Museums for America

Sample Application MA-252048-OMS-22
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Access

New York Transit Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS: $155,250
Amount of cost share: $157,937

The New York Transit Museum will enhance access to a collection of prints and negatives documenting the first line to open in the New York City subway system. The Route 1 collection contains an estimated 5,000 prints and 3,350 negatives that depict the 28 subway stations and 9.1 miles of tunnels that opened on October 27th, 1904. The museum will engage two contract archivists to catalog, digitize, rehouse, and create a finding aid for the images. The museum will use the newly digitized images in exhibitions and programming in addition to sharing them through social media and its online collections portal. The museum will also display selections of the images at the transit system's main facility, on public kiosks throughout Manhattan, and on digital screens throughout the subway system, promoting a greater public understanding of the local history of transit.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion
- Digital Product Plan

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the current Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

NEW YORK TRANSIT MUSEUM

Proposal to the Institute of Museum and Library Services Museums for America Program
"Picturing Route 1"
Narrative

Project Justification

On October 27th, 1904, the New York City subway system began operations with an inaugural ride that departed from City Hall station. With Mayor McClellan at the sterling silver controls – manufactured for the occasion by Tiffany & Co. – a ceremonial subway car full of dignitaries traveled north to Grand Central Station at 42nd Street, west across the island of Manhattan to Times Square, and then north again along Broadway to 145th Street, the original end of the line. Known as Route 1, this first subway line launched a transformation of New York City.

Friends of the New York Transit Museum seeks a Museums for America grant of $155,250 in support of a two-year project to catalog, digitize, and create a finding aid for an estimated 8,350 images of Route 1 in the Archives of the New York Transit Museum (NYTM). These images are part of the Subway Construction Photograph collection, an estimated 100,000 prints and negatives of the routes of the subway lines before and during construction. The Route 1 images capture a detailed portrait of Manhattan just before the subway was built, record the extraordinary engineering feats and human effort of the subway's construction, and document the impact the subway had on the city and the people who lived in it.

Route 1 opened new areas of Manhattan to development, making it possible for the city's burgeoning population to live somewhere other than the overcrowded downtown districts where they worked. It spurred the development of new business and amusement districts in Midtown. And its success was the driving force in establishing New York as an epicenter of American commerce and industry for much of the 20th century.

The Route 1 images show the buildings, businesses, and streets of Manhattan before the subway, along with the workers, tools, and equipment doing the backbreaking work of building the tunnels below. In addition to this engineering and architectural information, they also capture the everyday details of early 20th century street life: carriages and automobiles make their way, men congregate outside taverns, women push prams, children play, merchants sell their wares. Collectively, they show a city being transformed before the viewer's eyes by the transit system growing beneath it.

The photographs are accompanied by an extraordinary resource that is unique to the NYTM collection: the photographers' original logbooks, which record the date, precise location, image number, and photographer for each image listed. The logbook entries also sometimes record the names of people pictured, and in many cases note the reason the particular image was taken – for example, "4th Ave from 3' E of W.C./ L. & 14' N of N. C. L. 10th/ showing timbering of excavation/ (X) where man fell 10/17/ V. N. E."

The proposed project will make these images and all their related information fully accessible to NYTM's staff for the first time. Staff will then be able to share this important collection and rich history with a nationwide audience through exhibits, programs, and online content. The digitized images will also be central to commemorative exhibits for the subway's 120th anniversary in October 2024 that are expected to reach millions of viewers.

Institutional Impact: Located in an authentic 1936 subway station in Downtown Brooklyn, NYTM was founded in 1976 as an initiative of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). NYTM's mission is to collect, exhibit, interpret and preserve the history, sociology, and technology of public transportation in the greater New York City region, and to conduct research and educational programs that make our collections accessible and meaningful to a broad audience. In addition to collecting for preservation and exhibition, NYTM's Archives department is the official repository of records relating to the MTA and its operating agencies, and today holds the most extensive collection of public transportation materials in the United States – over 800,000 objects, images, documents, and ephemera. The proposed project directly supports our mission of making this collection accessible and meaningful to the public.

