

New Yorkers and visitors from “out there” with a hearing loss can find almost any type of service or attraction that offers them hearing access using hearing loops or neckloops and telecoils.



NEW YORK CITY

One Helluva Town for People with Hearing Loss

BY STEPHEN O. FRAZIER

With the COVID-19 pandemic fading to just an unpleasant memory, many of us are again thinking of travel and, for me, New York City is at the top of my list. I lived there for ten years, and regularly get an urge to revisit the Big Apple.

To me, New York without lots of noise just wouldn't be New York. That noise is probably why it's called The City That Never Sleeps. 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 have hearing loss, it has become the most hearing accessible city in America.

On my most recent visit, as I walked up from the Wellington Hotel to 57th Street and 7th Avenue, 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 classical music business in the CAMI building across from Carnegie Hall. I was headed for the subway fair booth to get a seven-day MetroCard. While a New Yorker, that was one of my regular "stops" when inclement weather forced me to use public transportation instead of just my own two feet and the sidewalks of New York to get me home 30 blocks away.

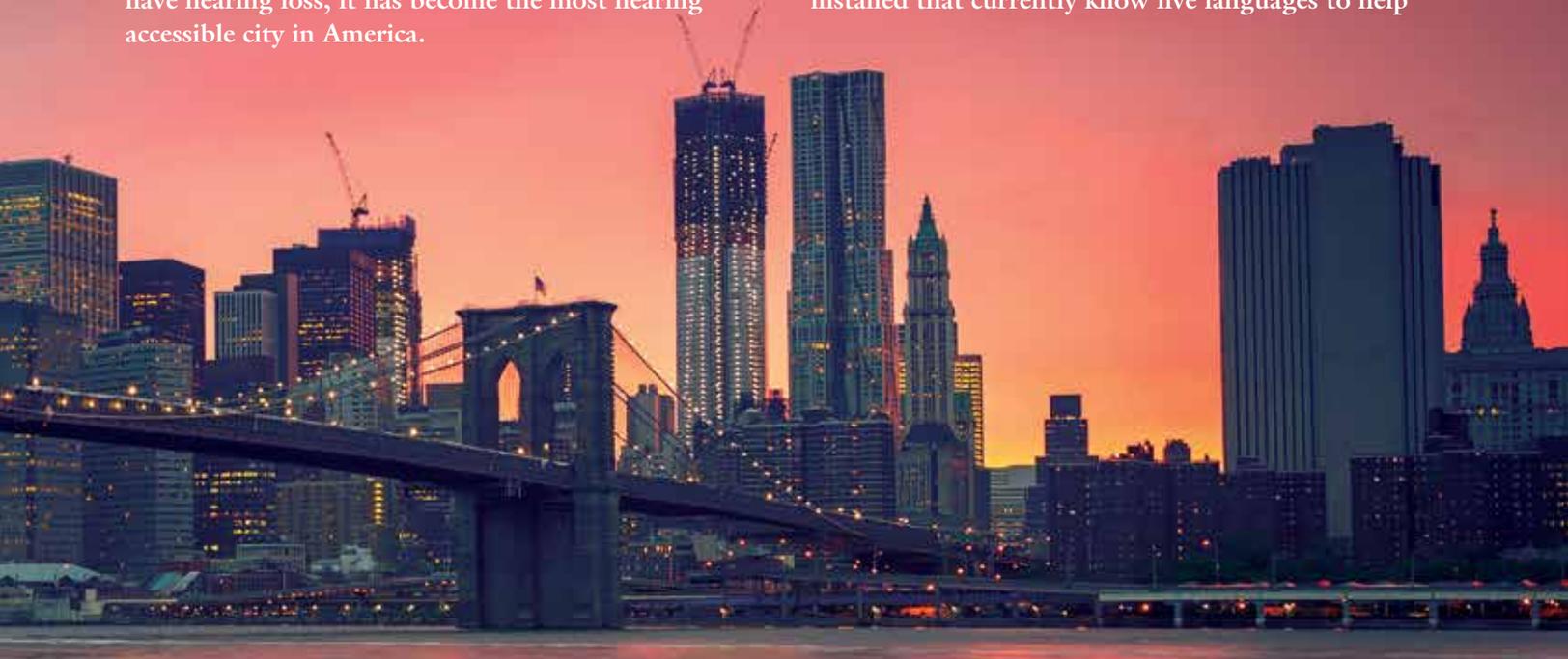
I knew the MTA had looped 600 plus subway fare/information booths but questioned how well they would work. I also knew the roar of trains passing through below made it hard to hear the agent in the booth so I was apprehensive as I approached it. I turned off the mics in my hearing aids and turned on my telecoils. Just as a train came roaring

