Transit Walk – Deep Dive: The IND 8th Avenue Lines

March 22, 2026

Tour Leader – Andrew Sparberg

Station Sequence Shown Below

1 Chambers St-WTC

2 West 4th St

3 42nd St. - 8th Ave.

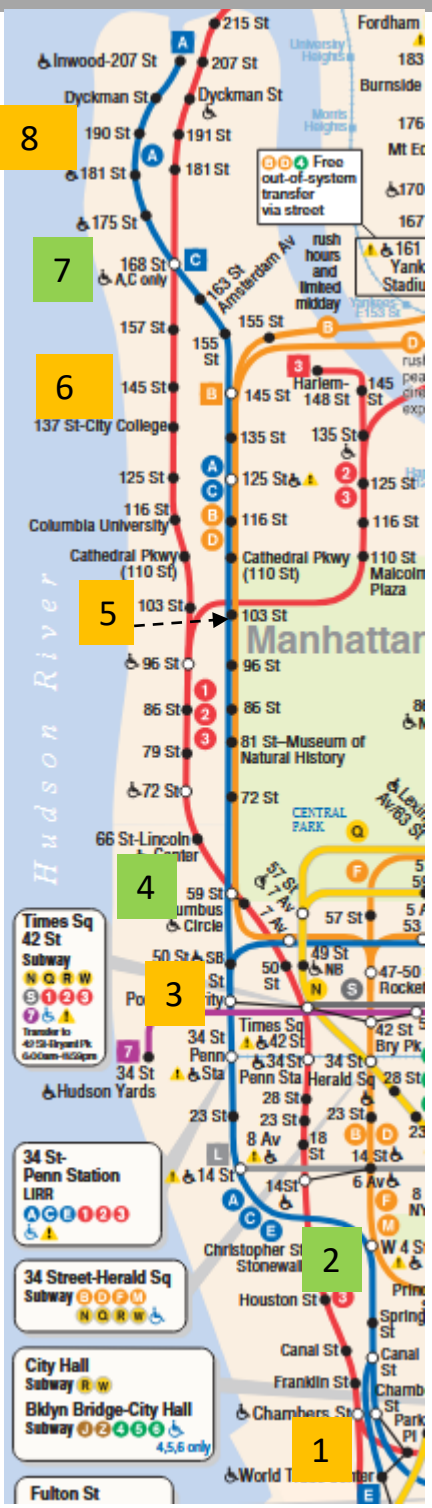
4 59th St. -Columbus Circle

5 103rd St. & Central Park West

6 145th St. –St. Nicholas Ave.

7 168th St. & Broadway

8 190th St. & Fort Washington Ave.



Station where we will stop for commentary.

Station where we won't stop but will have brief commentary on the train.

TRIP BACKGROUND

- Almost as soon as the first subway opened in 1904, crowded trains and packed platforms pushed the system to its limits, making expansion necessary. The first big subway expansion was between 1913 and 1931, when the Dual Contracts projects pushed new services into The Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens on the IRT and BMT networks. In the 1920s, New York City's government conceived a third network, a municipally owned and operated subway, the Independent Subway System or IND. Designed to relieve congestion, improve service, and replace obsolete elevated lines, the IND introduced faster trains, larger and more modern stations, and cutting-edge technological improvements.
- On this trip, we will retrace the first IND segment, the Eighth Avenue Line; its construction began in March 1925 and it opened in September 1932. We'll travel from lower to upper Manhattan and stop at key stations along the way. This route replaced the IRT's old Ninth Avenue Elevated, razed in 1940. We'll see some unique station features and innovative tunnel construction.
- The IND builders did their jobs very well. The entire route, about twelve miles long, is still in daily use. The stations, tracks, and structures have been rebuilt and renewed over the years, but many original features from the 1930s are still very much visible. Platforms were originally built 615 feet long (10 car train length), meaning no lengthening was needed later on.
- The route includes a unique mixture of various types of subway construction, including cut and cover, deep bore tunnels, and multi-level stations.
- We will begin at World-Trade Center/Chambers St. and continue northward, with stops at 42nd, 103rd, 145th, and 190th Streets. We will follow the route made famous in the Billy Strayhorn-Duke Ellington song "Take the A Train."
- The next pages contain photos of stations where we will stop, continuing in sequence with the itinerary numbers shown on page 1.
- Enjoy the trip!