Friends of the NYTM (Friends), a 501c3 educational nonprofit organization, was established in 1995 to promote and raise funds for NYTM's operations and programs. In 2012, the Board of Trustees of Friends approved a 10-year plan, reaffirmed in 2017, the goals of which include:
1. *Develop Timely, Relevant Programming*
2. *Serve Growing and Diverse Audiences Expertly and Efficiently*

Scheduled to coincide with the 120th anniversary of the subway system's opening day, the proposed project will facilitate timely programming about the impacts of Route 1 in the past and today. By making the Route 1 photographs accessible, the project will also serve NYTM's growing audience of in-person and virtual visitors.

The project will also advance the goals of the NYTM Archives' long-term plan, adopted by staff in 2019. The Archives receives regular transfers of records from our colleagues at the MTA, in addition to actively collecting past, present, and contemporaneous items – resulting in an immense accumulation of material to be properly processed and digitized for broader use. This document outlines a process for addressing the backlog and identifies item-level cataloging and digitization of the Subway Construction Photograph collection as a top priority. The proposed project, which would address roughly 8% of that collection, is a significant step toward that goal.

By supporting collections management, and promoting access to a museum collection, the project supports IMLS Agency Goal 3, Objectives 1 and 2. By advancing the management and care of a collection and its associated documentation, it supports Program Goal 3, and in particular Objectives 1 (cataloging) and 3 (digitization).

Collection Conditions and Need: The Route 1 collection contains an estimated 5,000 prints and 3,350 negatives that depict the 28 subway stations and 9.1 miles of tunnels that opened on October 27th, 1904. The images include a mix of platinotypes, cyanotypes, and gelatin silver prints, as well as 8x10 and 4x5 large format negatives. The prints have been matched to their negatives, revealing that many negatives are unique images with no matching print. The photographs date from the start of construction in 1900 through later reconstructions around 1960, with the bulk of material dating to 1900-1920. The prints and negatives are in good condition and appropriately housed in acid-free materials in the Archives facility, which is fully climate-controlled (negatives are stored in a purpose-built cold storage vault) and located in an office building with 24-hour security. The prints are organized by their Route and Section numbers, which are the designations used by MTA New York City Transit to indicate precise geographical locations in the subway system. This is the ideal and efficient arrangement, since most requests for images of subway construction are by station name or neighborhood.

The Subway Construction collection is the most important photographic collection in the New York Transit Museum Archives. It is used in many changing exhibits at the Museum, such as "Streetscapes and Subways," an exhibit on view 2020-2022 that focuses on the work of photographers Pierre and Granville Pullis. It is also frequently consulted by researchers for outside projects, which have included scholarly and popular publications, exhibits, documentaries, historic preservation research, student and teacher projects, and theater and film design; recently, images from the collection were requested for set reference by producers for Steven Spielberg's remake of "West Side Story."

However, only 30% of the images in the Subway Construction collection have been cataloged at the item level, and fewer than 3,000 have been digitized. Only 284 of 8,350 Route 1 photographs have been cataloged; 29 of those catalog records have no image. Because the photographs are not fully cataloged, research requests often require searching many boxes by hand, resulting in unnecessary and potentially damaging handling of the fragile prints and negatives; and because they are not digitized and have no finding aid, their contents are neither well-known nor easily accessible – even to NYTM's own staff.

Target Group and Beneficiaries: Route 1 is the most logical place to start the systematic cataloging and digitization of this large collection, not only because of the upcoming 120th anniversary of its opening, but because – as the earliest and original subway route – it is the route most frequently featured in NYTM programs. The primary target group for this project is therefore the 35 museum professionals who make up NYTM's staff, who will be able to share the digitized resources, and the rich stories they tell, with the public.

