

Editorial style guide for photos and images

Photos and other images are excellent tools for communicating information to readers.

We use images to:

- Humanize something that feels anonymous or abstract
- Add visual interest to a page
- Provide evidence or show a specific example of something
- Help readers understand something inherently visual
- Show contrast, like before/after or then/now

For instruction on adding images to Drupal pages, [see this page](#).

Guidelines for choosing images for a page

Do:

- **Include people** (or evidence of the presence of people) in images whenever you can. Look for photos that feel dynamic and personal, rather than large crowd shots that could feel generic or static.

This photo shows an MTA employee in the context of their job, and the upward-looking angle and wide lens give the image a sense of gravitas. The operator's finger-point and smile seem to be aimed directly at the reader, creating an emotional connection.



In this detail photo from a nostalgia train ride, even just people's hands are enough to bring passengers into the picture. The dated handholds also communicate something about the context.



- **Prioritize candid images.** Showing people interacting during their day-to-day lives feels much more genuine than showing a line of officials standing at a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Look for photos of MTA employees out in the field, candid moments of people's commutes, and photos of officials that aren't posed.

This image shows Sarah Feinberg, the acting president of New York City Transit, on the scene of an MTA response to an emergency. Something like this communicates more about her actual job than her standing at a microphone during a press conference.

