featur

KickMap took a little getting used to, but it was CityTr

You can also toggle between maps for nighttime and da

Android users have nothing yet that is as full-featured as KickMap or CityTransit. The free NYC Bus and Subway Maps app is a reproduction of the official transit maps and is great to have in your phone when you need to see them quickly. KickMap’s “Lite” version, which is also free, is just a map.

iPhone owners who want a more full-featured free app, meanwhile, will find HopStop useful. Type in your destination, and it offers you directions to the nearest subway station to get you there. It also tells you the travel distance and the approximate time.

Ads were an annoying distraction, but that’s what you get with a free service. And if you want information about hours of operation or construction alerts, you’re on your own.

HopStop’s timing estimates can be inaccurate, depending on the time of day. A trip from Brooklyn Bridge to Grand Central was supposed to take 32 minutes, but took just 25 minutes during rush hour, when the uptown 4 and 5 trains ran less than a minute apart.

While on that ride, I noticed I was ahead of schedule. The 6:04 train from Grand Central was suddenly possible — if I hit my marks.

And here is where Exit Strategy comes in handy. It solves a problem faced by anyone who has ever reached their subway stop, only to face the dreaded staircase bottleneck. If you approach the staircase from the rear, where people must squeeze along a narrow stretch of platform to reach the stairs, it’s even worse.

The app is simple to use, and requires no cell or GPS connection to work. Select your stop from the map and choose an uptown or downtown train, and it tells you which car will put you in the best position to beat everyone to the exit.

The app even shows the best door to choose on a given car, which is great.

That doesn’t mean you always avoid trouble. On my ride from Brooklyn Bridge to Grand Central, the app suggested that if I stood at the last door of the seventh car, I would step off the train and onto the stairway to Grand Central’s main concourse.

At the Union Square station stop, I jogged halfway down the platform to switch cars.

As the train slowed at Grand Central, I watched for the staircase. I was 10 yards behind it. I thought I had counted carefully, but Exit Strategy NYC’s developer, Jonathan Wegener, said that I probably entered the wrong car and that he had heard no similar complaints.

Either way, I was facing the dreaded behind-the-stairway bottleneck.

I sprinted to the corner of the staircase to reach it before the bottleneck formed, sped upstairs and made my train. By a minute.

The staircase error injected a little anxiety into the process, but Exit Strategy made the difference between tucking in my kids and hearing about their day, and kissing them on the foreheads as they slept.

Quick Calls

You can transport the media on your iPhone to your home entertainment system with Dexim’s AV Dock Station (\$70 at Dexim.net). A wireless remote control is included. ... If you’re a BlackBerry fan and are ready for a new phone, it may be worth waiting until summer. A new BlackBerry Pearl 3G and BlackBerry Bold 9650 will be available. Pricing and networks are not yet announced. ... With so many games in Apple’s iTunes store, choosing one is a challenge. The Game Trail (a free app, with a corresponding Web site at TheGameTrail.com) offers video previews and reviews to help speed your selection.

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