The beneficiaries of the project will be NYTM's broad and diverse audiences. Within the museum, this will include in-person audiences for exhibits and for education programs serving adults, school groups, families, and people with disabilities. In 2019, the last year NYTM was fully open prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, we served a record 700,000 people between our two locations and through programs outside our walls. In-person visitors at our Brooklyn location, where visitor demographics can be tracked, totaled a record 201,000 people. Walk-in visitors (170,000) were 70% adults and 30% children, and ZIP code data indicates that 92% were US visitors, with heavy representation from the New York City metro area. Field trip participants totaled 30,590 students and teachers from New York City; roughly 80% of groups visited from public or charter schools, and reflect the general demographics of the NYC public school system: 41% Hispanic, 26% African-American, 16% Asian, 15% white, 2% other; 73% of NYC public school students are low-income (per schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs). Nearly 90% of our school programs audience is elementary level (K-5), with 34% of school visits occurring for students in the 2nd grade, when New York City history is required. 17% of groups participated in adapted programs for students with disabilities, and 15% received need-based fee waivers.

Outside the walls of the physical museum, NYTM has built an engaged and growing online audience. Through October 2021, over 26,000 people from across the country have participated in the virtual programs we launched in March 2020, when NYTM began a 17-month closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Our social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) have grown to over 126,000 total followers, 81% of whom are US-based. As the project progresses, we envision announcing project milestones in our biweekly newsletter, directing 85,000 readers to our collections portal at nytransitmuseum.org, where the images will be freely accessible to anyone as soon as they are digitized and uploaded.

The upcoming 120th anniversary of the line's opening also presents a concrete opportunity for broad public engagement with the images. In October 2024, we hope to launch three anniversary exhibits. First, we will open an in-person exhibit of Route 1 images at NYTM's main location in Downtown Brooklyn. Second, Route 1 images geotagged by our partner Urban Archive will appear for the month on LinkNYC kiosks – sidewalk-mounted digital screens that display hyperlocal content – creating a "before and after" experience for viewers about the spot where they are standing. Third, we will collaborate with our colleagues at the MTA to display images on digital screens on subway platforms throughout the system – including in the Route 1 stations themselves – potentially reaching 5 million viewers per day during the anniversary month.

Project Work Plan

Friends of the New York Transit Museum will engage two Contract Archivists to catalog and digitize the proposed group of Route 1 images. One Contract Archivist will be fully funded through the proposed IMLS grant; the second will be funded roughly 50% through the proposed IMLS grant, 50% through another source (cost share). The Archivists will have a Master's degree in museum studies, library & information science, archival studies, history or a closely related field, plus experience in cataloging/digitizing museum collections and knowledge of NYC and/or transportation history.

Management and Resources: The project represents a significant investment of resources for NYTM. It will start with training the Archivists in September 2022, and finish with public display of the images in October 2024.

We estimate the Contract Archivists will undertake two weeks of training, 21.5 months of cataloging/digitizing with rehousing, and one month of creating and revising a finding aid, as detailed in the attached Schedule of Completion. Their work will take place on-site at the NYTM Archives facility in Downtown Brooklyn. NYTM has already upgraded its collections management software, PastPerfect, to create a user-friendly online interface and accommodate a significant increase in the number of images housed in its cloud storage, and will supply the Contract Archivists with appropriate workstations, scanners, and rehousing materials (cost share).

The project will be planned and managed by Acting Collections Manager Daniel Brenner, a trained archivist who has both performed and supervised similar projects at NYTM and Brooklyn Historical Society. Curator Jodi Shapiro, who has an extensive background in photographic materials and is also an archivist, will participate in training and supervision. Ms. Shapiro will also select the images for distribution to the public, including via social media (ongoing throughout), and for exhibition in October 2024 at NYTM, via LinkNYC in collaboration with Urban Archive, and on screens throughout the subway system through our colleagues at the MTA.