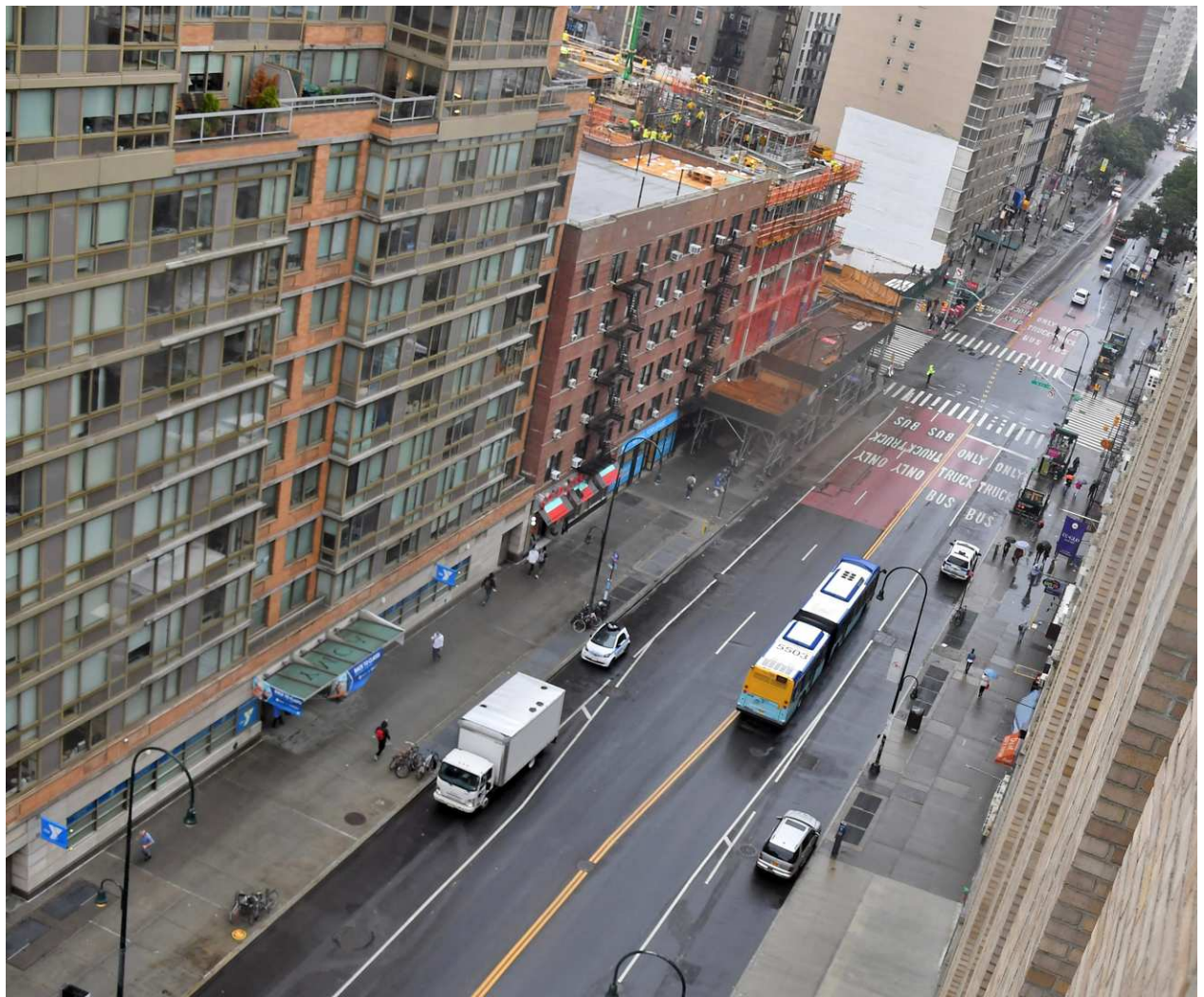


Even outtakes from press events can make for more interesting images than photos of the press event itself. Here, Sarah Meyer and Alex Elegudin chat off to the side, which gives the photo a nice "behind the scenes" feel.

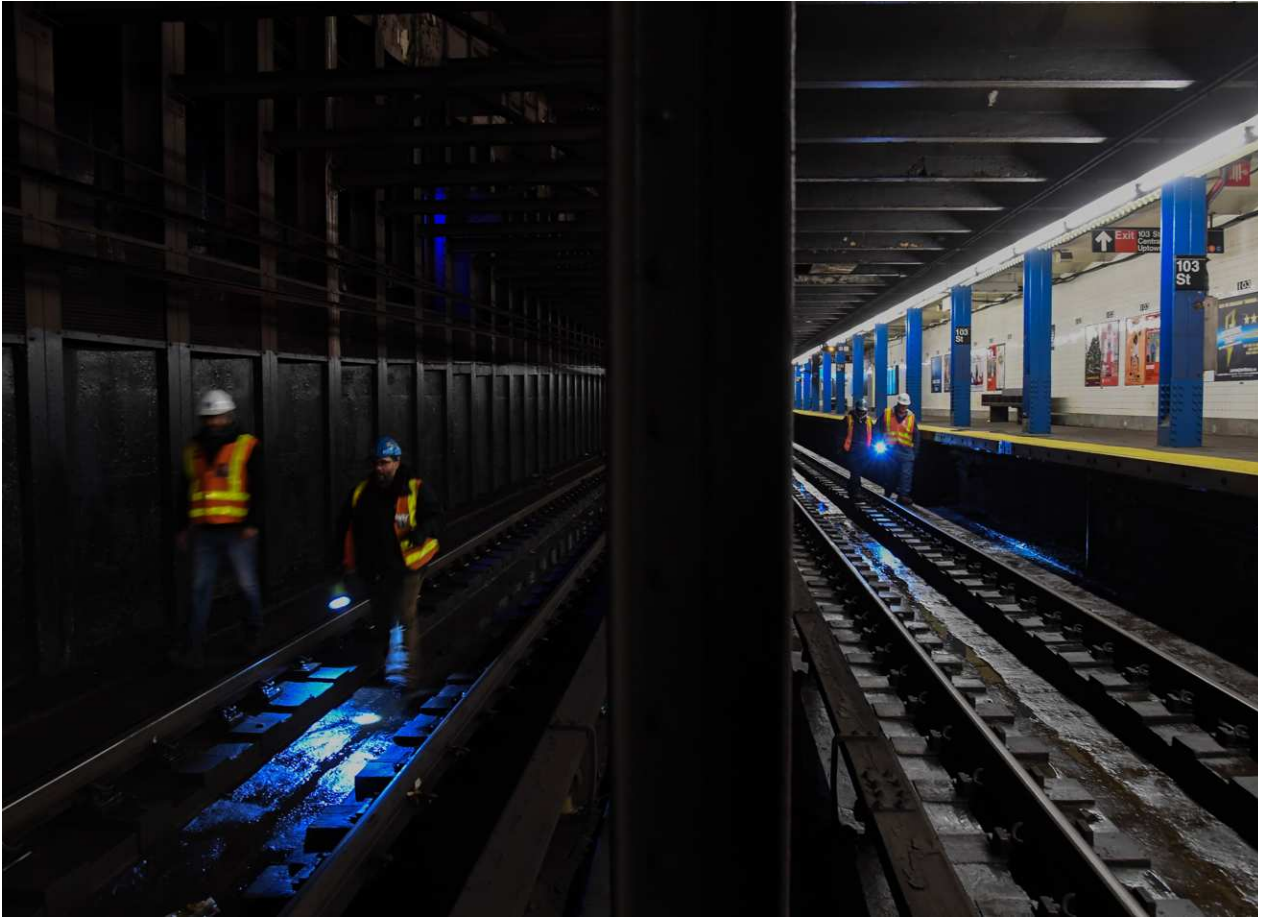


- **Choose images with a strong focal point or interesting framing.** Readers' eyes naturally follow where someone in a photo is looking, for example. Or maybe there are strong lines from a building leading the reader's eye into the frame. Maybe the foreground of the photo is in focus but the background isn't, or vice versa. Or maybe a person or scene is photographed from an unusual vantage point. If you can show something unusual that the average person might not be familiar with, do that.

