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Longtime NYC businesses being displaced by 2nd Ave. Subway rip MTA for dragging on promised help: ‘David and Goliath’

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East Harlem businesses being displaced by the Second Avenue Subway extension claim the MTA is dragging its feet forking over the financial compensation and relocation assistance they desperately need.

"They've left me hanging," said 59-year-old Lu Nicaj, whose 30-year tile-construction supply shop Eagle Tile is facing closure over the upcoming second phase of the behemoth Manhattan transit project.

"I don't know the future. I'm keeping my fingers crossed, but I do not know what's gonna happen," he told The Post.



Lu Nicaj fears he is going to have to close his contractor supply business of 30 years if the MTA doesn't act fast. Matthew McDermott

"It's the whole David and Goliath thing," Nicaj said — adding that this time David might not win.

Nicaj is just one of several East Harlem business owners being forced out of their storefronts to make way for new subway stops between East 116th and East 125th streets as part of the MTA's long-awaited $7.7 billion train-line extension.

The MTA claimed eminent domain on the properties in August — meaning tenants and landowners alike were given no choice but to leave — while promising to provide the legally required financial compensation and relocation assistance.

But months later, many businesses being booted by the MTA said they've been frustrated by the little help they've received — including Nicaj, who said he's spent $100,000 to move materials from the nearby lot he's rented for years to his store his inventory but has heard nothing from the MTA on when or even if they're going to pay him back.

"I'm gonna be in debt and a hole for a while until I pull myself out. It's gonna be a while before I can make that money back," he said.



Several businesses along Second Avenue in East Harlem are being evicted from their longtime homes for the subway project. Stephen Yang for the New York Post

Nicaj's actual storefront is not on the chopping block, but without that lot, he has nowhere to store the materials he makes his money from and expects to close down if he can't find an alternative fast.

"They didn't promise me anything. They said they'll see what they can do," he said. "I'm getting a lot of pushback, a lot of 'Yes, yes, yes, we'll get back to you, we'll get back to you,' but nothing is done."

The Second Avenue Subway's first extension phase was completed in 2017 when the Q train was brought to East 96th Street, with the MTA spending about $10 million to relocate displaced residents and businesses.

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But many stores now facing eviction over phase two are scared the MTA might not come through in time to keep their businesses afloat.



Diop has been running his clothing store in East Harlem for 14 years and is being forced to move out. Stephen Yang for the New York Post

The corner deli at the end of Nicaj's block had a 10-year lease on the storefront but is being kicked out by the MTA just three years into that term.

Its owner said the MTA hired a real-estate broker to show him alternate locations but that none fit what he needed.

"I'm just wasting my time there," he said of the MTA's showings, explaining that he's begun looking at locations on his own.

"All my money is tied up in there. I spent a lot of money. I invested $350,000," he said of his business.



The next phase of the subway extension into East Harlem has a budget of about $7.7 billion. MTA Construction and Development

Next door, the Touba African Store is getting evicted from its home of 14 years.

The clothing store's owner, Diop, said the MTA showed him a property he liked three months ago — but that they've failed to follow up with him on the deal.

"They say everything, they called the company," Diop said. "They said they will call back, but they haven't."

Diop said the MTA hasn't shown him another property in three months.

"I am frustrated. I feel like I'm in limbo, but there is nothing I can do," he said. I'm just waiting on them."

The MTA did not respond to a Post request for comment.

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