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Last Subway: The Second Avenue Subway's Phase 2 begins

Ross Sandler

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Since January 1, 2017, when Governor Andrew Cuomo led the celebration to open the Second Avenue Subway, much has happened. A pandemic undermined subway ridership, Governor Cuomo resigned, and a new governor and mayor took office. And now the second phase of the Second Avenue Subway has begun. This will provide the next chapter of the wonderful book by Philip Mark Plotch's on the Second Avenue Subway, *Last Subway: the Long Wait for the Next Train in New York City* (Cornell U. 2020).

Last Subway provides an insider's look at the politics, engineering, and choices that culminated in the January 1, 2017, celebration. Plotch documents how Phase 1 at \$4.6 billion became the world's most costly subway. These twists and turns alone make this book a must read.

On January 6, 2022, the new governor, Kathy Hochul, announced the start of the engineering phase of Phase 2 of the Second Avenue Subway from 96th Street to 125th Street. This is the last step before construction can begin. The announcement was lauded in the press release by New York's two senators and the three members of congress most affected. When reading such press releases it was helpful to have read Plotch's book which rehearses the overly optimistic predictions, deliberate obfuscations, and outright lies that littered the 80-year history of the Second Avenue Subway. One gains a healthful respect for the political and human processes that underlie the construction of a mega project like the Second Avenue Subway.

Plotch raises tough questions. Is spending \$20 billion on the next phases of the Second Avenue Subway the best use of transportation money? Why do we expect billions of dollars of support from Washington when the featherbedded work rules in New York City far exceed work rules in any other part of the country? And what about the modernization of the existing subway system? Plotch documents how the race to meet the January 1, 2017, goal set by Governor Cuomo hurt the rest of the transit system.

We are now beginning a new story with Phase 2. A good start for everyone interested would be to read the *Last Subway* and take notice of the lessons learned at such a great cost.

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