The strong diagonal line through this image helps pull the reader's eye from the bottom left corner to the upper right. The bus and truck in the foreground nicely illustrate the point of the photo: transit and commercial priority roadways.



The contrast between the light and darkness in this frame is striking, and the head-on framing creates a nice vanishing point as the train tracks lead off into the distance. The workers on the tracks give the image a more dynamic feel and help put the scale in perspective.



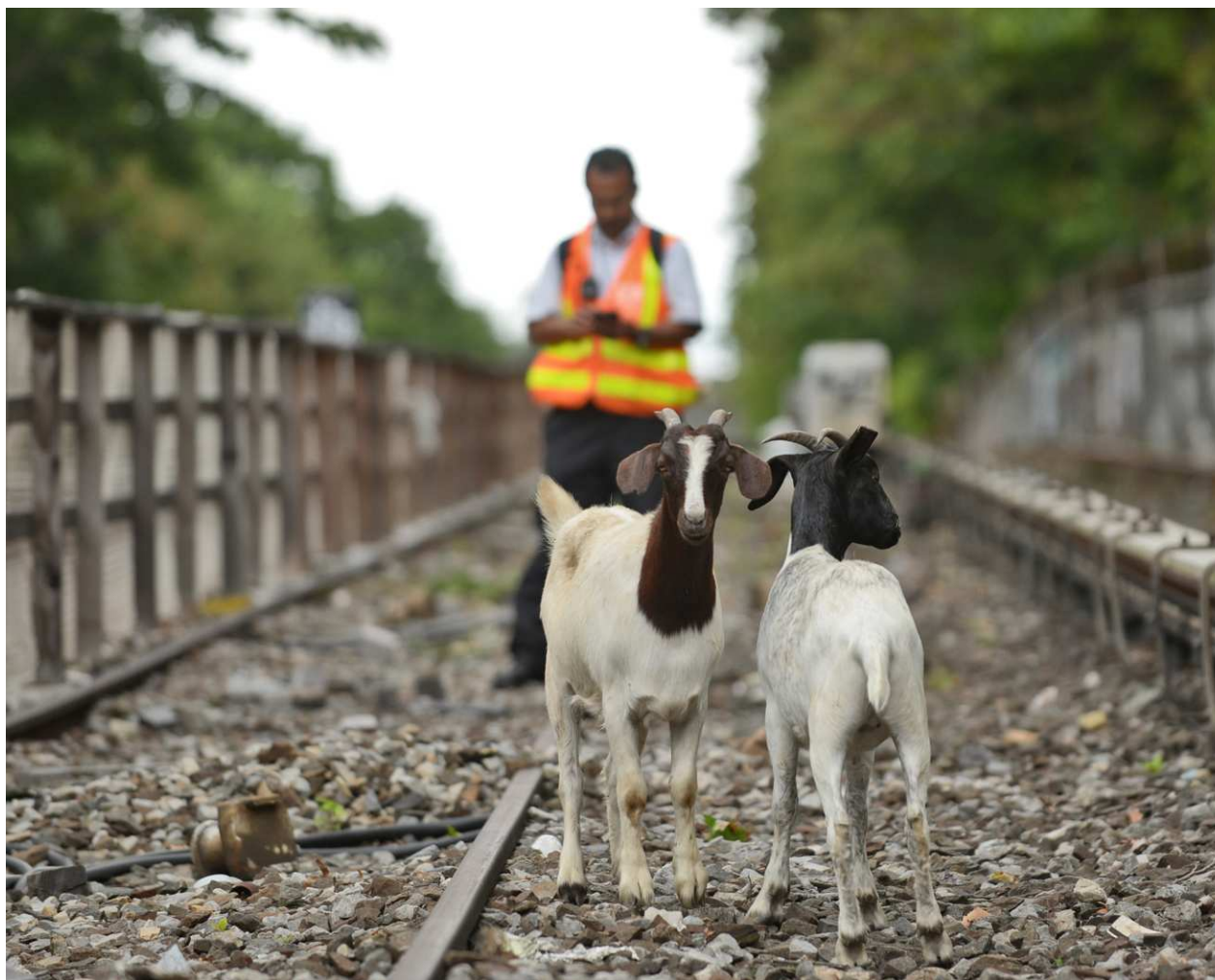
Silhouettes and an interesting texture help make this photo of workers on the job feel unique without losing the context of the transit system.