Table below summarizes station stops we'll make today. If the row has a white background, it means that we will stop there and get off. A gray background means we will go through the station but will not get off the train.

Station	**What we will see / train to use**
Chambers St. - WTC	South end of original 1932 IND subway. Adjacent to World Trade Center. *Take uptown E train to W 42nd St.*
W4th St.	Two level station, with Sixth Avenue Subway on lowest level (opened in 1940).
42nd St.	Offset platforms, running between 40th and 44th Streets. Connected to IRT and BMT Times Square complex, and adjacent to Port Authority Bus Terminal. *Take uptown C to 103rd St.*
59th St.	We won't get off here but note that this station was built below the IRT #1 line and the Columbus statue on the street level. A third platform between the two express tracks was included, but trains do not open on that side.
103rd St.	Two level station with tracks transitioning between two levels. *Take uptown C to 145th St*.
145th St.	Two level station with very wide uptown Concourse Line platform on lower level. *Take uptown A to 190th St.*
168th St.	We won't get off here, but note that this station was built above the IRT #1 line, because the latter follows a deep bore tunnel, while the IND follows a shallow tunnel along the top of a ridge.
190th St.	Station with street access on two levels because of hilly topography.

Next pages show photos at each station where will get off.

Chambers St – World Trade Center

This station is actually two separate platforms that are connected by a mezzanine at the north end. We begin at the south end, a stub-end terminal for the E train, and in years past for services that no longer run, such as the AA and CC trains.

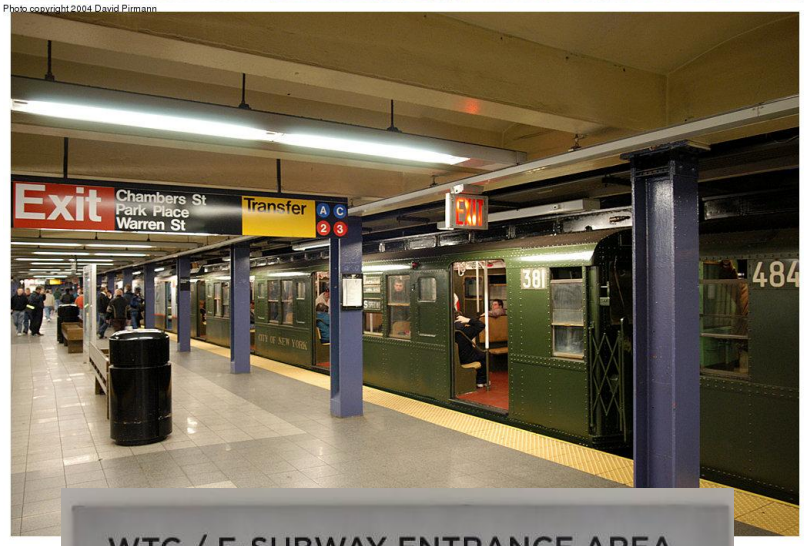
Before the World Trade Center was built, this station was called Hudson Terminal, the old name for the adjacent PATH train station, which opened in 1909 as part of the Hudson and Manhattan Railroad. PATH succeeded the H&M in 1962.

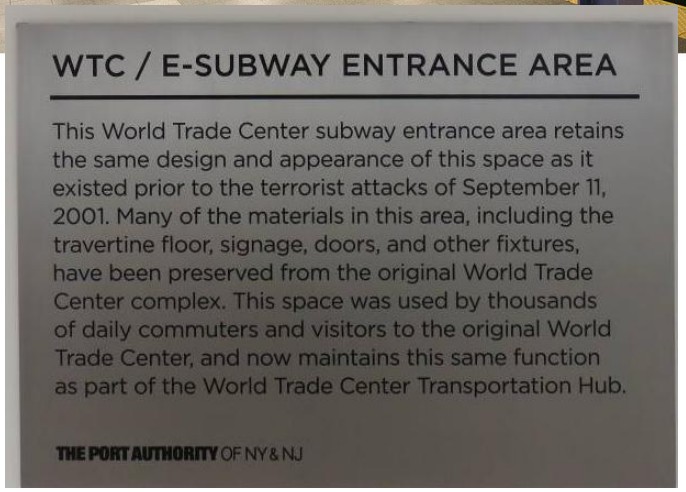
At its north end, this station has a free transfer to the IRT #2 and #3 train; at the south end a recent free transfer was added to the former BMT's R and W trains. So this location unites all three original subway operators – IND, IRT, BMT, and the PATH trains as well.

