

NEWS

Workers who build NYC's subway cars face low pay, anti-union bosses, report alleges



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Workers who manufacture New York City's [new subway cars](#) are paid less than the industry standard and face poor working conditions, contributing to rampant delays in the production of modern subway cars desperately needed by the MTA, according to a report published Tuesday by a labor advocacy group.

The report by the nonprofit Jobs to Move America and Cornell University's Climate Jobs Institute surveyed 180 current and former employees of the Japan-based company Kawasaki, which has received billions of dollars from the MTA over the last decade to build hundreds of train cars. The cars are primarily built in the company's plant at Lincoln, Nebraska, and finished at a facility in Yonkers before they're put into service.

The report found 79% of the company's Nebraska employees and 68% of the workers in Yonkers reported struggling financially. It states the workers make 16% less than the industry standard for their jobs and many of those surveyed said they witnessed workplace injuries, unfair treatment and discrimination in their workplace.

Kawasaki spokesperson Michael McKeon did not address the report's claims and questioned whether the people surveyed were actually employed by the company.

The report comes as the MTA continues to order more trains from Kawasaki, which along with France-based Alstom is just one of two companies capable of manufacturing subway cars for the

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A Kawasaki-manufactured R211 subway car on the A line.

Marc A. Hermann / MTA

Since 2018, the MTA has ordered 1,610 new subway cars from Kawasaki for \$4.5 billion — despite near-constant delays in delivery. The transit agency in 2022 reported high rates of turnover at Kawasaki's manufacturing plants, saying the attrition contributed to yearslong delays in the delivery of the modern trains now running in the system, including the MTA's new open-gangway cars.

The sluggish production of new trains mean riders are more likely to be stuck riding older,

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Kawasaki has for decades managed to keep unions out of its manufacturing plants. Its Nebraska operation is in a right-to-work state with few union protections. But the employees in Yonkers are also non-union, despite being in a state known for strong labor protections and politically influential unions.

Jobs to Move America shared a Kawasaki employee handbook that discourages union drives. Instead of organizing a union, it tells workers, “You can talk to us, and we can talk to you; we hope to keep it that way,” and, “Each employee is treated as an individual.”

Lauren Schandevell, a campaigner with Jobs to Move America, said at a news conference Tuesday morning she wants the MTA to force Kawasaki to improve working conditions at its plant through a “community benefits agreement.”

“A community benefits agreement is a win-win for communities, workers and the company and the MTA, frankly, which will have better products if their workers are trained and happy and not turning over constantly,” Schandevell said. “If Kawasaki doesn't want to come to the table and work with us, then community and labor leaders will continue to fight to make that happen.”

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Ramsey Khalifeh

Ramsey Khalifeh is a transportation reporter on the NYC Accountability desk covering the largest transit system in the country. He was previously a general assignment reporter at Gothamist and worked on the Boston Globe's metro and copy desk. Got a tip? Email...

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Stephen Nessen



Stephen Nessen covers transportation. Since 2008 he has reported on everything from Occupy

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A **anewyorker**

2 days ago

Wider context needed here

Due to Made in USA requirements, political reasons and stringent MTA requirements very few train manufacturers actually bid for MTA projects.

As a result, since the 2000s only 3 companies have actually built train cars for the MTA. Alstom, Bombardier and Kawasaki.

Bombardier ...

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Y4 **Your Mother 420**

1 day ago

At this point I'd be interested to see what other vendors / manufacturers are out there to bid on work.

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2 days ago

"It states the workers make 16% less than the industry standard for their jobs"

Would be interesting to know how they define "industry standard," since there's only one other company making trainsets in the US, as far as I'm aware.

👍 6 🗨️ • Share

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Y4 Your Mother 420

2 days ago

"You can talk to us, and we can talk to you; we hope to keep it that way," and, "Each employee is treated as an individual."

:eyeroll:

👍 6 🗨️ • Share

emjayay

1 day ago

Exactly true though. In any case involving worker pay or treatment, without a union it's a huge corporation vs one individual.

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Mongoshlongo

1 day ago

When unions were strong in America, America had a strong middle and working class and the poor had a pathway out of poverty.

👍 3 🗨️ • Share

John Gray

1 day ago

The collapse of the American auto industry occurred with a 100% unionized American auto industry. Lots of things were different in the 1950s, esp the lack of single parent households, where most of our economic dysfunction resides, including lack of economic mobility. There was no global competi...

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These train cars cost that much WITHOUT union wages? imagine if they did. How much is the MTA gonna raise fares.

The unions striked in Hollywood 2 years ago and won a wage increase and now their fruit is starting to bear because many Hollywood productions have moved out of the US and Atlanta and ha...

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Todd Thomas

1 day ago

We need unions in every state. Strong effective unions with members who actually attend their meetings rather than just pay their dues.

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John Gray

1 day ago

I've worked upstate in NY manufacturing. Also at Texas Instruments main campus in Dallas. Simply put, NY state stands ready to punish you if you have the audacity to build a mousetrap in this state. Especially if you make the mistake of using a kilowatt of energy. Perhaps instead of trying to micro...

See more (Edited)

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J C

1 day ago

Lincoln is in Nebraska.

"How did the Empire State, sitting as the #1 builder for 120 years, become the #1 exporter of manufacturing jobs?"

Free flow of capital internationally, lack of nationwide single payer medical, the repeal of the FT tax by Kennedy + Eisenhower, and Reagan's approval of a war a...

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18 hours ago

Definitely sounds like a Japanese company, a union won't make it any better.

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With the Republican nominee polling a distant third behind Andrew Cuomo, a supporter mulls jumping ship.

By Elizabeth Kim

Published Oct 2, 2025 at 12:47 p.m. ET

3 comments

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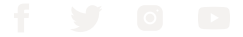
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