

# Social media and Hurricane Sandy: Comparing agency strategies

by SUSAN on DECEMBER 17, 2012

“If there is one lesson transit officials have learned from Hurricane Sandy, it is that in the Internet era, keeping riders up to date is just as important as tracks and rolling stock,” Ray Rivera writes in *The New York Times*. “Blow it, and they will let you know.” So *The Times* compared the way MTA Long Island Rail Road and NJ TRANSIT used social media during the storm and its aftermath.

Although both agencies used Twitter extensively, *The Times* focused on the Facebook pages for each agency. The differences were clear. Long Island Rail Road kept its page updated before, during, and after the storm. Staffers answered questions from riders and posted links to outside resources. NJ TRANSIT also posted updates, but the information did not start until the storm had passed, and the agency answered rider questions sporadically and sometimes incorrectly. Rivera writes:

*The result: the Long Island Rail Road conveyed a narrative of shared pain, of workers fighting back against unprecedented damage that was beyond their control. Passengers frequently and vociferously critical of the railroad suddenly sympathized and even praised communication efforts that, if not perfect, were viewed as improved. New Jersey Transit’s communications, on the other hand, became for many commuters yet another source of misery.*

“Long Island Rail Road learned the lesson of telling their riders what’s going on,” said Mitchell L. Moss, director of the Rudin Center for Transportation Policy and Management at New York University. “And it turns out that is as important as the level of service you are providing.” The Rudin Center sponsored a panel discussion about Hurricane Sandy and social media last month. NJ TRANSIT officials defended their hurricane-related communications. “We were tweeting information practically 24 hours a day,” said spokesman John Durso, Jr. As one of the operating agencies of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, LIRR had the advantage of following the lead of its parent agency. “The philosophy was: Everything we find out, let’s put it out as fast we can,” said Adam Lisberg, MTA director of external communications. [Link to full story in The New York Times.](#)

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