As the plaque pictured on the right notes, this station led to the original World Trade Center concourse. Your tour guide used this entrance regularly between 1974 and 1982, when he worked for Tri-State Regional Planning Commission at #1 World Trade Center.

Photo copyright 2010 Anthony Modesto

Photo copyright 2004 David Pirmann





All 3 photos, nycsubway.org

42nd Street – 8th Ave.

42nd - 8th Ave. is an express station with four tracks and two island platforms, but it also has many unique features. It is part of the overall Times Square/42nd Street complex and is thus heavily used. The original IND builders designed the platforms extra wide for that very reason, which is why they are offset from north to south; the southbound platform extends between 40th and 42nd Sts. and the northbound between 42nd and 44th Sts., with a slight overlap in the middle. There is a full mezzanine above the entire platform length that allows transfer to the rest of the Times Square complex and to the Port Authority Bus Terminal. There is also an abandoned lower level with one track and one side platform on the downtown side, that was used in the 1960s and 1970s for rush hour downtown E trains and also to begin special services to the Rockaways and Aqueduct Race Track. A number of scenes from the 1990 film *Ghost*, starring Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore, were filmed on the lower level platform. It has since been closed permanently to allow the #7 line extension to pass below the IND tunnel.

Top photo shows the mezzanine level with its shops; bottom photo shows the uptown platform and its generous width.

Mr. Sparberg photos, 9/22/23

59th Street – Columbus Circle

59th Street/Columbus Circle was built with a third platform between the two express tracks in anticipation of heavy passenger use. At one time express trains opened doors on both sides. This practice is no longer followed, but the middle platform serves as a free transfer passage between the downtown #1 and the A, B, C, and D trains.

New York's longest underground express run, 3¼ miles, is from here to 125th Streets. We won't take it because we need to stop at 103rd Street. The IND builders did that to make sure that anyone riding a local train southbound would see no reason to transfer to an express train here if the person's final destination was in Manhattan. If you listen to the famous song "Take the A Train" (written by Billy Strayhorn and famously performed by Duke Ellington), you can imagine this fast express run. B and C trains serve the local stops. Below photo shows the center platform at 59th Street.

Mr. Sparberg photo, 9/22/23

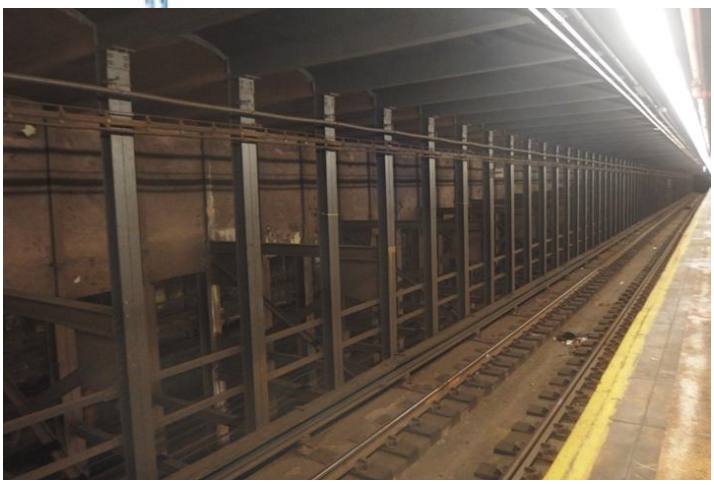
Under Central Park West the five stations between 72nd St. and 103rd Streets inclusive are in an unusual two-level tunnel with uptown trains on the upper level, and the express trains against the east wall on both levels. The design was used because street stairways are only needed on the west side of Central Park West, where all buildings are located, eliminating the need for a mezzanine level over four tracks. This design also combines the fare controls with the uptown platforms. One downside to the two-level design is that the noise level on the local platforms is very high whenever an express train passes through.

At 103rd Street the tracks begin their return to a conventional layout at 110th Street and begin to rearrange themselves. We will get off at 103rd Street to see how the uptown express tracks drop from the upper to the lower level in order for the line to resume its conventional layout at 110th Street. That's why 103rd Street Station is like no other New York station.