The blurred image of a train in motion communicates the dynamic nature of working in the transit system. You also get a sense of how close workers are to fast-moving vehicles



Not only is the depth of field in this photo interesting, putting the foreground in focus while blurring out the background, the subjects are instantly charming.



- **Be precise and factual in the images you choose.** If you're talking about a particular line, neighborhood, or project, choose an image from that specific context. If you're not sure if an image is relevant, ask the person who took it or an expert on the subject matter.

Instead of showing a generic train or tracks photo, consider using something that shows literal details from what you're describing. This would be a much more instructive photo when talking about routine maintenance or relay equipment, for example.

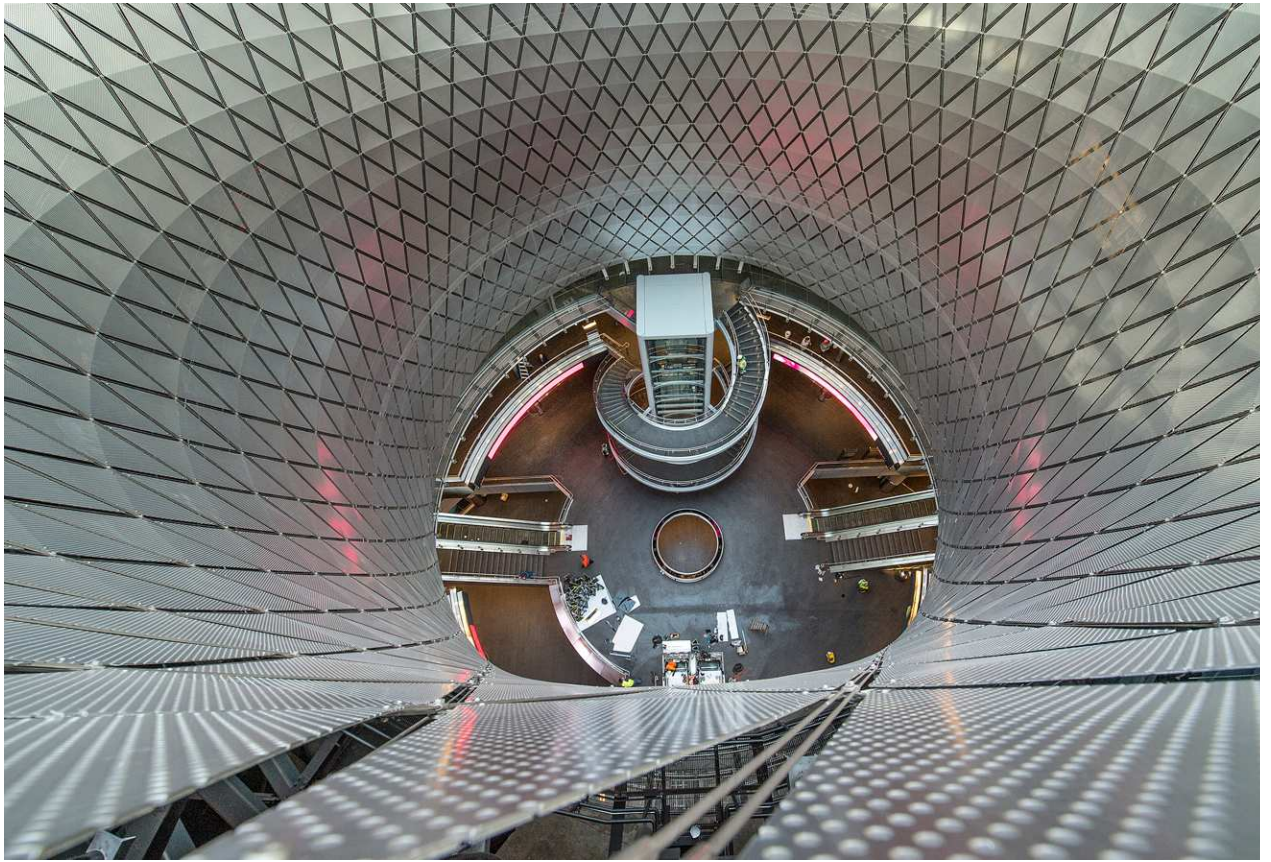


- **Prioritize interesting angles or different points of view**, particularly if you're showing a well-known landmark. If you're talking about something people are familiar with, look for a new way to show it.

