

Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council
Chair's Report
June 12, 2014-Mark Epstein
PCAC Meeting

MTA Chairman Tom Prendergast's decision at the end of April to replace Helena Williams as President of the LIRR took nearly everyone by surprise. Ms. Williams served longer than any LIRR President since the State assumed ownership of the system in 1966. Her long tenure provided stability to the leadership of the Rail Road and gave our Council an opportunity to build a relationship with top LIRR management.

The announcement that Ms. Williams was leaving the LIRR was followed quickly by an announcement of the appointment of Patrick Nowakowski as LIRR President, effective May 12. Mr. Nowakowski is an engineer by training, with four decades of experience in rail transportation. Most recently he served as Executive Director of the Dulles Corridor Metrorail Project, which is nearing completion and will connect the Washington DC Metro system to Dulles Airport. Prior to his work in Washington, Mr. Nowakowski spent 27 years with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) in the Philadelphia area, completing his career there as Assistant General Manager of Operations.

We issued a statement thanking Helena Williams for her long and distinguished service and expressing our appreciation for her work with the Council and respect for its mission. Our statement also congratulated Mr. Nowakowski on his appointment as the LIRR's next President.

Mr. Nowakowski has noted that he intends to spend a lot of time learning about local needs and issues and meeting with stakeholders. I believe that we should help him as much as possible to learn about the riders' issues. This is a critical period for the LIRR and its riders, with a new MTA Capital Program in preparation, questions about East Side Access remaining unanswered, and most immediately, the threat of a strike on the Rail Road as early as July 19.

On Friday, May 30 I met with President Nowakowski at the LIRR offices in Jamaica. He is clearly getting the feel of a new organization, and I discussed with him issues that are important to the LIRRCC, as well as ways that the LIRRCC and the Rail Road have worked together in the past and our hopes for a good working relationship in the future. I particularly stressed the value of communication to the riders. At this meeting, I presented Mr. Nowakowski with a letter on our letterhead, which was also signed by 31 civic, transportation and labor leaders and local elected officials including the Nassau and Suffolk County Executives. The letter outlined projects and initiatives that we see as critical to the LIRR, effective and efficient transportation, and the future of Long Island. We are pleased that these leaders agree with the LIRRCC about the importance of these issues. A copy of the letter is attached to this report.

Communication was one of the major issues that were evident in the problems that the LIRR had in transporting horse racing fans to the Belmont Stakes last Saturday, June 7. The Rail Road anticipated serving about 20,000 passengers for the race, but instead had about 36,000 people buying tickets to Belmont Park. Conditions were tight traveling to the racetrack, but because most of the crowd wanted to leave the facility in a short period of time following the Belmont Stakes race, conditions at the end of the day approached chaos. It took about 3 ½ hours to load the last passengers on trains, after an evening of long lines, crowded conditions, and uncertainty among riders about when they would be able to board a train and leave. The LIRRCC has asked the LIRR for an explanation of the problems in Belmont Stakes service and whether there were any actions that could have been taken to increase westbound service after the race.

Following the March PCAC meeting where the LIRR labor negotiations were discussed, I was quoted in a Newsday article in which I called for the LIRRCC to be brought into the contingency planning process for a possible strike. I noted the importance of thinking outside the box and exploring innovative ways of ensuring that workers who cannot work from home and must travel to or from New York City will be able to do so.

The collective bargaining process between the LIRR and its represented employees has entered its final phase as the LIRR and MTA and the coalition of unions negotiating with the LIRR met in the presence of mediators from April 21 to 23. The two sides met without mediators on April 24, but no settlement was reached. The coalition of unions has offered to extend the cooling off period in the process another 60 days from its current July 19 expiration to mid-September. The MTA has acknowledged receiving the proposal but has not yet accepted it. Whether in the summer or fall, a strike is bad news for Long Island commuters and we have urged both sides to reach a settlement.

The LIRR will soon be selling and accepting tickets through mobile phones using an application developed by the mobile payments firm Masabi. Masabi is the same company that will be providing mobile ticketing for the Nassau County (NICE) bus system. The mobile ticketing pilots that were used at several golf events served by the LIRR were operated by a competing firm, CooCoo.

On April 10, after concrete fell from the bridge structure onto the tracks, the LIRR closed the pedestrian bridge at the west end of the Port Washington station for repairs, and two weeks later the Rail Road announced that the bridge would be closed permanently because deterioration had progressed to far to allow repair and would be demolished this summer. We had a number of communications with the LIRR about this issue and we have not yet been informed of an acceptable plan for resolving the severe inconvenience that this closure has brought to Port Washington riders. North Hempstead Councilwoman Dina De Giorgio, who represents the area around the station, attended our May meeting to discuss the loss of the pedestrian bridge and ask for the LIRRCC's help in reaching a resolution.