NYTM's Press and Marketing Manager, Chelsea Newburg, will manage distribution of the images on social media and through our biweekly newsletter; she will also maintain the collections portal page on the website. Assistant Deputy Director for Education Jennifer Kalter and Senior Manager for Exhibits Rob DelBagno will be the chief liaisons for their departments, ensuring that identified programming needs are met and images are utilized as appropriate. Museum Director Concetta Bencivenga supervises and approves all NYTM programming, and will be the liaison to our MTA colleagues. (All NYTM staff time is cost share.)

Work Plan and Target Group Needs: The Contract Archivists' work plan will be responsive to the museum's programming needs. To assess those needs throughout the project period, Mr. Brenner and the Contract Archivists will present regularly at NYTM's weekly all-staff meetings. The first

presentation will be a kick-off announcement for the project, introducing the two Contract Archivists to the staff community and requesting colleagues' reflections via a written questionnaire on how they might use new Route 1 images in their work – be it exhibits, education programs, or even retail. Any immediate staff needs will be prioritized in the work plan for Year 1 and their completion will be communicated promptly via department liaisons.

Quarterly, Mr. Brenner will present digitized material at staff meeting so colleagues are aware of newly accessible resources they can incorporate into their work. At the end of Year 1, he will survey staff for qualitative and quantitative information on how they have used or intend to use the new image resources, and will again respond to image requests in the work plan for Year 2. At the close of the grant period, he will again survey staff to learn how the images have been used in NYTM's work across departments.

Cataloging and digitizing the photographs will be done concurrently, ongoing from September 2022 through September 2024. Specifically, the project will proceed as follows.

- *Training*: In the first weeks of the grant period, the Contract Archivists will familiarize themselves with the collection and receive training from Mr. Brenner and Ms. Shapiro in NYTM's cataloging standards, as articulated in our Collections Processing and Cataloging Manual. This project will adhere to the Society of American Archivists' *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, which are aligned with the descriptive standards developed and supported by the International Council on Archives and facilitate consistent, appropriate, and self-explanatory descriptions of archival materials. It will also be guided by The Library of Congress Name and Subject Authority File (NAF) and Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus (AAT) for maintaining local thesauri and controlled vocabulary. NYTM has developed an internal Transit Authority File (TAF) which is aligned with the standards put forth in the NAF and includes terminology specific to New York's transit system for custom information such as station names, facility names for yards and bus depots, power facilities, etc. This comprehensive subject authority guide will be instrumental for the cataloging component of this project.

- *Cataloging:* The Contract Archivists will catalog all images within the Museum's collection management database, PastPerfect. They will correct and complete existing catalog records as necessary.

  The most important resource the Contract Archivists will consult for cataloging research is the original logbooks. The date, location, and image number information is recorded in the logbooks, on the prints, and on the sleeves of the negatives, making it possible to match the images and entries definitively. The logbook entries' wealth of detail about each image will be included on the catalog records.

  Complete records will include:
  o An object name that adheres to the standard for this collection (for example, R1S1_484 is Route 1, Section 1, plate number 484)
  o All of the information contained on the photograph itself (Route number, Section number, date, location if available)
  o NYTM internal custom fields filled out (Route, Section, official name of the subway line)
  o Subjects, including street names, borough, names of people pictured (as recorded in the logbooks), names of businesses pictured.
  o The full logbook entry typed into the "Description" field
  o Relationship to any other relevant collections objects (for example, a matched negative or an artifact from the pictured station)

- *Digitizing:* The Contract Archivists will scan the Route 1 images according to Library of Congress archival standards. Both prints and negatives will be scanned as TIFF files at 600 dpi (preservation copy) at 100% size with no interpolation. A surrogate access jpeg file is created automatically when the TIFF is attached to the PastPerfect record. The scans will be uncompressed and unlayered, with an embedded color profile, and DRM-free. Scans will be made on two Epson V850 or equivalent scanners purchased for the project (cost share). The Archivists will attach metadata (including geotags as appropriate) to the images based on a metadata standards sheet Mr. Brenner will develop specifically for this collection.