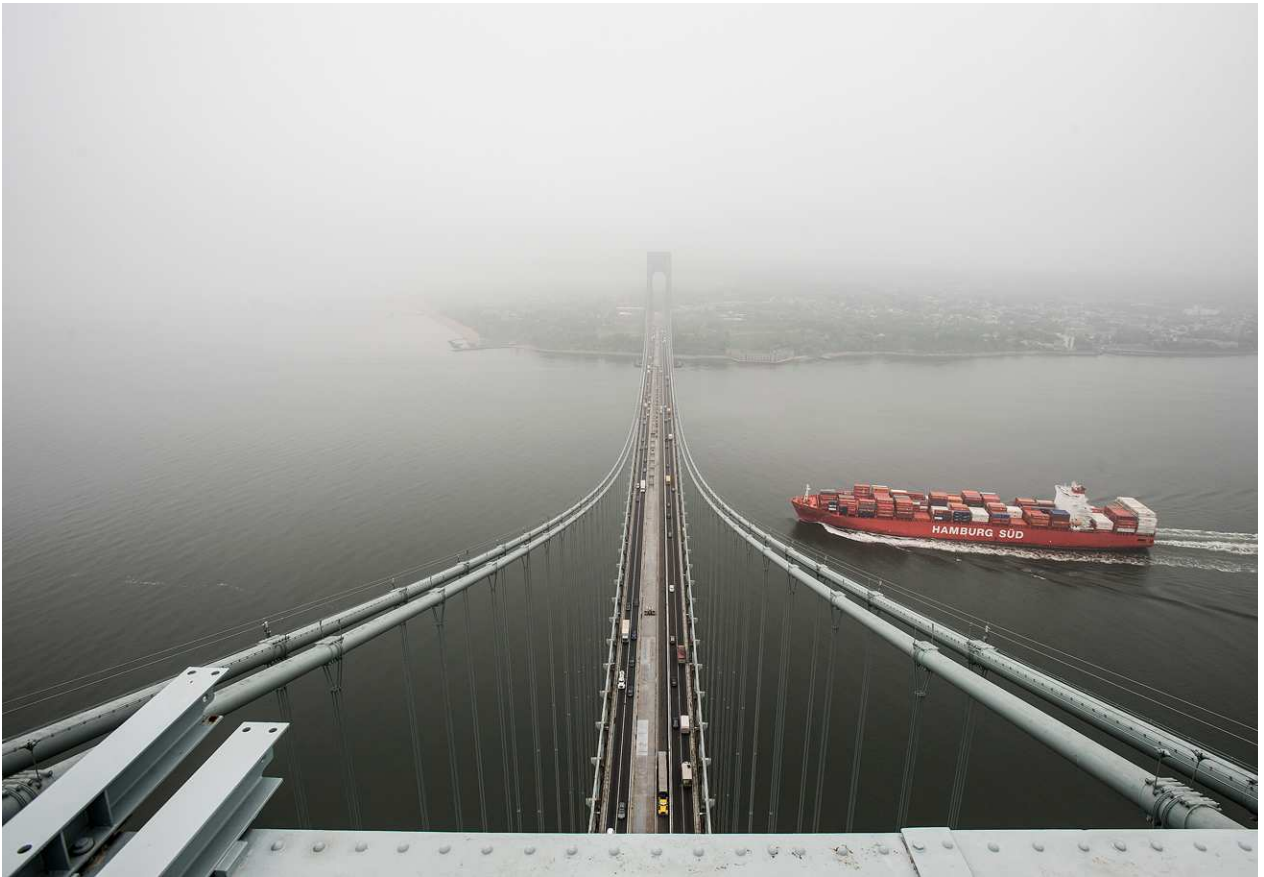
This image shows a different view of Grand Central Terminal. Iconic details like the windows and painted ceiling are still recognizable, but the different vantage point and detail of the lighting fixture in the foreground help it feel fresh and interesting.