On April 24, along with Ira Greenberg and Matt Kessler, I attended a ceremony in Mineola marking the 180th Anniversary of the Long Island Rail Road, which is the

nation's oldest railroad still operating under its original name and of course the nation's top railroad in terms of passengers.

At a meeting on April 25, Amtrak CEO Joseph Boardman announced that one of Amtrak's Hudson River tunnels will have to be shut down within the next twenty years. This would not have a direct impact on LIRR operations, but could impact riders through changes in NJ Transit operation that would almost certainly become necessary if tunnel capacity were sharply curtailed. Amtrak's Gateway Program, which is not funded, has plans for two additional Hudson River tunnels.

At our May meeting, we received a briefing from the LIRR on safety and maintenance issues. Those briefing us included Chief Mechanical Officer Michael Gelormino, Assistant Chief Engineer Jonn Collins, General Superintendent of Transportation Robert Free, and several other LIRR managers. The briefing covered both track and rolling stock and discussed FRA requirements as well as maintenance issues not covered by FRA requirements. Mr. Gelormino offered the LIRRCC members a demonstration of safety and operational equipment and how it is inspected at the Hillside facility and we will arrange to have this tour over the summer.

Even with warmer temperatures, difficult conditions continued to impact LIRR commuters through the spring. In 2014 we started off the year with delays due to a derailment of a freight train carrying stone near Brentwood and continued on with numerous weather-related delays and track, equipment, and signal problems. Riders sometimes receive multiple alerts when a situation is unchanged, but sometimes receive no alerts when there are significant delays. We've also noticed a growing disconnect between the explanations of a delay given through the alerts and through other channels, such as in-station announcements. Improving the quality of announcements will be one of our focuses as we work with new LIRR leadership this year.

We furnished a quote for Senator Schumer's press release on LIRR safety, which was included in several news reports, and I was quoted in a Newsday article last month supporting the Senator's call for the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to investigate the safety of LIRR operations. This investigation would be similar to but less extensive than the FRA's "Operation Deep Dive" at Metro-North. The Newsday article pointed out a rise in the number of reported incidents on the Rail Road over the past ten years, although it noted that much of this increase was due to changes in reporting implemented after the August 2006 gap-related fatality at the Woodside station. I said that the complex nature of the LIRR and its specific safety challenges, as well as the increasing number of incidents warranted FRA attention.

We also supported Suffolk County's call for increased State funding for its bus operations, joining with other community and transportation advocates. The Suffolk County bus system is already an important connection to the LIRR for many riders and has the potential to increase in importance as a link to the Rail Road if it is provided with sufficient funding. Suffolk County is seeking an additional \$10 million in funding from

the State. Unfortunately, this additional funding was not included in the State budget that was approved March 31.

Over the past several years, we've discussed issues about freight use of LIRR tracks on several occasions. The freight operations' access to the tracks is mandated by the federal government, but the MTA will be installing monitoring equipment on the LIRR to detect problems before they result in accidents. The LIRR will install hot box detectors, which warn of overheated axle bearings, and wheel impact detectors, which spot wheel defects before they lead to derailments or damage. Both of these systems will be useful for passenger as well as freight equipment. The LIRR will also install tag readers, which allows the LIRR to track freight in the system by automatically capturing codes that identify freight cars. On the passenger side, the LIRR is installing inward and outward facing cameras and audio recorders on its own rolling stock to monitor the activities of train engineers and allow the Rail Road to detect issues with operating personnel before they result in accidents.

In response to our letter on the difficulties that commuters are having navigating the area around Wyandanch Station during construction of the Wyandanch Rising project, in March the LIRR and Town of Babylon got together and developed and installed new wayfinding signage to direct riders to station parking lots. Because some parking was relocated and access to other parking had been changed, there was considerable confusion about the location of and access to parking at the station.

In the near future, the LIRRCC will be meeting with officials from Renaissance Downtowns, which is a major developer of Transit Oriented Development in both Nassau and Suffolk Counties and nationally. Currently, they are involved in projects in Huntington and Hempstead, as well as at the Nassau Coliseum site. We are very interested in ensuring that these projects are good for commuters as well as those who live and work in them.

Finally, we will be holding a Meet the Commuter Council event at Penn Station on Monday, June 23. We hold these events periodically, and they are always good opportunities to listen to the riders and provide them with information about the Council and its activities.



Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council

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Queens County: Ira Greenberg
Kings County: Matthew Kessler

May 30, 2014

Mr. Patrick Nowakowski, President
MTA Long Island Rail Road
Jamaica Station
Jamaica, NY 11435

Dear Mr. Nowakowski:

We the undersigned are writing on behalf of those who represent Long Island Rail Road riders, who make over a quarter million trips each day, as well as Long Island business and labor. Together we welcome you to Long Island and your new role as LIRR President and send our wishes for a cooperative and productive relationship with you. Our intent in writing is to convey our shared vision of the connection between the future of the Long Island Rail Road and Long Island's future economy and quality of life. As you may be aware, over the past few years there have been some hard fought battles to secure and defend funding for Rail Road projects critical to Long Island, and this effort must continue. Our vision of the future includes a set of projects that in our view are essential to the Long Island Rail Road and Long Island and necessary for the LIRR to remain a powerful economic engine and transportation system for all of Long Island, as it has been for the past 180 years.

