

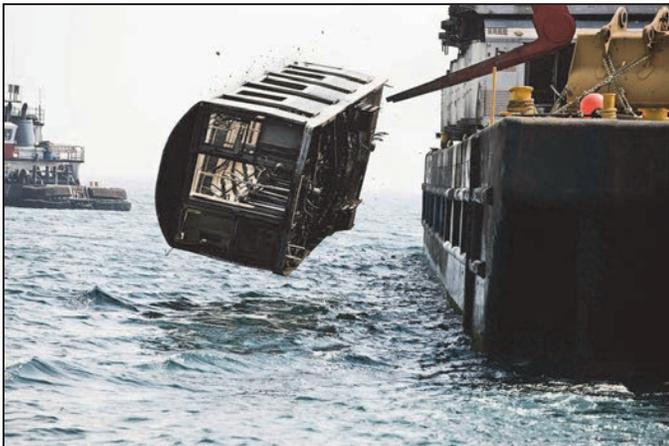
For Subway Cars, The Final Trip

By Michael M. Grynbaum
(from the Internet)

A decade ago, in a moment of inspiration, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of New York City stumbled on a way to help the environment and its own bottom line: donating retired subway trains to the cause of creating artificial reefs.



Over 2,500 obsolete subway cars – including 1,269 of the classic ocher-hued A Redbird cars – were packed up, shipped out and then, with a splash, dropped into silent graves at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, somewhere off the coasts of six states up and down the Eastern Seaboard.



Seats that once held jostling commuters yielded to a new batch of passengers: barnacles, bass, mussels and tautog, just a few of the forms of sea fauna that now frolic in and out of the sunken steel. Even sharks have been known to stop by for a visit. Stephen Mallon, a photographer, tagged along with the ocean-bound cars from 2008 to 2010, documenting four reefings, including the images shown here, which were shot off the coasts of Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware (the latter has more than 1,300 subway cars buried off its shore).

The reefing program, which began in 2001, seemed a win-win for the transportation authority. Sinking the subway cars cost about half as much as selling them for scrap, and the agency could avoid the costly process of removing asbestos from the cars' floors and walls. While some states initially rejected the cars, fearing contamination from asbestos, a report from the Environmental Protection Agency found the materials posed little risk to creatures in the water.

The ersatz reefs, meanwhile, were good for marine ecosystems and local economies alike. Invertebrates, happy with their new home, attracted more fish, which in turn provided local fishermen with a more bountiful catch. But after 10 years, the authority determined that its newer subway cars would not be suitable for this fate; those trains have more plastic parts than their predecessors, making them more expensive to prepare for reefing. The era of the underwater subway graveyard officially came to an end.

According to a subway spokesperson, the authority is seeking a more efficient manner of disposal ... but the details remain submerged.