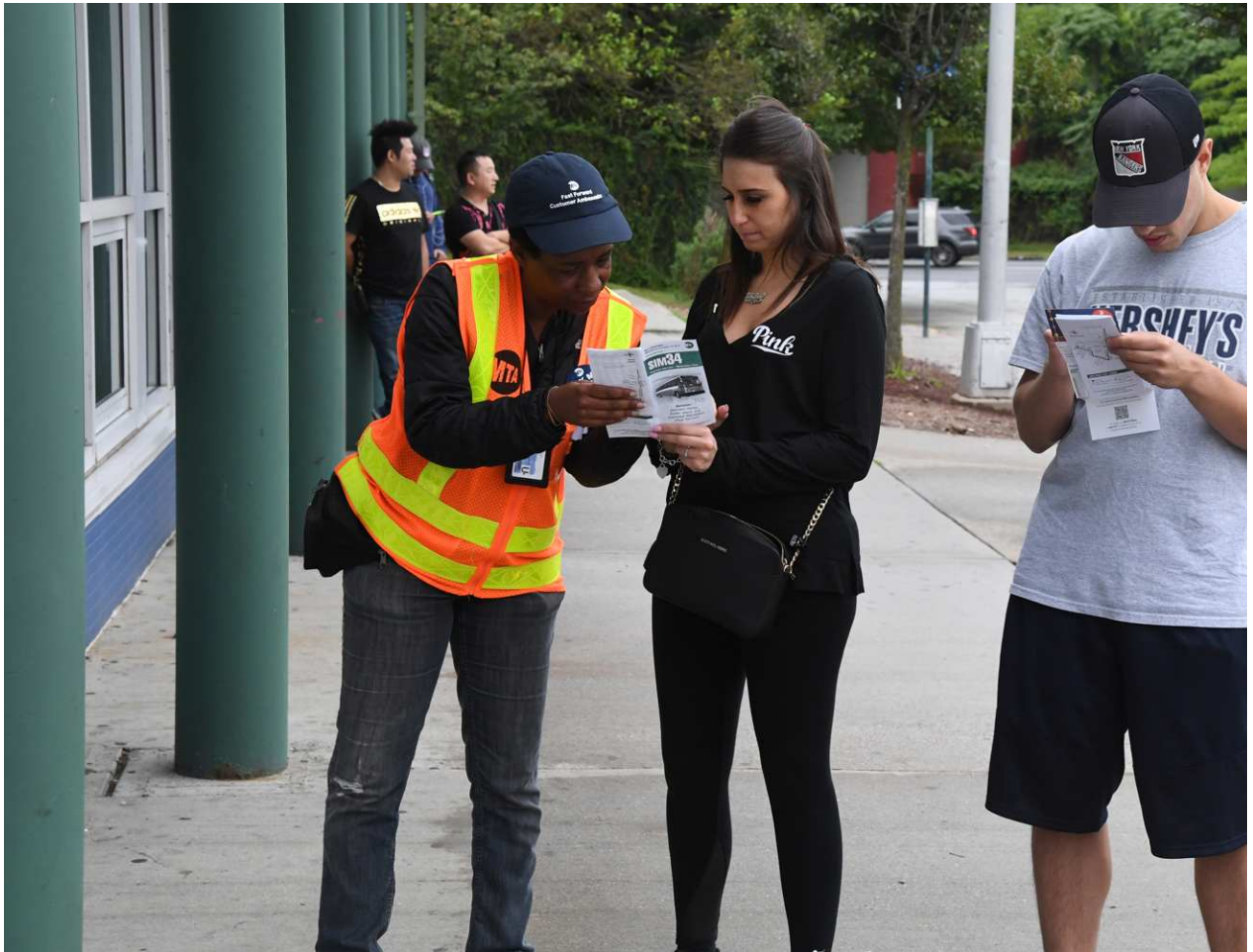
The downward-looking angle here reframes the familiar Sky Reflector-Net fixture at Fulton Center.



Here's a photo of not just a bridge, but a bridge in context: The high vantage point, body of land in the distance, the water vehicle and the fog make this image very different from a stock photo of a bridge.



- **Use photography to showcase the diversity of our organization and community.** Make sure your photo picks don't just show white men.
This image also shows great interaction between MTA employees and riders.



Don't:

- **Don't use images of text.** These images aren't accessible, don't scale well and won't show in every view of our page. If the words are important, put them on the page as text.

This is a great visual for station screens and print handouts, but not for the website. Pull the content in the image into text instead.



- **Don't use generic photos, stock photos or clip art.** If you could describe the image by saying just "subway train," "city skyline," or "Times Square," skip it.

...nope.

- **Don't use a cliched landmark to signify a place.** If you're talking about Brooklyn, consider showing something other than the Brooklyn bridge. Think of all of the views of the borough experienced by the millions of people who live there.

Find a different image to illustrate a page about Brooklyn.



- **Don't use images we don't have rights to publish,** like photos taken from other sources without permission.

