

# Long Island Rail Road Commuters' Council

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## ***2000 LIRR Report Card Finds Modest Improvement in Many Areas, Commuters' Council Pleased But Cautious***

The Long Island Rail Road Commuters' Council (LIRRCC) today released the [2000 LIRR Report Card](#), the results of its annual, independent rider survey. The report details the results of a survey of over 2,000 LIRR commuters who were asked to give a letter grade to a variety of aspects of LIRR service. The LIRRCC has undertaken the Report Card survey every year since 1987 to determine the issues of importance to LIRR riders necessitating the attention of the Council.

The results of the 2000 Report Card show statistically significant improvement in almost all categories, and stand in stark contrast to the results of the 1999 Report Card when most grades declined markedly. Out of 46 performance indicators, 38 exhibited significant improvements, while grades for the remaining eight did not change appreciably. Riders gave railroad service a C+ overall, a significant improvement over the C received by the railroad in 1999. Many of the indicators showing significant gains in 2000 are the same indicators that dropped significantly in the previous year. Moreover, no statistically significant declines were recorded in any category. Among the categories with significant improvements in 2000 are air conditioning (C), heating (C+), morning on-time performance (B-), morning seating availability (B-), and management performance (C+).

While the 38 statistically significant improvements recorded on the 2000 Report Card were modest, given the nature of statistical surveys we would not expect large jumps in any single grade. The fact remains that in 2000, most categories were graded at or above average. This year, the majority of grades in most categories fell in a range between C and B-. This is in contrast to 1999, when scores for most categories ranged just below average, falling generally between D and C.

The three highest grades, in the 2000 survey went to the new bi-level coach fleet (B+), followed by morning train crews (B), and perceived security at Penn Station (B-). These grades represent the first time since 1994 that any attribute has received a higher score than morning train crews. Lowest grades went to Flatbush Avenue restroom cleanliness (C-), On-board restroom cleanliness (C), and Jamaica Station restroom cleanliness (C). It should be noted that of each of these indicators showed a statistically significant increase in 2000 except for perceived security at Penn Station.

Riders were also asked questions regarding the perception of service improvement, satisfaction with the new bi-level coach fleet, possible strategies to deal with cell-phone abuse aboard trains, and improvements they would most like to see. Almost half of all electric-territory riders said that they did not feel service to be getting better or worse. However, more than half of all diesel-territory riders on the Montauk (55.6%), Oyster Bay (58.0%), and Port Jefferson (54.2%) branches identified the railroad as getting better. These results represent an enormous improvement over 1999 when far smaller percentages of Montauk riders(33.3%), Oyster Bay riders(7.9%), and Port Jefferson riders (17.2%) perceived service to be improving, and are likely due to the replacement of the old, problematic diesel coach fleet with modern bi-level coaches, a task completed in early 2000.

In terms of the bi-level coaches, themselves, riders by a wide margin identified comfortable seats and cleaner car interiors as their favorite features of the new cars, each attribute receiving more than one-quarter of total responses to this question (27.5 percent and 25.5 percent, respectively). Interestingly, seats also evoked strong negative sentiment from riders, also being identified as the least-liked aspect of the coaches, being called uncomfortable by more than 12 percent of respondents. Riders also expressed a desire for more through service to Penn Station from diesel territory on the bi-levels (i.e. without a change at Jamaica).

Regarding the growing problem of onboard cell-phone abuse, 80.7 percent of riders told the Council that the railroad should educate riders about considerate cell-phone usage. However, riders equally overwhelmingly rejected ideas to limit cell-phone usage to car vestibules (63.6% No) or designated cars (71.1% No) or to prohibit cell phones entirely (66.1% No).

The top three improvements desired by riders in 2000 were better on-time performance, identified by 11.1 percent of respondents, followed by increases in seat availability (7.9%), and the elimination of short trains (6.9%). Of these three desired improvements, elimination of short trains was the only one not appearing in the top three desired improvements identified in 1999. In addition, a desire for better or more reliable air conditioning was identified by 6.3 percent of respondents, a sharp drop from the 14.7 percent of respondents desiring improved air conditioning in 1999.

In terms of performance by branch, continuing a several-years-long trend, once again the Port Washington branch was graded highest by riders, receiving a B- for overall service. Three branches—Huntington, Port Jefferson, and Ronkonkoma—shared the lowest grade, C, with Ronkonkoma performing worst when analyzed by raw grading data. However, for the first time in four years Montauk did not appear among the three lowest ranking branches.

Port Washington riders almost uniformly gave grades of B- or better in many categories, including schedule adequacy (B-), train crews (B+), home station waiting areas (B) and maintenance (B-), Jamaica Station and Flatbush Avenue restrooms (A- and B+, respectively), and on-board and station security (A- and B+, respectively). The Oyster

Bay branch was also a strong performer, with strong grades in on-board cleanliness (B+), on-board and station restroom cleanliness (B- and B, respectively), on-board and station security (B and B-, respectively), and home station maintenance (B-).

On the whole, the Council is pleased to see such wide-ranging, statistically significant improvements in grade in the 2000 LIRR Report Card. We are aware that the railroad took great pains to address formerly prominent and chronic complaints about air conditioning and old diesel coaches, items that consumed much of the Council's attention in 1999 and scored poorly on that year's Report Card. We commend the railroad for its efforts in these areas.

However, it remains to be seen whether this improvement trend will continue into 2001. At a press conference held by the Council to discuss the findings of the 2000 Report Card, Council Chair Lawrence Silverman said, "It is our hope that the railroad will give similar attention to remaining problem areas including items raised in this year's survey and customer comments, such as on-time performance, availability of cars and seats, and home-station parking so that these issues will not have negative impacts on customer satisfaction".

As is our legislative responsibility, the Council will continue to monitor the LIRR to help insure that all areas of service and policy remain squarely in the interests of riders.

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