The next page has a track diagram and photos that illustrate the unique area at the 103rd and 110th Street Stations in more detail. Below this complicated track work, the #2 and #3 train between 96th and 110th Streets runs in a deep tunnel below 104th Street, which opened in 1904 as part of the first IRT subway. There is no #2/#3 station here; just the tunnel itself.

103rd Street & Central Park West

Track diagram, left, shows the B and C train stops at 103rd, 110th, and 116th Streets. The photos show the 103rd St. Station, uptown platform, where we will get off the train. Left photo is looking downtown. Right photo shows a Bronx-bound D express train doing a "deep dive" so that it can emerge on the east side of the tunnel at 110th Street. (*Mr. Sparberg photos, 8/1/2023)*



After 103rd Street the uptown local tracks remain on the top level but must realign to the east side of Central Park West. The arrow on the diagram above shows how this happens. The uptown express track must dive under the uptown local. The uptown local moves all the way to the right and at 110th resumes its normal layout on the right. At 110th Street you can see the uptown express ascending back to the single lever tunnel in the middle of the station. The two downtown tracks, south of 110th Street, simply drop to the lower level and remain there to a point north of 59th Street.

Below the ABCD train tunnel, the #2 and #3 train tunnel runs below 104th Street, on its way between the 96th and 110th Street Stations. This route is part of the original 1904 subway. There is no station on the #2 / #3 line here; it is below the B and C trains, as indicated by the arrow on the track diagram.

The next two pages show construction photos between 96th and 125th St. Stations.

103rd and 108th Sts. along Central Park West

Below, Central Park West looking north from 102nd St., July 1925, above the 103rd St. Station site. Below, a two-level tunnel will be built. Construction began earlier in 1925 at 121st St. and 8th Ave, Note the streetcar tracks, with conduit between the running rails. This route is now the M10 bus.

Above, construction proceeds below Central Park West looking north from 108th St., December 1925. Here the four tracks will realign onto one level, from 110th St. Station northward. IRT 9th Ave. elevated is in background.

Deep Dive Continues below CPW and 8th Ave.

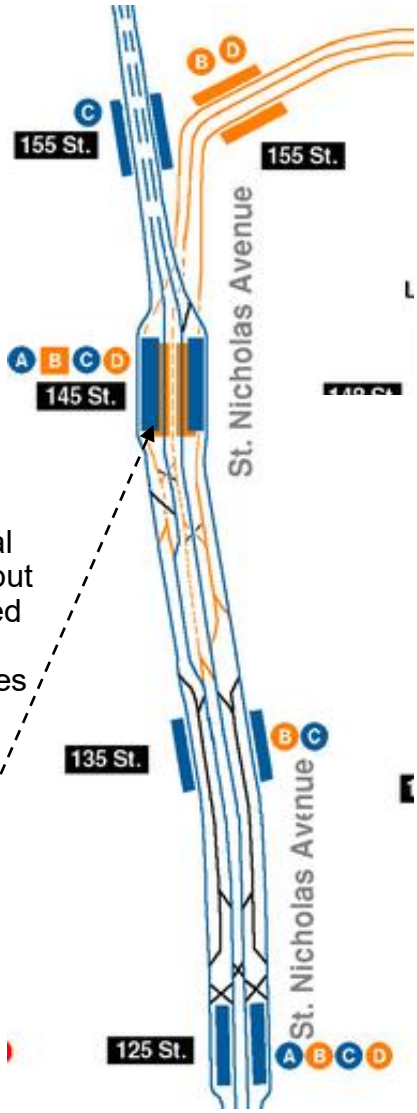
Left, a car clearance template is working in the tunnel between 96th and 103rd Streets, 1928.

Right, intersection of 121st St., 8th Ave., & St. Nicholas Ave. in April 1925 about a month after construction began. 9th Ave. elevated is above, running atop 8th Ave. at this point. The elevated closed in June 1940 and was promptly razed. New subway will curve left at the intersection and jog left about 45 degrees. 125th St. Station is 4 blocks north and is below St. Nicholas Ave.

125th to 145th Streets below St. Nicholas Ave.

IND R10 train in November 1970 at 125th St.

Photo and track map from nycsubway.org.



North of 125th, extending to 145th Street. is an unusual six track layout, including the 135th Street Station, the only station in NYC that has six tracks passing through on one level between two local platforms (Hoyt-Schermerhorn station in Brooklyn has six tracks but has three island platforms). Between 135th and 145 is nicknamed "Homeball Alley" due to the large number of switches and home signals, because the Washington Heights and Concourse branches diverge and converge here. Home signals control entrances to switches; "Ball" is subway slang for signal.

