

Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council

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RIDERS DISSATISFIED WITH LIRR SERVICE

The Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council (LIRRCC) today released its 1999 LIRR Report Card. Riders gave the railroad its lowest mark since 1995: a C, down from a C+ in the three previous years. Ratings dropped measurably in 24 of the survey's 46 service categories. Only one area - home station ticket selling hours - improved measurably.

By comparison, scores rose in seven categories and declined in just five last year. The percentage of riders who feel that service is getting worse rose from about 20% last year to approximately 30%. The steep decline in grades and the rise in the percentage of riders who feel service is worsening is an alarm that should be heeded.

The low marks reflect poor service in such critical areas as on-time performance, air conditioning, and the availability of adequate seating. These deficiencies are a direct result of the failure to maintain the electric and diesel fleet adequately and to replace the cars in a timely fashion. Grades were particularly low in the areas related to car condition. Train rest room cleanliness and summer air-conditioning received the two lowest grades in the survey. Three of the top five areas customers would most like to see improved also reflect dissatisfaction with the condition of cars. The most frequent request was more trains. Seating availability, on-time performance and climate control, which tied for third, and car cleanliness rounded out the top five.

Several aspects of railroad service did earn good grades. The new bi-level diesel coaches received the highest grade in the survey: B+. Riders responded positively to the number of available seats on the cars and to the new and clean look of the coaches. Of the categories that respondents grade each year, train crews once again received the highest marks, and public address announcements, home station cleanliness, and personal security also rated highly.

"Riders are telling the Long Island Rail Road that the long-standing problems on the railroad are getting worse," said LIRRCC Chairman Larry Silverman. "In the last few years, the Council has noted the increase in reports from riders and the Long Island Rail Road of late trains, poor air conditioning, and crowded conditions on trains. Once again the results of the Report Card are not surprising. They closely parallel the Long Island Rail Road's monthly performance data and the complaints we receive from riders."

Mr. Silverman said that the answer is to replace the LIRR's aging fleet of diesel and electric rail cars. "We are pleased that the five-year Capital Program recently announced by the MTA provides for the replacement and overhaul of virtually the entire electric fleet. We are hopeful that as the process of approving the Capital Program moves forward all public officials and transit advocates in the metropolitan region recognize Long Island's critical need to correct the service disparities between the Long Island Rail Road and the other members of the MTA family."

Noting that it will take several years for the LIRR to replace the majority of the fleet, Mr. Silverman urged the railroad to implement short-term measures to improve service. "In recent months an improving trend has been noted in the climate control area, which may be a result of the railroad's increased maintenance efforts. The improvement underscores the importance of continuing and expanding these efforts. If something drastic is not done to improve service I'm afraid that the Long Island Rail Road is heading to an all-time low."

Copies of the full report are available upon request

The LIRRCC was created in 1981 by the New York State Legislature to represent the riders of the Long Island Rail Road. The twelve volunteer members are commuters appointed by the Governor upon the recommendation of the Nassau and Suffolk County Executives and the Brooklyn and Queens Borough Presidents.