

Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council
PCAC Meeting
Chair's Report — Mark Epstein
September 4, 2014

We had a very timely Meet the Commuter Council session in Penn Station on Monday June 23. This was a good event for the LIRRCC, since it gave us the opportunity to speak to commuters and urge them to get prepared for a possible strike, a message that was not being heard even from the MTA and LIRR. Our impact went beyond the commuters that we met at the event, as media coverage that we received discussed the flyer we handed out and our recommendations for commuters to prepare themselves for a possible strike. Other media outlets picked up that story and so we got additional exposure. Also, the buttons that we produced have been popular and I had several elected officials ask me for them so that they could hand them out.

While we were vocal in calling for riders to be given every consideration in the face of the labor dispute between the LIRR and the unions representing its workers, we made it very clear that LIRRCC was not taking sides in the dispute, We were strictly on the side of the riders and wanted only for the parties to negotiate with each other and reach a settlement. We also recognized the strategic nature of much of what is said and reported in the media and did not want to be a part of that process.

Our Council also testified before the Transportation Reinvention Commission on July 16. At this time we appeared to be moving toward an LIRR strike within days and I was involved with local officials in a press event calling on the MTA to protect commuters, and so LIRRCC member Gerry Bringmann stepped up to deliver our message.

In our statement we called on the MTA and LIRR to continue to modernize the system to deal with the increasing threat of severe weather and to work with Amtrak to harden the parts of its system on which the LIRR relies. We also called for additional infrastructure, including the completion of the second track from Farmingdale to Ronkonkoma and the Main Line Third Track to help the LIRR meet the demands of current and potential riders. Our remarks highlighted the critical need for improved information to the riders and discussed the increasing financial burden of fares on commuters as well as the need to better serve the intermediate and reverse commuting and New York City markets.

As you know, the LIRR has a new leader, and I met with President Nowakowski at the LIRR offices in Jamaica. The new leadership marks a major change at the LIRR and it will clearly take time for us to establish a new working relationship with the Rail Road's new leadership. At our meeting I presented to President

Nowakowski the 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 put special emphasis on the continuing need to improve communication with the riders.

LIRR riders scored a significant win in the latest round of MTA service improvements and restorations when this year's package included the restoration of weekend service on the West Hempstead Branch. This change will start on Saturday, November 22 and will end four years without weekend service on the branch. This is truly a lifeline service, as service operates every two hours, but for those who must travel on the weekends and potential new residents in the area, it is a major improvement.

The MTA service improvements will also add 10 weeks of weekend service on the Montauk Branch to meet the demand for leisure travelers for service from the end of summer through Thanksgiving and in May. The LIRR will increase weekend service to Babylon and Patchogue during this period starting next fall. In addition, the Oyster Bay Branch will receive two new weekend trains starting in the fall of 2015 to provide better service for those headed to New York City. Commuters have not been left out, as the LIRR will be adding two cars to six separate rush hour trains that have been operating above 90 percent of capacity on average.