

Kawasaki's Yonkers Plant Among Facilities Cited for Low Wages and Safety Concerns

By: Kenneth Morales

News

Published on: October 1, 2025



Photo by Tima Miroshnichenko/Pexels

For nearly 40 years, Kawasaki Heavy Industries has manufactured subway cars in a former Otis Elevator building, located in the heart of Yonkers since 1986, providing

jobs for roughly 500 workers in a non-union facility.

However, a study released on Tuesday, September 30th, shows a different side of the Japanese conglomerate's railcar facilities.

Workers at the company's plants in Yonkers and Lincoln, Nebraska, earn 16 percent less than the industry average, with many reporting they cannot afford rent, groceries, or medical care, according to a year-long investigation by Jobs to Move America, a pro-union advocacy organization, and Cornell University's Climate Jobs Institute.

The study surveyed 180 workers at both facilities. The Yonkers plant houses Kawasaki's executive staff and employs approximately 500 workers, who focus primarily on completing projects and repairs. The Nebraska facility, where most of the railcars are manufactured, operates as a heavy manufacturing operation with a railcar division that employs roughly 500 workers within a larger facility that houses a total of 2,700 employees.



Photo by Chevanon Photography/Pexels

Researchers found that women earn \$3.49 less per hour than men performing the same task. Temporary workers, who account for more than half of the workforce at both plants, earn \$4.66 per hour less than employees hired directly by the company.

Neither facility is unionized. Kawasaki's workforce "has not felt a need to unionize in more than 40 years," according to a February 2024 court filing by the company.

"Ninety-two percent of the workers we surveyed said they were struggling to afford at least one basic expense," said Lauren Schandavel, senior campaigner for Jobs to Move America, which conducted the study with Cornell's Climate Jobs Institute.

The findings raise questions about conditions at the factories where workers manufacture railcars for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's \$4.5 billion contract, the largest the transit agency has ever awarded.

Forty percent of employees at both facilities reported witnessing a coworker injured on the job, while 17 percent reported experiencing their own injuries. Workers identified several risk factors, including heavy lifting, exposure to loud machinery, poor ventilation, and malfunctioning equipment.

Half of the workers surveyed reported witnessing discrimination based on race, gender, or immigration status. Some workers reported that their supervisors used slurs or made offensive jokes. Additionally, nearly one-fifth of the respondents said that a supervisor had instructed them not to discuss their pay with coworkers.

Reverend Margaret Coleman of Messiah Baptist Church in Yonkers said the findings shocked her congregation.

“We’re proud to host the makers of New York’s famous subway cars, but we’re also shocked by what Kawasaki workers are experiencing—below-average wages, temp labor, discrimination, and injuries on the job,” Coleman said at a press conference Tuesday morning outside MTA headquarters in Brooklyn. “Yonkers residents deserve good, career-track jobs.”

John Chiarella, vice president of Transport Workers Union Local 100, which represents MTA transit workers, stated that the company’s reliance on contract workers is detrimental to both employees and the quality of the product.

“Contract workers could be hired for a day and are often paid 50 percent of what a car inspector makes,” Chiarella said. “If they’re going to take federal money, they should pay the right money.”

The pattern of low pay and high turnover has previously caused problems for Kawasaki, particularly at its Nebraska facility.

In 2022, the Nebraska plant was losing 45 employees per month out of a 430-person railcar workforce, resulting in an annual turnover rate of approximately 125 percent. The staffing crisis became so severe that MTA officials had to implement “constant oversight and supervision” of production on the R211 subway car contract.

A separate 2022 audit by the New York State Comptroller’s Office discovered that Kawasaki’s contract to build trains for the Long Island Rail Road had fallen nearly three years behind schedule and \$8.9 million over budget. LIRR officials cited “inadequate training,” “inadequate staffing,” and “ineffective inspections” at Kawasaki facilities.

Despite repeated requests from the public and labor groups, Kawasaki has refused to provide detailed information on worker compensation. In the February 2024 court filing, the company claimed that making such data public would “unnecessarily agitate” its employees.

Labor and community groups are now urging Kawasaki to sign a Community Benefits Agreement, which will legally bind the company to a contract stating that it guarantees not only minimum wages, but also established safety regulations, well-developed training programs, and encourages local hiring in its facilities.



Photo by Evgeny Tchegotarev/Pexels

Theodore Moore, the executive director of ALIGN (Alliance for a Greater New York), a coalition of labor and community activists, believes that the MTA has the power to make it happen.

“Public dollars must do more than just fund infrastructure,” Moore said. “They must build community power and create safe, dignified jobs.”

John Samuelson, international president of the Transport Workers Union, put it more bluntly.

“Kawasaki has benefited from billions in public contracts while the workers who build the trains struggle with low wages, dangerous conditions, and disrespect on the job,” Samuelson said. “If the MTA changed course, workers in New York and Nebraska could win the safe, stable jobs they deserve.”

The Yonkers Ledger reached out to Kawasaki and the MTA for comment.

The full report, [“Off the Rails: Inequality, Insecurity, and Unsafe Conditions at Kawasaki’s U.S. Manufacturing Facilities,”](#) is available at jobstomoveamerica.org.

Tags: cars Immigration Jobs to Move America

Kawasaki Heavy Industries Kawasaki Rail Car labor conditions

MTA Photography subway cars wage gap

workplace discrimination workplace safety Yonkers

Yonkers manufacturing