

Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council

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2003 LIRR REPORT CARD Results: Majority of Riders Are Less Confident About Long Island Rail Road Service

The Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council (LIRRCC), the legislatively mandated representatives of LIRR riders, today released the 2003 LIRR Report Card, the results of its seventeenth annual independent rider survey. The report details the results of a survey of 1,278 LIRR riders who were asked to grade the railroad's performance on 48 indicators including on-time performance, air conditioning, seat availability, cleanliness, scheduling, crew performance, and safety, and to respond to topical questions concerning riders' interest in using shuttle bus services to railroads.

The LIRRCC's Report Card survey, an annual undertaking since 1987, provides riders with an opportunity to react to service and the quality of their ride. The Council looks to LIRR riders to help measure conditions and to assist it in making recommendations to the Rail Road for improvements. The Report Card also gives the LIRR an indication of how riders feel the railroad and employees have performed over the past year.

Riders gave the railroad an overall grade of C+, the same grade they have assigned since 2000. The results of the 2003 Report Card, however, show riders are less confident that railroad service is improving. One key factor, which is likely to have influenced riders' dissatisfaction in 2003, is the MTA's fare increase. Many riders may have expected an increase in service along with higher ticket prices and evaluated LIRR service and conditions more critically as a result.

Riders' perception tends to be negative despite the Rail Road's past year of record on-time performance. Riders who think that the LIRR has gotten better (33%) decreased by 12 percent from last year (45%), while those who think service has gotten worse (21%) increased by 11 percent.

Riders are most satisfied this year on the Oyster Bay (60%), Hempstead (51%) and West Hempstead (44%) branches. Riders on the Ronkonkoma branch were the most dissatisfied (48%). The percentage of satisfied Ronkonkoma riders declined by 30 percent between 2002 and 2003. The majority of riders, on seven of the eleven branches, feel that no change is occurring on the LIRR. Port Jefferson riders showed the most notable change - the percentage of riders who feel service has stayed the same increased by 21 percent. The percentage of Port Jefferson riders who feel service has gotten worse also increased by 21 percent. In 2002, Port Jefferson branch riders felt the most satisfied of all the branches – 75 percent of the riders felt service was improving.

This year 9 of 48 performance indicators show statistically significant improvement, compared to 27 last year. This year 13 indicators show statistically significant decline, compared to only three in 2002. Riders gave B- and B to a quarter of the performance indicators compared to a third last year.

Systemwide, LIRR customers gave higher scores than in 2002 to seating availability, security and home station ticket selling hours. The three highest grades (B) were given to morning and evening train crews and security at Penn Station. Riders generally felt more secure on trains and in stations this year compared to last year.

Riders gave lower scores to evening on-time performance, announcements, cleanliness, management performance and escalator reliability. Riders were the most dissatisfied with restroom and waiting area cleanliness. Riders assigned the lowest grades to the Flatbush Avenue Terminal restroom (D+), on-board restroom conditions (D+) and Flatbush Avenue Terminal waiting area (C-).

Announcements were on customers' minds this year. Riders assigned a lower letter grade to announcements on-board morning trains (C+) from a B- in 2002. The numerical scores for announcements on-board morning trains dropped by 5 percent and by 8 percent for evening trains from 2002. While riders gave the same grades as last year for announcements at Penn Station (B-), the numerical scores declined significantly (down 6% for morning and evening).

Riders were also dissatisfied with the performance of LIRR management and escalator reliability in 2003. Management performance dropped to a C in 2003 (from a C+ in 2002), representing a significant 22 percent drop in numerical score. Escalator reliability also dropped to a C in 2003 compared to a C+ last year – a 14 percent drop in numerical score.

Out of a list of five possible LIRR service improvements, riders ranked better on-time performance and more frequent peak and off-peak service as top priority improvements. Better on-time performance received a slightly higher percentage (42%) than more

frequent peak and off-peak service (37%). This year's top priorities represent a combination of the priorities identified by riders in 2001 and 2002.

In written comments riders also identified increased frequency of peak and off-peak service as the one aspect of service they most want the railroad to improve (19%). Cleanliness on-board trains, in station waiting areas and restrooms was identified as the second highest (11%) – a change from last year (seating availability). On-time performance (10%) was riders' third most wanted improvement.

The LIRRCC's special topic this year examined riders' interest in using shuttle bus services to railroad stations during peak travel times. Riders were asked a series of questions about their likely use of shuttle bus services. Despite the benefits of shuttle bus services for reducing parking demand at railroad stations, almost two thirds (63%) of the riders surveyed systemwide said they were not at all likely to use a shuttle bus service. "Riders feel that conditions have declined since last year," said James McGovern, LIRRCC Chair. "The results of the 2003 Report Card clearly indicate that riders are not happy with the fare increase and this is reflected in their evaluation of LIRR service."

"This year riders assigned good grades, B and B-, to a quarter of the performance indicators, compared to a third last year," continued McGovern. "Riders recognize and appreciate the LIRR's efforts over the past year to upgrade the fleet, and improve seat availability, security and home station ticket selling. However, the declines in scores show that the LIRR has more work to do in several key areas: announcements and customer information, evening on-time performance, cleanliness, and customer communication and frequency of service."

The Council proposed seven recommendations to LIRR management this year: to prioritize agency improvements in communication technology for the provision of train service information to front line personnel, to provide front line personnel with text messaging pagers to ensure communication systems back-up, to create special communication teams to facilitate communication to customers in emergencies, to require more frequent on-board and station announcements, to review ways to improve evening on-time performance and cleanliness, and to create a more proactive campaign to inform riders about and elicit support for LIRR plans to improve frequency of service. "The Council wants to work with the Rail Road to help facilitate these improvements," said James McGovern.

The executive summary and full report may be downloaded below or requested as hard copies from the Council office at 212-878-7087.