This is a very nice image...made by somebody working for The New York Times. We shouldn't publish it on our site without explicit permission.



- **Don't use selfies.**
- **Don't use PDFs or maps in image blocks.** We have specific CMS components for those.

This should be in a map component.

Service Map: Updated on September 1, 2019 and effective through summer 2020



Examples of how we use images

Showing evidence of something

On a page about the [Accessible Station Lab](#), we use images to help readers understand the difference between different floor treatments and tactile guideways. These images help answer the question, "What does a raised dome look like in a subway station?" They're not artistically framed, but they're very instructive and that's what we're looking for here.

Raised domes alert you of an intersection or landmark. When you detect raised domes, look for signs with **braille and raised letters** on a **nearby column** that explain your location in the station and what the raised domes indicate.

A 2-foot by 3-foot section of **raised domes** tells you that you are at a three-way intersection. Look for braille/raised letter signage on a nearby column for guidance.



[Here's](#) how we used a rendering to help readers understand upcoming changes to a station. Even though the image isn't a literal photograph, it helps riders visualize how a station will be changing for the better. Note that we included a caption identifying the image as a rendering, not a photo. If there's any doubt about where an image came from, use the caption to explain.



3D Rendering of Future 42 St Shuttle platform at Times Square

**A New Experience
Underneath 42 St**

**42 St Connection Project:
More Space to Move**

**42 St Connection Project:
More Reliable**

Adding visual interest to a page

Striking photos give texture and variety to a page that might otherwise just be text. They can also give readers a sense of place: New York is a city of neighborhoods, and our transit infrastructure reflects that. Photos can also help readers understand the scale of the work we do for the city.

[This](#) is an example of a mostly decorative photo that not only shows the bridge the page is about but also gives a sense of what the surrounding environment is like.

Henry Hudson Bridge



Named in honor of Henry Hudson, the explorer whose ship, the Half Moon, anchored near this site in 1609, this bridge opened in 1936. It connects northern Manhattan to the Bronx and was built as part of the Henry Hudson Parkway by the Henry Hudson Parkway Authority. When it opened, it was the longest plate girder arch and fixed arch bridge in the world. Originally built with only one level, the bridge's design allowed for the construction of a second level if traffic demands increased. Within a year and a half the upper level was opened. The upper level carries northbound traffic; the lower one is for southbound traffic.

After a series of mergers, the Henry Hudson Parkway Authority became part of the Triborough Bridge Authority in 1941. Today the Henry Hudson Bridge remains one of Bridges and Tunnels' facilities, but the parkway is under the jurisdiction of New York City and New York State.

Helping readers understand something

On [this page about signal modernization](#), we featured an image of a track interlocking so readers would have a more concrete sense of what we're talking about in the project description. We deliberately did not use images of trains themselves as prominently, since this project is much more about signals and tracks.



[Home](#) > [Culver Line Signal Modernization](#) > [Culver Line Signal Modernization: Details About the Project](#)

Culver Line Signal Modernization: Details About the Project

Culver Line Signal Modernization will improve reliability and resiliency of service. We're also using the opportunity to make additional station improvements.

We also used an image of a signal when we [talked about signal modernization](#). This photo accomplishes two things: It shows what a signal literally looks like, and it has a nice visual metaphor: Green means go!



