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MTA chief's report card: Lots of A's & B's - & 2 big fat F's for Chairman Jay Walder

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In a Daily News spot poll ranking MTA Chairman Jay Walder's first year, the executive earned mostly A's and B's, and two big F's from a rider advocate.

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As his first year running the MTA draws to a close, [Chairman Jay Walder](#) earned high marks from a business leader, fiscal watchdog and heads of two think tanks - but poor grades from a top rider advocate.

To help gauge how Walder has steered the [Metropolitan Transportation Authority](#) since last October, the Daily News asked five close observers of the bus, subway and commuter train system to rate his performance.

Four of the five gave the top transit executive mostly A's and B's in each of the categories: finance/fares, technology, labor relations, efficiency/eliminating waste and service improvement.

But [Gene Russianoff](#) of the Straphangers campaign socked Walder with two big fat F's - one for sour relations between [Transport Workers Union Local 100](#) and management, and the other for scaling back bus and subway service.

"This June, riders were socked with the harshest service cuts in decades, with the loss of two subway lines, more crowding and longer waits on a dozen more and the end of 36 bus routes," Russianoff griped.

[Robert Yaro](#), president of the [Regional Plan Association](#), a planning and policy think tank, insisted Walder did well under tough circumstances. He noted the state Legislature cut about \$140 million earmarked for the MTA while tax revenues have come in far below levels projected by state number crunchers.

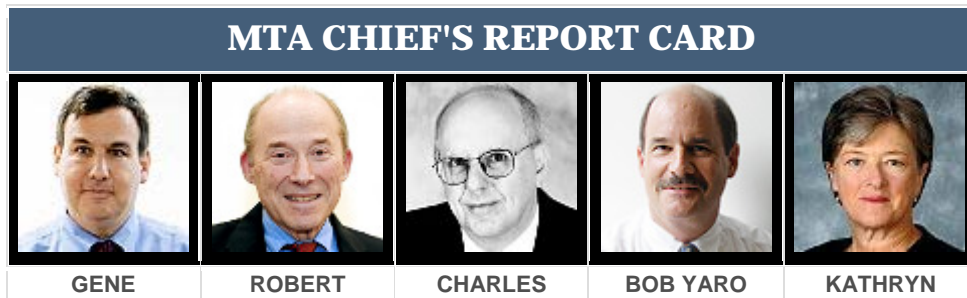
"He's made the best of a lousy situation with improved website information like service notices and station countdown clocks," Yaro said.

The MTA has overhauled its website to make it more rider-friendly, and is putting next-train message boards in a growing number of subway stations, Yaro pointed out.

[Gov. Paterson](#) picked Walder to run the MTA's transit system and network of bridges and tunnels last year, when he was a partner in an international consulting company. He was previously a top planning and financial executive with [London's](#) transit authority and a [Harvard](#) professor. He also worked at the MTA for about a decade early in his career.

The other experts recruited by The News to grade Walder are [Kathryn Wylde](#), president of the [Partnership for New York City](#), a nonprofit organization of business leaders; [Charles Brecher](#), executive vice president of the [Citizens Budget Commission](#), a fiscal watchdog organization; and [Robert Paaswell](#), director of the [University Transportation Research Center](#) at the [City College of New York](#).

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RUSSIANOFF of the Straphangers campaign	PAASWELL director of the University Transportation Research Center at the City College of New York	BRECHER executive vice president of the Citizens Budget Commission, a fiscal watchdog organization	President, Regional Plan Association	WYLDE president of the Partnership for New York City, a nonprofit organization of business leaders
Finances / Fares				
C- Like the Titanic, only worse. Revenues have cratered by \$900 million in 2010. The economy handed Walder this mess.	A- He is working toward a next generation fare technology and fare setting, while encumbered by a single fare history. He is unafraid to make the strong changes necessary to keep most of the system running.	A- He is leveling with the public on the need for fare hikes and service cuts in these tight times. The minus is for not setting a long-run fare policy that links fares to the cost of a ride.	A- Walder was dealt a bad deal. The State Legislature grabbed money from the budget and payroll taxes are coming in under expectations. He's facing an unparalleled situation and it is real.	A Walder was quick to go public with the details of MTA financial woes and to take the painful actions required to address the crisis.
Technology				
A- Some good moves here. Such as more real-time information on delays and those countdown clocks. There's also a new, fast bus coming in October.	A This is a strength and changes are being made, but he needs to be selling the importance of next generation technology to the public more; take everyone to Paris or Hong Kong!	B+ Good on speeding up the countdown clocks and tap-and-go fare collection experiments, but there is still no viable long-term plan for improved signaling.	A- Technology can improve system efficiency and amazingly, he's been able to make real improvements here, even through tough times. Examples abound but some include the Smart Card pilot to ease entry into the system (and) the "dashboard" for tracking construction projects.	B Walder clearly knows what needs to be done, but budget problems have pushed tech investments to the back burner.
Labor Relations				
F Raw tensions fueled by hundreds of layoffs, management's mean hit on spit-on bus drivers and personal attacks on Walder. Riders need the warring parties to find	B+ People fear for their jobs - especially in this climate - and his message, while looking for operational changes, must be one of appreciation for the extraordinary work most	B His efforts so far to get some concessions from the unions have been unsuccessful, but at least he has started pushing for changes in overtime and scheduling.	B For insisting that the MTA's unions participate in the belt tightening that is going on at the agency. And for demanding that the unions change work rules that	B- He gets credit for effort, and for a thick skin, but there is still not a lot of good will between MTA management and labor.

common ground.	operating personal are performing.		undercut the MTA's efficiency and service quality.	
Efficiency / Eliminating waste				
B+ Trying hard to cut the fat by \$500 million a year. ...Miles to go before public sees MTA's action as credible.	B+ Again, a strength honed at McKenzie (consulting firm, where Walder was a partner) but the B will be an obvious A when the railroads (Metro-North & Long Island Rail Road) are organized more efficiently and old railroad rules can be reworked.	B The savings from changes in procurement practices and eliminating administrative jobs are an important signal to the public and the staff, but truly significant efficiency gains will have to come from negotiations with the unions.	A Jay's core competency! He's been a real breath of fresh air. The MTA is a 40-year-old agency that never consolidated its individual agencies, such as Metro-North, New York City Transit and Long Island Rail Road. More than any other chief executive, he's aggressively taken on combining functions.	A+ Walder has accomplished more in one year than we saw happen in the previous decade. Hopefully he will have the backing required to keep it up!
Service improvement				
F This June, riders were socked with the harshest service cuts in decades, with the loss of two subway lines, more crowding and longer waits on a dozen more and the end of 36 bus routes.	B+ This should be an A for carefully maintaining core service with huge budget holes, while still modernizing the system but the B is just to reflect that the service cuts have effectively shrunk the city for thousands of New Yorkers.	C The effort to accelerate bus rapid transit services is a plus, but still missing is strategic thinking about long-run improvements. ...More reliable service on the existing lines requires more attention to state-of-good-repair work.	B He's made the best of a lousy situation with improved website information like service notices and station countdown clocks, but the reality is critical subway, bus and paratransit service has been reduced.	D Cuts in express bus and other services have been very painful to neighborhoods like Bay Ridge, where I live. Progress on Bus Rapid Transit seems to have slowed.

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