

# New York, one helluva town for the hard of hearing

By Stephen O. Frazier, Hearing Loss Support Specialist

*Hard of hearing New Yorkers and visitors from "out there" can find almost any type of service or attraction that offers them hearing access using hearing loops or neckloops and telecoils.*

For me, New York without lots of noise just wouldn't be New York. The shattering sound of jackhammers tearing things down only to rebuild them confirms O'Henry's claim that New York "will be a great place if they ever finish it." Even unfinished, it's a helluva town and, for those who are hard of hearing like me, possibly the most hearing accessible city in America.

On a recent visit, as I walked up from the Wellington Hotel to 57th and 7th, the incessant flow of traffic on the Avenue brought back memories of a cacophony that was so familiar when I lived in New York and worked in the CAMI building across from Carnegie Hall. I was headed for the subway fair booth to get a Metropass. While a New Yorker that was one of "my stops" when inclement weather forced me to use public transportation instead of just my own two feet and the sidewalks of New York.

I knew the MTA has looped 600 plus subway fair/information booths but questioned how well they would work. I also knew the roar of trains passing through made it hard to hear the agent in the booth so I was apprehensive as I approached it. I turned off the mics in my hearing aids and turned on my telecoils. Just as a train came roaring in underneath I asked for a 7 day unlimited metrocard and to my surprise and delight heard the agent say loudly and clearly, "That'll be \$33.00." I went on to ask a few questions since there've been changes in the subway system since I lived there and had no problem communicating with the agent. Wow, I thought, those hearing loops really work well.

The subway isn't the only place I found the technology. Every New York City Nissan "Taxi of Tomorrow" is a mobile demonstration of hearing loop technology. The cabs are "looped" so hard of hearing passengers can talk to and hear the driver using the telecoils in their hearing aids. With their hearing aid microphones turned off and the telecoils turn on, they hear little of the incessant drone of the cab's tires on the road or the sound from busses, delivery trucks and cars all jockeying for space on the city's over crowded streets.

What's a hearing loop? In its simplest form it's a wire connected to a transmitter that's connected to a microphone. It can circle an entire room or, in miniature, hang around the user's neck, plugged into a pocket sized receiver, an mp3 player, a cell phoner or other electronic sound producing device. That loop broadcasts sound from the source as a silent, electromagnetic signal. Hearing aid wearers with tiny receivers called telecoils inside their hearing aids connect to the signal just as a radio connects to WQXR and Viola! - it's like the

person speaking into the mic is standing next to the telecoil user. In the case of the taxi it moves you from the back seat to the front - right beside the driver.

One of the few advantages of being hard of hearing is that turned off mic trick used in the cab mentioned earlier. In New York it let me dim the powerful New York symphony of sound nearly down to soft elevator music yet I could still hear what I needed to when in the presence of a loop. A counter loop at the Met's information desk ensured I could hear the directions I needed to get to the Egyptian wing in that huge vault of artifacts. I could choose from nearly a dozen Broadway, Lincoln Center and Off Broadway theaters whose auditoriums are now looped or, if not, usually offer to loan a neckloop instead of earphones so I didn't have to remove my hearing aids and gamble on damaging or losing them in order to hear the lyrics of most any show I could get half price tickets for at the Times Square TKTS booth.

Hard of hearing New Yorkers and visitors from "out there" can find almost any type of service or attraction that offers them hearing access using hearing loops or neckloops and telecoils. There are hearing loops to help them communicate with pharmacists or soda jerks at several Duane Reade drug stores and Shake Shacks scattered around the city. The Apple Store and several Gristedes have loops at the checkout counters and for their guided tours many of the museums offer neckloops as an alternative to earphones. Places of worship with loops in their sanctuaries represent a variety of faiths. Sports fans can hear the ticket seller at Madison Square Garden or Yankee Stadium over the roar of the crowd. The list of looped facilities is long and impressive. Manhattan boasts nearly 100 venues that offer the technology and, with places like the Bronx Zoo, the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, the NY Mets Citifield in Queens, the outer boroughs add many popular tourist sites to that list.

Led by the Manhattan chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) and Manhattanite Janice Schacter Lintz through her Hearing Access initiative, advocates for hearing loops have made New York City the nation's most hearing loss friendly city. It's not easy to locate but the New York City HLAA chapter has posted what is possibly the most comprehensive list of the city's known looped venues on their [hearinglossnyc.org](http://hearinglossnyc.org) [website](#). Both New Yorkers and out of towners can also access Loop America's Loop Locator (<https://time2loopamerica.com/loop-locator/> ) and Otojoy's LoopFinder (<https://loopfinder.com/> ) to find looped facilities not just in New York but around the country. There's even a "location aware" LoopFinder app for smart phones that offers suggestions for travelers of nearby venues with hearing loops. The Website [www.hearingloop.org](http://www.hearingloop.org) has become the "go to" [site](#) for millions with hearing loss wanting to learn more about the technology that, partnered with telecoils, can double the functionality of their hearing aids and allow them to enjoy not just the sights but also the sounds of New York.

James Baldwin said of New York, "All other cities seem, at best, a mistake, and, at worst, a fraud. No other city is so spitefully incoherent." Maybe he found it incoherent because he was hard of hearing and hearing loops had not yet made their New York City debut.