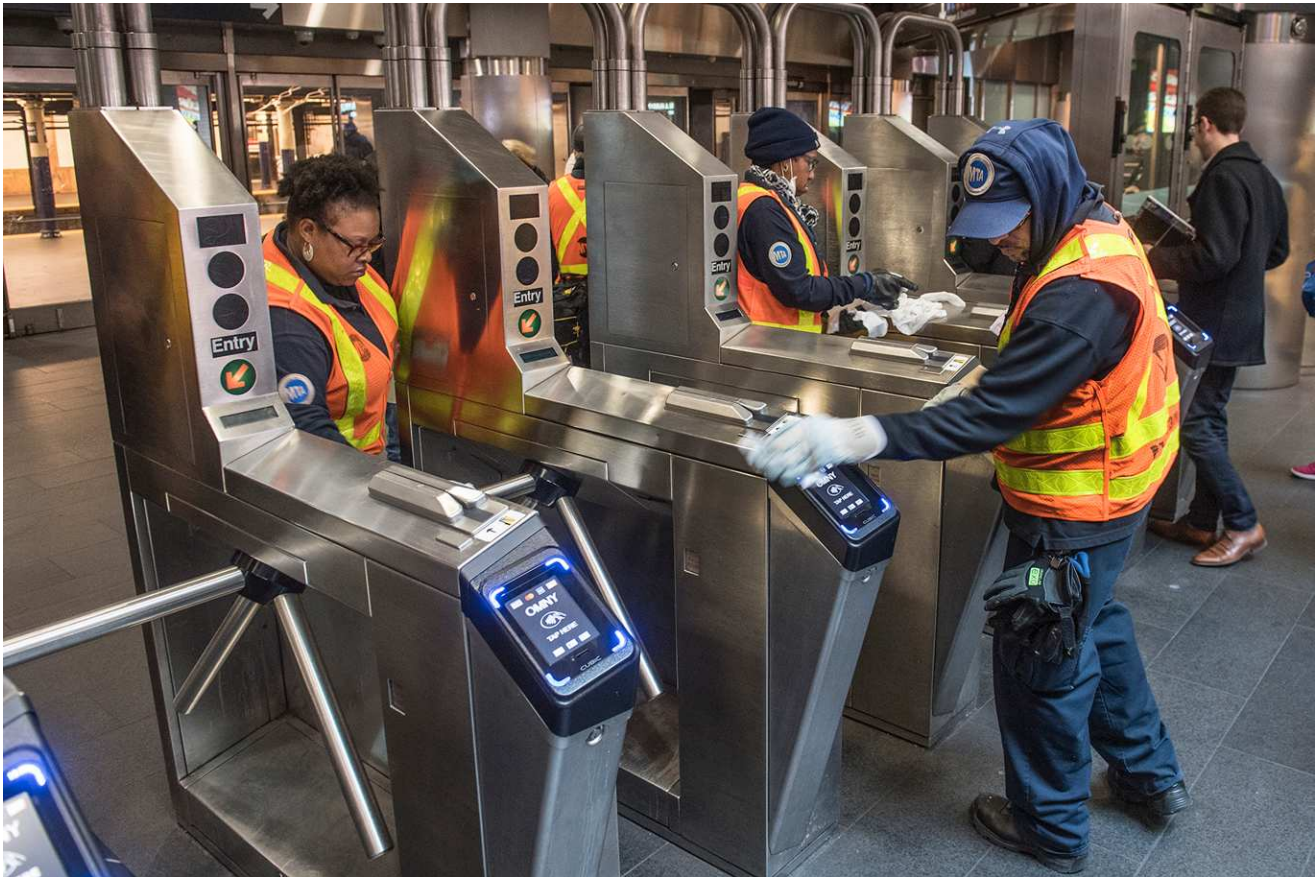
[Home](#) > [Culver Line Signal Modernization](#) > [Culver Line Signal Modernization: Alternate Service Options](#)

Culver Line Signal Modernization: Alternate Service Options

We are running a free bus, the Culver Link, to connect you along the F in Brooklyn. Coming from Manhattan, other parts of Brooklyn or Queens? Consider using an alternative subway line.

Humanizing something that feels anonymous or abstract

We used an image of MTA employees cleaning turnstiles and other equipment during the coronavirus outbreak. This helped with a few things: It put a human face on the thousands of employees working to keep the system running, and it showed the literal steps we were taking to address the outbreak. It also lent a sense of timeliness and immediacy: These weren't generic images of someone mopping a station, these are new, highly relevant photos. The images reflected what we were doing, right now, to help our employees and riders stay safe.



Publishing altered photos

Avoid this whenever possible. Modifications tend to draw focus, and we approach photos as visual evidence. Showing this evidence unaltered helps build trust with our riders. Decisions to publish altered photos are made on a case-by-case basis.

Color toning and other corrective touches are completely fine.

Before using a modified photo:

- Try cropping the photo
- Use a different photo
- Consider other visuals that would accomplish the same thing
- Go without an image

Modifications to photos might include:

- Blurring or blacking out part of the image
- Removing something
- Adding something
- Cropping the photo in a way that drastically changes its original meaning

If we do decide to modify a photo:

- There's an advertisement we can't crop out that draws focus away from the subject of the frame.
- Keep any modifications subtle, because they can also be distracting. Light blurring is generally less noticeable than putting a black box over something.
- Have someone who hasn't seen the photo before look at the altered version. Does something feel off? They can help flag issues you might not see.

About image captions

In general, you don't need to include a photo caption. If more explanation would help someone understand what's happening in the image, add one.

Captions shouldn't be longer than two sentences. Shorter is better. Don't restate what's in the image.

Style tips for image captions

- Write in present tense: "MTA crews work on a track interlocking underground."
- Include a period at the end of the caption, even if the caption isn't a full sentence: "A rendering of the station under construction."