

LONG ISLAND RAIL ROAD COMMUTER COUNCIL
MINUTES OF Thursday, January 11, 2018

A meeting of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council (LIRRCC) was convened at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, January 11, 2018 in the LIRR Transportation Services Conference Room at 1 Penn Plaza, Penn Station, New York, New York

The following members were present:

Gerard P. Bringmann
Mark Epstein
Michael Godino
Raymond Pagano
Larry Rubinstein

The following members were absent:

Sheila Carpenter
Ira Greenberg
Bryan Peranzo

In addition, the following persons were present:

William Henderson	-PCAC Executive Director
Bradley Brashears	-Planning Manager
Hector Garcia	-LIRR
Ryan Attard	-LIRR
Matt Kessler	-Concerned citizen

Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The agenda for the January 11, 2018 meeting was approved. The minutes of the November 2, 2017 meeting were approved.

Chair's Report

The Chair's Report is attached to these minutes. Mark Epstein asked for comments or questions on the report and there were none.

Board Report

Ira Greenberg presented the Board report. He said that there have been four Board working groups established to identify issues and opportunities for improvement. These groups address contracting for capital projects, procurement, paratransit, and accessibility. Mr. Greenberg said he has been asked to lead the last of these groups.

Mr. Greenberg noted that the on-time performance statistics had been very good up until December, but it is likely that they would head downward in view of the change in weather in December and January. He said that the Board discussed major projects including East Side Access and the Main Line third track and that he had once again raised the issue of lack of direct service to Brooklyn under the anticipated service plan.

Staff Report

Bill Henderson said that the PCAC is bringing on a new staff member, Sheila Binesh, and that she will move into the transportation planner position vacated by Bradley Brashears when he was promoted into the planning manager position. He said that the office had received a small number of comments from riders, with the greatest number of them addressing snow clearing on platforms.

Member Reports

Mark Epstein said that one of the major issues in the recent winter weather has been the quality of snow shoveling by the towns who maintain facilities adjacent to the LIRR's stations. Hector Garcia said that the LIRR has examined stations and areas next to them and determined responsibilities for maintenance that pertain to each part of the station area. This allows the Rail Road to direct issues with maintenance to the appropriate parties more quickly.

Larry Rubinstein said that there are problems with snow clearing at Bellmore related to the parking area and that the lot was not cleared at night when it was not being used. Michael Godino said that he has found there are problems at the Lynbrook station related to poor snow clearing in pedestrian areas. He said that snow is sometimes pushed into areas that pedestrians need to access the station. The members discussed issues related to snow clearing and Chair Epstein offered the LIRR the Council's assistance in working with local governments.

Gerry Bringmann stated that the removal of pigeon netting at Patchogue station has paradoxically kept the platform cleaner because birds are no longer nesting in the netting. He also noted that the LIRR has paid attention to rider concern about the lighting near the station's ticket vending machine and that this area is now reasonably well lit.

New Business

Mr. Epstein said that it has been some time since the LIRRCC last hosted a Meet the Council, but that members must commit to be on hand for it to be successful. He said that the location of the session could be either Atlantic Terminal or Penn Station, and that there are advantages to each. Mr. Bringmann said that there are issues that the Council should hear from Brooklyn riders, but the configuration of Atlantic Terminal is not ideal for a Meet the Council, and there are more riders from Penn Station. Mr. Greenberg noted that the bar cart at Atlantic Terminal may cease operations, opening an area for the Council. The location was discussed and the consensus was to arrange a session at Atlantic Terminal.

The LIRRCC reviewed an updated poster to give riders information about the LIRRCC. Members can direct any comments to staff.

The Council discussed additional weather related and winter storm issues. Hector Garcia said that December was a problem month because of the number of cars out of service, which was largely due to slippery rail conditions caused by falling leaves. He said that the fall season happened for the LIRR over a few days in December, and that eighty cars were out of service due to weather-related flat wheels. Mr. Epstein asked whether the LIRRCC can help the LIRR obtain resources to deal with these issues. Mr. Garcia said that the Rail Road has a substantial three year contract for tree trimming, but the short period in which leaves fell was problematic.

Ray Pagano asked how close tree limbs can be to the tracks. Mr. Garcia said the standard is fifteen feet when the LIRR owns right-of-way. The Rail Road cannot go onto private property, but can only go to the property line unless property owners permit them to come onto their land. Mr. Pagano said that the State Department of Transportation sometimes uses specialized equipment for tree trimming. Mr. Garcia replied that the LIRR uses contractors with chain saws and tries to address all track areas at least once every seven years.