- *Rehousing:* As the project progresses, the Archivists will also rehouse images as necessary, sleeving the prints in Mylar and distributing them to new folders and boxes to alleviate crowding. (The negatives are already individually encapsulated in acid-free sleeves and not crowded within their boxes. Rehousing materials will be cost share.) Should vinegar syndrome be detected in any of the negatives, those items will be immediately isolated from the collection.

- *Finding Aid:* At the end of the grant period, the Contract Archivists will create a preliminary finding aid for the Subway Construction Photograph collection, which will grow as images of more routes are digitized going forward. The finding aid will be posted online at nytransitmuseum.org and periodically updated.

Mr. Brenner will track progress toward our goal of digitizing the full group of 8,350 images by running weekly reports from PastPerfect showing the records and digital images added to the database. These reports will serve as regular quality control checks, to ensure that catalog records and scans meet NYTM standards and that errors are quickly corrected. On a monthly basis, he will check the total number of records added against the goal, to ensure that the team is on pace to complete the project during the grant period.

Throughout the grant period, the results of the project will be put to use in NYTM programming and the project will be promoted to interested audiences via NYTM's social media and regular eblasts. Catalog records and digital images will be available to staff and the public as they are completed, via our collections portal at nytransitmuseum.org. To raise awareness,

Risks and Mitigation: Risks to the project include staff turnover and equipment malfunction, which would result in the team losing time on the schedule. The project budget and timeline spread 23 months' worth of work by the Contract Archivists over a 24 month period, building time into the schedule to accommodate holidays and sick days; if a new team member needs to be hired and trained mid-project, this buffer will mitigate the time lost. We also plan to purchase two scanners to facilitate two Archivists working simultaneously, which means there will be a backup if one breaks down.

Project Results

Products and Stewardship Improvements: The products of the project will be 8,350 catalog records and high-resolution digital images, making the Route 1 images in NYTM's collection truly accessible for the first time. These products will incorporate the added value of NYTM's unmatched expertise and resources related to the subject matter, particularly the data entered from the logbooks. They will be stored in our cloud-based PastPerfect software, as well as in a separate, networked storage system that is backed up nightly. These digital surrogates will provide access to the content of the original images,and they will also help preserve the originals by minimizing the need for handling the fragile negatives and prints.

Results, Impact, and Sustainability: The intended result of this project is access to the Route 1 photographs for NYTM staff, who will use them in their work across departments to tell our board audiences richer stories about the construction of the subway in New York City. Potential near-term examples include:

➢ Our popular in-person tours of Old City Hall station, the first station in the New York subway system, speak to Route 1's construction; these tours will be enhanced with high-quality historic images of that work being performed.

➢ The school field trip program "Immigration and Transportation" focuses on newly arrived immigrants from Ireland and Italy and their primarily manual labor on Route 1; the photographs offer images of some of those workers, and offer a glimpse into the working conditions for newly arrived laborers.

➢ "Steel Stone and Backbone: Building New York's Subways," NYTM's permanent exhibit on establishing the subway, closely tracks and focuses on Route 1's construction; newly-uncovered and digitized images would provide an opportunity for this exhibit to be updated and refreshed for the first time in more than 20 years.

➢ Online "digital discussions," illustrated talks on transit topics held live via Zoom, could focus on the IMLS-funded project itself, discussing how the work is accomplished and showing examples of the images discovered.

Longer-term, the images and the stories they tell will be the foundation of new NYTM projects. As noted, in October 2024 a selection will be exhibited at NYTM, on LinkNYC kiosks via our partnership with Urban Archive, and in the subway system itself through our colleagues at the MTA. A proposed exhibit about East Side Access, a major improvement project at Grand Central Terminal, could incorporate the Route 1 photos of Grand Central before its subway station was constructed – showing that before the subway, the area was far from the business district we know today. New school and public programs could focus on stories of place-making and displacement in the neighborhoods along Route 1.