We will remain on our train until 145th St. At right is the track diagram in this area. Below is a construction photo of the two-level 145th St. Station.

A maze of steel. At this point, there are three levels which you can count in the steel frame. The bottom two will carry tracks; and the third will be the mezzanine of a station.

145th and 168th Streets below St. Nicholas Ave.

D Train is on lower (Bronx) level on downtown track at 145th St. Notice how wide the uptown platform is. ***(Mr. Sparberg photo, 8/1/2023)***

145th Street Station, above, has seven tracks on two levels. Washington Heights trains (A and C) use the 4-track upper level, while Bronx trains to and from the Grand Concourse (B and D) use the 3 track lower level. The station and the area immediately south are a good example of the many flying junctions built on the IND subway. This station was built on two levels in order to speed service, separating the Washington Heights and Grand Concourse services. The uptown platform on the lower level is exceptionally wide, because the station footprint is four tracks wide to match the upper level.

We will board an uptown A train on the upper level and continue to 190th Street., stopping at 168th Street, an important transfer point to the #1 IRT train. Photo below shows an A train stopping at 168th and illustrating how the express train uses what is usually the local track at most other express stations. 168th Street has an unusual history, because the A and C station was built in 1932, 26 years after the #1 station, which is about 150 feet below the street level and built in 1906. The IND station is a cut-and-cover station close to the street surface, so the challenge here was to build the station above the older #1 line. While 168th on the A and C appears to be a typical four track, two platform express station with a mezzanine above the platforms, in reality the normal local and express pattern is reversed – the express "scrapes the wall" and the local trains turn around using the middle tracks and a small underground yard area just to the north.

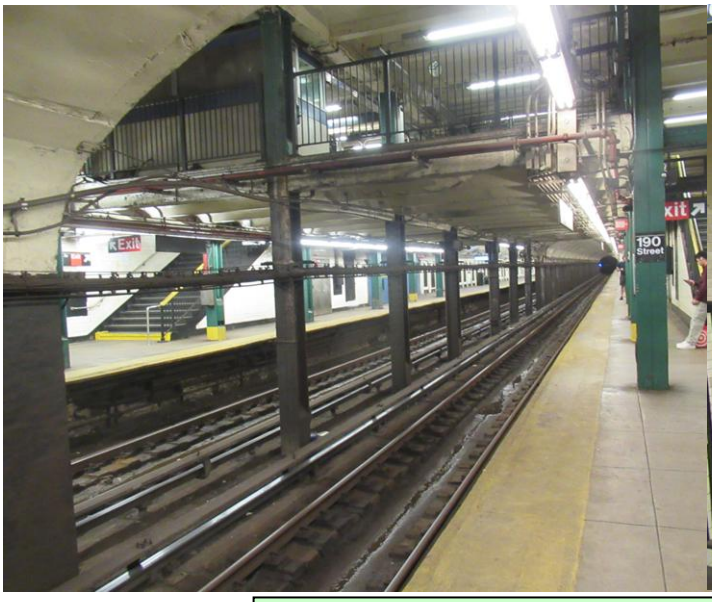
Photo copyright 2020 Chao-Hwa Chen

R46 A Train consist is shown stopping at 168th St. "scraping the wall." ***(nycsubway.org photo, 11/15/2016).***

190th St. below Fort Washington Ave.

We continue north on the A train to the 190th Street Station, which is situated inside a steep hill and has entrances both above and below. Once there you will understand more. Photos below are at 190th St. This is our last stop. The next two pages are information only and not part of the trip.