Mr. Bringmann asked what happened to service on the past Friday. On Thursday service was fairly good, but Friday's service was horrible. He commented that the LIRR provides no details about the delays while they are occurring. Mr. Bringmann stated that his train was 2 hours and 35 minutes late, which is the furthest behind schedule one of his morning trains has been in his commuting experience. Mr. Rubinstein related an account where riders were repeatedly told that they should be moving shortly as they waited over an hour to proceed.

Mr. Pagano stated that at many stations there was not access to the platform due to the clearing of parking lots and surrounding areas. Although the station itself was clear, the access to the station was not.

Mr. Greenberg commented that information is riders' greatest need. As it stands now passengers expect to receive poor information and generally do not understand why they are not moving. Mr. Epstein noted that information is better on the platform than on trains, and that the greatest breakdown in getting information to riders is in on-board announcements.

Mr. Garcia commented that there is an open invitation for the LIRRCC members to tour the LIRR's Passenger Information Office and to provide the LIRR with their observations and recommendations.

Mr. Bringmann stated that customers do not get options from the LIRR when they must make a decision on what they should do. Mr. Garcia suggested that the Council hold the next month's meeting in Jamaica, which would allow members to have a conversation with those responsible for customer information. The members said that this was a good idea, and Mr. Epstein said that if members can get to the meeting this is what the Council will do.

Mr. Henderson briefly discussed the Governor's State of the State address, noting that the Governor had not had much specific to say about transit, except that he has convened the Fix NYC panel to make recommendations on reducing congestion and funding the MTA. Mr. Henderson said that the recommendations were expected in the next week and noted that he was asking each of the Councils to give him their feelings on some of the options that had been reportedly considered under the Fix NYC process. He said that these responses are needed to craft responses when proposals are released.

The members discussed construction projects within the LIRR system. Ryan Attard stated that the LIRR is presently doing outreach and awarding contracts for work under the Enhanced Station Initiative. The members and LIRR representatives discussed work underway at Hicksville, including the cracking of the newly poured platform, and the lack of platform shelters, which were delayed after other elements of the project were delayed. Mr. Pagano raised the issue of the station house not being included in the project. The group also discussed the rehabilitation of the Wantagh station and the Wyandanch station rebuilding, which is scheduled for August 2018 completion.

Other Projects that Ms. Attard and Mr. Garcia discussed were the replacement of two East Hampton bridges, which will require road closings for ten days each. There will be bridge replaced on the Oyster Bay Branch over the course of one weekend. An elevator will be added at the Murray Hill Station. Bridge repair and painting will resume in March but will probably have no effect on service. A new phase of work on the Double Track project will begin in March and will require substitute busing.

Mr. Epstein asked whether new Amtrak work will start in May. Ms. Attard responded that Amtrak will have some outages for work in Manhattan and Queens and that work on Moynihan Station, East Side Access, and other non-Amtrak projects will be piggy

backed on the Amtrak outages. Most of this work will take place on weekends and as a result will affect fewer commuters.

Mr. Garcia said that the MTA and LIRR have held their initial meetings with the contractors responsible for the Main Line Third Track project, but that there will be no heavy construction for nine months.

Mike Godino asked whether all grade crossings in the Main Line Third Track will be closed at the same time. Mr. Garcia replied that the Rail Road will not close two crossings in the same community at the same time.

Mr. Greenberg noted that Rethink NYC has plans for reconfiguration involving Penn Station. Mr. Henderson said that if members are interested, the group can be invited to present to the LIRRCC.

It was noted that the M9 cars are being shipped to Colorado for testing before they come to New York. Mr. Garcia also noted that the LIRR is working on Positive Train Control to meet a December 31, 2018 deadline.

Mr. Epstein asked about potential service changes at Belmont Park with the development that is planned there. Mr. Garcia said that the LIRR had met with the Empire State Development Corporation (ESD) earlier that week. They want the Islanders to begin playing hockey at Belmont Park in 2020. The LIRR can bring some trains into the Belmont Park Station, but the starting time for most hockey games is in the latter portion of the evening rush hour. Trains navigating curves and crossing tracks to access Belmont Park are likely to impact commuters, and the LIRR and ESD continue to discuss a service plan.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:52 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

William Henderson
Executive Director