

**Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council**  
**PCAC Meeting**  
**Chair's Report-Mark Epstein**  
**March 6, 2014**

At several points this winter the cold weather has led the LIRR to leave its waiting rooms open around the clock until there are breaks in the weather, and Newsday noted in its story about this decision that the LIRRCC was the first to call for extending waiting room hours. Our members believe that the 24 hour a day openings are the right thing to do. Bill Henderson thanked the LIRR for keeping station waiting rooms open around the clock at the January 24 MTA Board Long Island Committee meeting, but we also recognize that our work on opening waiting rooms to provide a safe and climate-controlled space for riders is not complete. A number of station waiting areas are normally open for only limited hours. The LIRR's temporary policy change has been a good opportunity to make the case that waiting rooms should be open to all riders as they need them unless there is a compelling reason to close the facilities.

The Metro-North derailment on December 1 was a jolt to riders on the LIRR as well as Metro-North. As you know, we issued a statement expressing our concern for those affected by the derailment on the day it happened. In the next week we called upon the LIRR to communicate with its riders about the systems that LIRR trains use, the safety features in place and how they work. We also called for the LIRR to examine Metro-North's experience to make the Rail Road safer and to implement a confidential close call reporting system, as recommended by the Federal Railroad Administration. At our January meeting we received a briefing on the questions that we posed to the LIRR following the derailment.

Following our very public call for direct communication with Amtrak, on December 19 Ira Greenberg and I met with Amtrak Chairman Anthony Coscia, Amtrak Senior Staff and MTA Chairman Tom Prendergast concerning LIRR rider issues that are related to the Rail Road's use of Amtrak's Penn Station, East River Tunnels, and tracks. In the meeting we also discussed Amtrak's plans for its Gateway project and how these plans might impact LIRR operations. Amtrak would like our support for improvements that they wish to make in their infrastructure and Mr. Coscia said that Amtrak will provide the LIRRCC a briefing on these plans. As a result of the meeting, we now have a direct channel to the Amtrak Chairman and the railroad's senior staff.

Unfortunately, we may be back to square one in our effort to have a Long Island representative appointed to the Amtrak Board of Directors. As you may know, State Senator Charles Fuschillo unexpectedly announced his departure from elected office to head the Alzheimer's Foundation of America as its CEO. Having LIRR commuters represented on the Amtrak Board remains a priority for us, and I will be discussing next steps toward this goal with Senator Schumer's office. Further, Senator Fuschillo's departure and Senator Zeldin's decision to run for Congress may leave Long Island and the MTA Region without adequate representation on the New York State Senate Transportation Committee. This week, Senator Joseph Robach of Rochester was

appointed Chairman of the Committee, but we continue to reach out to the Senate leadership to press for strong Long Island representation on this important committee.

As we feared, the maximum pre-tax amount that transit commuters can set aside for travel to work fell from \$240 to \$130 a month on January 1. Senator Schumer's attempt to allow immediate consideration of extending the higher benefits in December failed, and the effort to restore the benefit is now attached to a larger bill containing "extenders" for a wide variety of expired or expiring tax benefits, which are to be considered by April. While the commuter benefit extension will likely be proposed to be retroactive, few commuters make the post-tax payroll deductions for transit that would be needed to claim the retroactive benefits. We issued a statement calling on Congress to swiftly restore the higher levels, and we signed on to a similar statement issued by Tri-State Transportation Campaign as well.

The announcement that the MTA will pursue 4 percent fare increases in its 2015 budget was welcome news for Long Island commuters. Affordability of fares has been a major issue among our riders. While any increase will be difficult, at least this is about one-half of the size of increases in 2011 and 2013. This relatively lower fare increase is dependent on the MTA being able to achieve savings in a number of areas, including labor costs.

On December 21, a Presidential Emergency Board recommended annual raises averaging 2.83 percent for represented LIRR employees, while the MTA's financial plans envision no raises without compensating savings. The MTA has rejected the recommendation and can request a second Presidential Emergency Board to review the matter, but this makes an LIRR strike this summer more likely. In the meantime, the MTA has entered into talks with its labor unions facilitated by the National Mediation Board, but the two sides remain far apart. The LIRRCC's role is not to take sides but to ensure that our riders are protected in case of a job action. Our Council has been discussing steps that the LIRRCC will take to press the LIRR and MTA to ensure that our riders will have transportation in the event of a strike.

In December we received complaints from riders on several issues related to the construction of a new parking facility at the Wyandanch Station. We sent letters to Town of Babylon Supervisor Rich Schaffer and LIRR President Helena Williams raising the issues that riders had sent to us and asking for explanations of actions that each of them are taking to address these issues.

In January we had questions for the LIRR about not seeing copies of the LIRR's Pledge to Customers and our Council's poster displayed in stations. In both cases, the LIRR has committed to reprint these materials and ensure that they are posted in stations. In the case of the Pledge, we also asked about posting the document in train cars and were told that the MTA's management of advertising space the LIRR and other operating agencies makes it more difficult for the LIRR to post materials on board trains.

In January Mike Godino, Sheila Carpenter, Matthew Kessler (via phone), Edith Prentiss from the NYCTRC and Karyl Berger of the PCAC staff attended the LIRR's ADA Task Force meeting. Also in attendance were representatives from the ADA offices of

Nassau and Suffolk Counties, Hector Garcia from the LIRR, and Peter Albert, LIRR General Attorney. The group discussed a variety of issues and will have a presentation at the next meeting on the ADA features that will be incorporated into the M-9 cars.

Due to inclement weather, we were forced to postpone our February meeting, which we expect to make up in March.