The benefits of the project to NYTM staff will be long-lasting. Not only will staff members have the immediate and permanent benefit of access to the Route 1 images, but through the quarterly staff meeting presentations and annual usage surveys they will also become more familiar with searching the collections portal and working with the Archives department, offering the opportunity to incorporate more collections resources into their work going forward.

By cataloging and digitizing these images, NYTM will serve our mission and advance our own and IMLS's collections stewardship goals, while making new resources directly relevant to their work accessible to staff. Through NYTM's programming, collections portal, social media, and public-facing collaborations with Urban Archive and MTA, the images will potentially reach millions of people – giving them a greater understanding of New York City's evolution and transit's impact on it.

Friends of the New York Transit Museum
Proposal to IMLS Museums for America
Collections Stewardship and Access
15-Nov-21

Schedule of Completion

Task	GRANT AWARD	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	10/1/2024 Subway Anniversary
Hire and Train Contract Archivists *Collections Manager, Curator*	■	■																									
Catalog & Digitize Route 1 images *Contract Archivists*		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Rehousing *Contract Archivists*		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Supervision and Quality Control - record completeness, image standards *Collections Manager*		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Create Finding Aid Edit, format, and post online *Contract Archivists , Collections Manager*																									■		
NYTM Image Use Staff Surveys *Collections Manager*		■												■												■	
Quarterly Staff Presentations *Collections Manager, Contract Archivists*					■			■			■			■			■			■			■				
Image Distribution to Staff *Collections Manager, Contract Archivists, Asst Dpty Dir for Education, Sr Mgr*			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Select Images for NYTM Social Media *Curator, Press & Marketing Manager, Museum Director*					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Select Images for LinkNYC Kiosks, MTA Screens, and NYTM Exhibition *Curator, Museum Director*																		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		

Digital Products Plan

Type
What digital products will you create?

Through the proposed project, we will be creating catalog records for each photograph/negative using our PastPerfect Museum Software. These records will be made available to researchers and for internal use.

We will also create high-resolution scans of photographic prints and negatives which adhere to the LOC archival standards for digital materials of this nature.
As of 2021-22 these are (in brief):

- Highest resolution available (for our purposes, we will be scanning both prints and negatives at 600 DPI)
- Scanned at 100% size with no interpolation
- In TIFF and JPG format
- Embedded color profile
- Uncompressed and unlayered
- DRM-free

Having these digital images at the ready will make it easier to have more robust exhibitions, school programs, and public programs. It will also enable us to better serve research requests for historical photographs from authors, television and movie productions, and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Availability
How will you make your digital products openly available (as appropriate)?
The scanned photographic materials will be available to the public through our web-based collections portal. In addition, they will be used in the Museum's social media posts (Instagram, Facebook).

Since the Museum has a relationship with Urban Archive, a curated selection of photographs will be fully geotagged and delivered to them, for geographically targeted deployment on LinkNYC kiosks around New York City.

Another aspect of this project is ensuring that the newly digitized images are cataloged according to the Museum's standards, which have been adapted from LOC standards and include specialized New York City Transit and MTA related subject headings that are in LOC format. By setting this example, other institutions with collections of similar material can use our

standards as a guide to make their materials more easily accessed.

Access
What rights will you assert over your digital products, and what limitations, if any, will you place on their use? Will your products implicate privacy concerns or cultural sensitivities, and if so, how will you address them?

Despite the majority of the collection falling under public domain due to copyright expiration, permissions to use images must still be sought from the New York Transit Museum. Photographs and negatives dated before 1926 regardless of publication are in the public domain and anything published with notice but copyright has expired between 1926 and 1963 also fall under public domain due to copyright expiration. The images we will be digitizing and creating records for are still property of the New York Transit Museum and permissions to use these images for reproduction must still be granted.

Sustainability
How will you address the sustainability of your digital products?

By keeping abreast of LOC standards for sustaining digital products, we will be able to ensure best practices are followed to keep these images accessible.

Digital images will be stored in our museum catalog software as well as a separate, networked storage system that is backed up nightly.