

IELTS Reading Practice Test - Academic Reading Test 001

The Emergence of the New York Subway System

In the latter part of the 19th century, the population of New York City surged at an unprecedented pace. The sprawling metropolis witnessed increasing congestion, especially in the heart of Manhattan. The advent of elevated railways, known as "Els", offered a partial solution, but these structures shadowed the streets below and often were deemed eyesores. To efficiently transport people across the city and alleviate traffic at the street level, a new solution was required.

Alfred Ely Beach, an inventive entrepreneur and publisher of the Scientific American, was among the first to visualize a solution. He conceived an underground railway system propelled by pneumatic tubes. In 1870, Beach secretly built a prototype of this idea – a short subway tunnel with a single station under Broadway. This "Beach Pneumatic Transit" operated by pushing a car through the tunnel using air pressure. While the concept was revolutionary, the system was limited in scope and failed to gain traction.

In contrast, William Steinway, the famed piano manufacturer, proposed a more conventional underground railway. Recognizing the potential of the subway system to connect his factory in Queens with Manhattan, Steinway began to lobby for its implementation. He championed the idea of using electric trains, which were quieter and cleaner than their steam-powered counterparts.

Steinway's advocacy bore fruit when the Rapid Transit Act was passed in 1894, paving the way for a city-wide underground transit system. The Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT) was tasked with the construction and operation of the initial line. The chosen path ran mostly beneath major avenues and streets to avoid excessive property displacement.

Construction began in earnest, adopting the 'cut and cover' technique similar to London's underground. The project wasn't without its challenges – gas line explosions, water main breaks, and tunnel collapses intermittently plagued the development. But the engineers and workers persevered.

The inaugural line, spanning from City Hall to Harlem, opened to the public on October 27, 1904. On its first day, it transported an impressive 150,000 passengers. The journey between these two stations took under 30 minutes, a record at that time. By the close of the first year, the IRT had seen more than 100 million rides.

Expansion of the system was swift. Within a decade, additional lines branched out to various boroughs, including Brooklyn and The Bronx. The city continued to wrestle with transportation challenges, however. As Manhattan's center became increasingly dense, there was a need to burrow even deeper, beneath the existing subway lines, to accommodate new routes.

While the deeper construction posed technical challenges, the main hindrance was the use of electric locomotives in such confined spaces. Though the idea of using electric trains was not new, it required innovation to ensure reliable power delivery and ventilation. Innovators were up to the task, and by 1918 the first deep tunnel, connecting Times Square to Grand Central, began operations.

Over the following years, the New York subway system grew rapidly, incorporating newer technologies and expanding to farther reaches of the city. Competing subway companies emerged, and the labyrinth of tracks became even more intricate. But it was the 1930s' unification of these competing systems under the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) that solidified the subway's role as the city's primary public transportation system.

Today, the New York subway, much like London's Underground, stands as a testament to human ingenuity and the relentless drive to overcome urban challenges. These subterranean railways not only reshaped the cities they served but also set the standard for public transport in major metropolises worldwide.

1. Complete the notes below.

Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the passage for each answer.

The New York Subway

Alfred Ely Beach

- created an underground system using [1]_____.
- system's car was moved by [2]_____ pressure.

William Steinway

- wanted to connect his factory in [3]_____ with Manhattan.
- promoted the use of [4]_____ trains.

Expansion and challenges

- new routes required construction [5]_____ existing lines.
- the first deep tunnel linked [6]_____ Square to Grand Central.

Next Questions:

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage?

- *TRUE if the statement agrees with the information*
- *FALSE if the statement contradicts the information*
- *NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this*

2. The main reason for building the subway in New York was due to the shadows created by "Els" on the streets below.

- A) TRUE
- B) FALSE
- C) NOT GIVEN

3. Alfred Ely Beach's underground system was fully functional and served a large number of passengers daily.

- A) TRUE
- B) FALSE
- C) NOT GIVEN

4. The Rapid Transit Act was passed in 1894 to pave the way for a city-wide subway system.

- A) TRUE
- B) FALSE
- C) NOT GIVEN

5. The inaugural subway line ran from Harlem to City Hall and took under 20 minutes.

- A) TRUE
- B) FALSE

C) NOT GIVEN

6. Within a decade of its opening, the subway expanded to serve Brooklyn and The Bronx.

A) TRUE

B) FALSE

C) NOT GIVEN

7. The main technical challenge in deeper subway construction was ensuring reliable power delivery and ventilation for electric locomotives.

A) TRUE

B) FALSE

C) NOT GIVEN

8. The unification of competing subway companies took place in the 1930s under the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).

A) TRUE

B) FALSE

C) NOT GIVEN

9. William Steinway's primary motivation for promoting the subway was to reduce traffic congestion in Manhattan.

A) TRUE

B) FALSE

C) NOT GIVEN

10. The "cut and cover" technique was borrowed from London's underground construction method.

A) TRUE

B) FALSE

C) NOT GIVEN

Answer Keys

Question	Answer
1	[1] pneumatic [2] air [3] Queens [4] electric [5] beneath [6] Times
2	B
3	B
4	A
5	B

Question	Answer
6	A
7	A
8	A
9	C
10	A