Among the projects that are critical for the future of the LIRR and Long Island is the construction of a second track between Ronkonkoma and Farmingdale. The growth of Suffolk County has for many years demanded the increased capacity and operational flexibility that a second track would provide. The second track is also critical to Long Island's future by providing the necessary infrastructure to allow for intra-island commuting. Riders east of Farmingdale have frequently experienced multiple hour delays when incidents on the right of way rendered the single track serving this segment impassible. The first phase of this project, between Ronkonkoma and Central Islip, is underway, but the second phase that completes the second track is currently unfunded. We must not squander the momentum that has been built on this project. We ask for your assurance that the completion of the second track will be included in the next MTA Capital Program and will be a priority for the LIRR.

Intimately related to the second track is the redevelopment of the Republic Airport station. The redevelopment and reopening of the station is workable only with the capacity provided by the second track, but this project is critical for the future of the Route 110 corridor and ensuring that public transportation will provide a link to this expanding employment center. We strongly support the development of an intermodal

center at this location to support employment growth in the area as well as the LIRR working in tandem with Suffolk County on the Connect Long Island initiative, which promotes economic development centered around transportation hubs. The Long Island Rail Road has been an important partner in these efforts and we urge that it will continue in this role under your leadership.

It is also crucial that the Long Island Rail Road continues to advance projects to provide necessary capacity and infrastructure for the opening of the East Side Access project. While East Side Access has been subject to a series of delays and cost increases, the MTA has a clear commitment to resolving issues with the project and opening a second Manhattan terminal for the LIRR. In preparation for this opening, facilities such as yards and pocket tracks must be created to permit efficient operation of new service plans. Expanded parking and station access improvements will be required to accommodate new riders. The Port Washington Branch in particular will require a number of improvements to take full advantage of the capacity created by East Side Access. The Port Jefferson Branch must be addressed to resolve overcrowding and add capacity for current and future riders. The LIRR must continue to work diligently to provide for these needs, and we require your assurance that these projects will continue to move forward.

East Side Access will allow the LIRR to expand and diversify service and to at last provide reasonable levels of reverse peak service, but until this project is completed, the LIRR must explore opportunities to better serve its riders. One way this can be done is through restoring service cuts that remain from 2010, such as weekend service on the West Hempstead Branch. Other improvements that can be made involve examining changing ridership patterns and tailoring service to meet them. With changes in travel, additional service in shoulder and off peak periods may be warranted and the LIRR should study new service demands and provide additional trains where they are feasible and warranted.

Finally, at this time of when we reflect on the sacrifices of those who have served our nation in uniform, we call again for the Long Island Rail Road to make the Pinelawn Station fully ADA accessible. You may be aware that the Pinelawn station serves the Long Island National Cemetery, which was established in 1936. Fellow veterans, guests, and friends and family members of those interred who use wheelchairs or have mobility limitations, however, do not have full access to the shelter afforded by the station since the station is not fully accessible. We have been told that the solution to this problem is relatively straightforward, but that no funding has been identified to carry it out. We find this situation unacceptable and ask that you work to remedy this inequity as soon as possible.

We are pleased that MTA Chairman Prendergast stated that you will be an advocate for Long Island in your role as President. We have come to expect an open and productive relationship with LIRR management and we look forward to hearing your vision for the future of the Long Island Rail Road, its riders, and the Long Island economy that depends upon it.

Sincerely,



Mark Epstein
Chair

Joined by:

Hon. Edward P. Mangano
Nassau County Executive

Hon. David McDonough
NY State Assembly 14th District

Hon. Charles D. Lavine
NY State Assembly 13th District

Roger Clayman, Executive Director
Long Island Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO

Hon. Kevan Abrahams, Minority Leader
Nassau County Legislature

Hon. Siela A. Bynoe
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Hon. Carrié Solages
Nassau County Legislature District 3

Hon. Delia DeRiggi-Whitton
Nassau County Legislature District 11

Hon. Judith Jacobs
Legislative District 16

Hon. David Denenberg
Nassau County Legislature District 19

Hon. Paul Pontieri,
Mayor, Village of Patchogue

Veronica Vanterpool
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Claudia Borecky
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Hon. Steve Bellone
Suffolk County Executive

Hon. Richard Schaffer
Supervisor, Town of Babylon

Hon. Edward Romaine
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Coalition of Nassau Civic Associations
North Syosset Civic Association
Old Lindenmere Civic Association
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