in underneath, I asked for a seven-day unlimited MetroCard, and to my surprise and delight heard the agent say loudly and clearly, "That'll be \$33." I went on to ask a few questions since there've been changes in the subway system since I lived there, and I 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. For visitors who fly in, it can begin at the new Delta Airlines Terminal at LaGuardia Airport where all departure/arrival gates feature hearing loops. The terminal also has text-to-speech engines installed that currently know five languages to help

strangers to the terminal. At some point in the future all transportation hubs managed by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey will be joining the Delta Terminal in offering loops. The Port Authority recently mandated that all new or upgraded terminals at its airports must have hearing loops at departure gates and information counters. Rail, bus and ferry terminals must also offer information counter loops.

Many of the city's fleet of buses now offer captioning of the announcements made by the driver and every New York City Nissan "Taxi of Tomorrow" is a mobile demonstration of hearing loop technology. The cabs are "looped" so passengers with hearing loss can hear the driver through the telecoils in their hearing devices. With their hearing device microphones turned off and the telecoils turned on, they hear little of the incessant drone of the cabs' tires on the road or the sound from buses, delivery



trucks and cars all jockeying for space on the city's overcrowded 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 or a cellphone, laptop or other electronic sound producing device. That loop broadcasts sound from the mic as a silent, electromagnetic signal. Hearing device wearers with tiny receivers called telecoils inside their devices connect to the signal just as a radio connects to New York's WQXR FM News Radio and voila!—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 having hearing loss is that turned off mic trick used in the cab. 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 Metropolitan Museum of Art information desk ensured I could hear the directions I needed to get to the Egyptian wing in that huge vault of artifacts. Many Broadway, Lincoln Center and Off-Broadway theaters' auditoriums are now looped or, if not, they 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. In this case the show was the award-winning "Kinky Boots" and it was a hoot.

I always take my personal neckloop with me when I travel. I can use it instead of the poor sound quality earbuds the airlines give out to listen to music or a movie on an aircraft. Where museums and other tourist sites loan earphones and receivers to hear the recorded information as you tour the site, I've often used my neckloop instead. That works not just here in the states but abroad—that's how I learned as I "toured" Stonehenge in England and about the remains of earlier structures touring the catacombs under Notre Dame prior to its recent burning in Paris. The loop signal is at the same frequency anywhere in the world so, unlike FM or infrared, receivers work in London, Seoul, South Korea or any place a loop is present.

New Yorkers and visitors from "out there" with a hearing loss 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 supermarkets have loops 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 Botanic Gardens, and the New York Mets Citi Field in Queens, the outer boroughs add many popular tourist sites to that list.

Initiatives by the HCAA New York City Chapter and the work of Hearing Access and Innovations, Inc., advocates for hearing loops have contributed greatly to making New York City the nation's friendliest city for those with hearing loss. It's not easy to locate but the chapter has posted what is possibly the most comprehensive list of the city's known looped venues on their hearinglossnyc.org website.

Both New Yorkers and out-of-towners can also use Loop America's loop locator (<https://time2loopamerica.com/loop-locator/>) and OTJJOY's LoopFinder (<https://loopfinder.com/>) to locate looped facilities not just in New York but around the country.

There's even a "location aware" LoopFinder app for smartphones that offers suggestions of nearby venues with hearing loops for travelers. Hearingloop.org has become the go-to site for millions with hearing loss who want to learn more about hearing loops that, partnered with telecoils, can double the functionality of their hearing devices so that they can 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 had hearing loss and hearing loops had not yet made their New York City debut. They're there now and I may soon be, too... **HL**

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AMTRAK Customer Service

AMTRAK Information Booth



Metropolitan Museum of Art Information Desk



Airport

Taxis



Yankee Stadium



Brooklyn Botanic Garden



Subway System



Lincoln Center



GET IN THE HEARING LOOP

It's Time to Get in the Hearing Loop

Many people aren't yet aware of hearing loops or other technologies that can improve communication access and public engagement, or how they can enrich the lives of people with hearing loss, their families, friends, colleagues and even communities. The Get in the Hearing Loop Program is changing that—one loop, one advocate, one ADA request at a time.

Get in the Hearing Loop, a communication access program of HLAA, is dedicated to providing and promoting community education, advocacy on behalf of people with hearing loss, and consultation services to help venues of all kinds successfully implement hearing loop technology.

We dream of a world where people with hearing loss can thrive each day with communication access, full inclusion and equal participation in all aspects of life, everywhere they go.

For more information about hearing loops and the Get in the Hearing Loop Program, visit hearingloss.org/GITHL or email GITHLinfo@hearingloss.org.