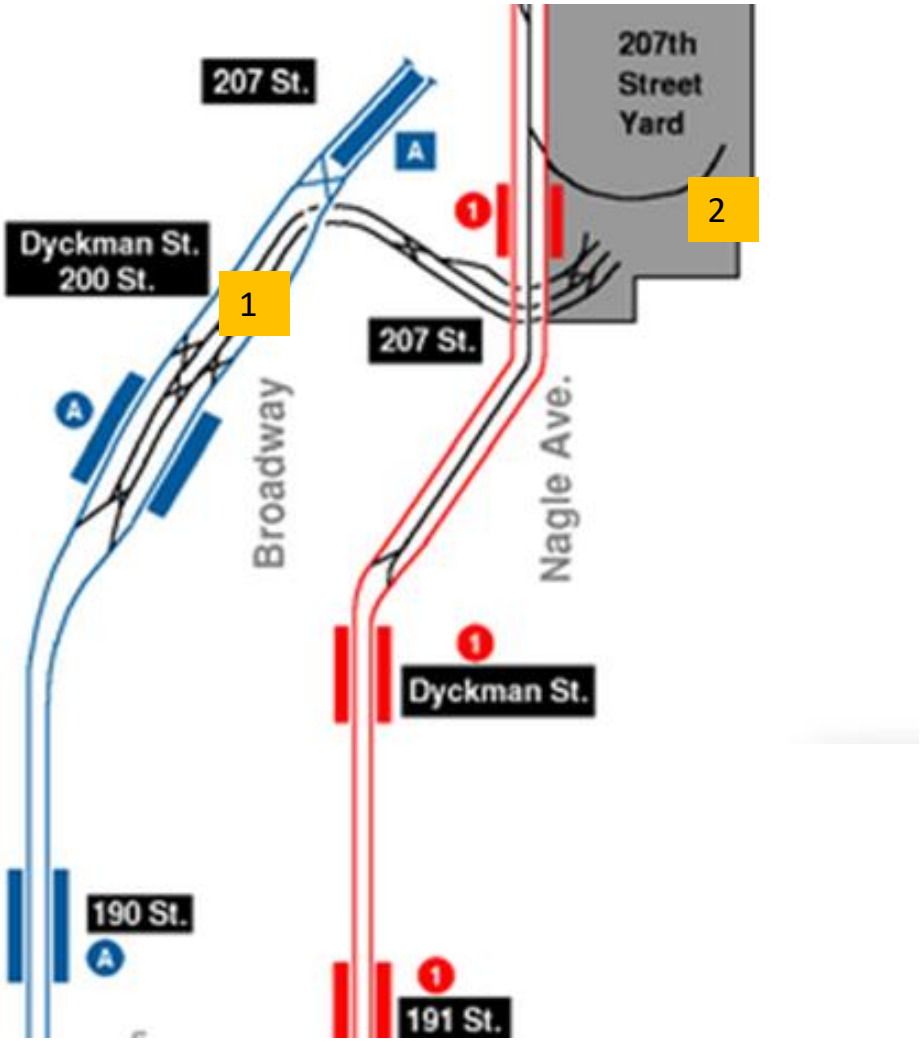
There are two ways to access this station from the street – via an elevator to Fort Washington Avenue, or via a ramp to Bennet Avenue. Before we board a downtown train note that the tracks drop downward north of this station. The next stop, Dyckman Street, is below the elevation of 190th Street, since the land drops downward as we head north. Refer to the track diagram on the next page.



Various views of the 190th St.-Fort Washington Ave. A train station. Rock behind the Post Office truck is Manhattan Schist, a particularly hard substance. ***(Mr. Sparberg photos, 8/1/2023)***

190th St. to Dyckman St.
not part of trip

North of 190th St. Station, the A train tracks descend through a steep hill to reach the next station, Dyckman-200th St., which is a conventional cut-and-cover station under Broadway. There are four tracks through the station, but the two in the middle are not for express trains, instead serving as lead tracks to and from the nearby 207th Street Shops and Yard (#1 in the diagram below). That facility also opened in 1932, as the heavy repair facility for IND Division cars. After 1960, it was modified to handle IRT division heavy repairs as well. IRT equipment was originally moved here using a connection in The Bronx between the Concourse Yard and the #4 Jerome Ave. Line. The lead track (#2 in the diagram below) was added in 1988 to give the #1 line elevated structure direct access to and from 207th St. Yard.



207th St. below Broadway
not part of trip

The IND Eighth Avenue Line's north terminal is 207th Street, unchanged since 1932. Just like Chambers-World Trade Center, it is a simple two-track single platform stub end terminal. The original IND is a collection of varied and unique subway infrastructure, including double deck tunnels, six track layouts, seven-track stations, and deep stations with elevator access.

Manhattan's varied topography was a challenge to the IND builders, but they did an admirable job.

nycsubway.org photos at 207th St. in Sept. 2007 (left, on the 75th anniversary of its opening) and Nov. 2007 (right, showing a since-retired R32 train consist).