

LONG ISLAND RAIL ROAD COMMUTER COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MAY 11, 2017

A meeting of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council (LIRRCC) was convened at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 11, 2017, in the LIRR Transportation Services Conference Room at 1 Penn Plaza, Penn Station, New York.

The following members were present:

Gerard Bringmann
Owen Costello
Mark Epstein
Michael Godino
Ira Greenberg

The following members participated in the meeting via Phone:

Bryan Peranzo
Larry Rubinstein

The following members were absent:

Sheila Carpenter
Raymond Pagano

In addition, the following persons were present:

William Henderson	-PCAC Executive Director
Hector Garcia	-LIRR
Bill Hollister	-Amtrak
Cliff Cole	-Amtrak
Alfonso Castillo	-Newsday

Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The agenda for the May 11, 2017 meeting was approved. The minutes of the April 6, 2017 meeting were approved.

Chair's Report

The Chair's Report is attached to these minutes.

LIRRCC MINUTES

- 2 -

Election of Officers

Bill Henderson asked if there were any further nominations for the offices. Larry Rubinstein said that he had withdrawn from the election for Vice Chair due to scheduling difficulties. There were no further nominations and the Council elected the following members to two year terms:

Mark Epstein – Chair

Gerard Bringmann – Vice Chair

The members also voted to nominate Ira Greenberg as PCAC Second Vice Chair. This position will be officially filled for a two year term at the June PCAC meeting.

Introduction of William Hollister and Cliff Cole - Amtrak

Mark Epstein introduced William Hollister, Amtrak's Senior Manager for Government Affairs for the northeast and Cliff Cole, Amtrak's Northeast Corridor Product and Development Director. Mr. Hollister apologized for the problems that have occurred on Amtrak's facilities in New York City in the last few weeks. He said that Mark Epstein reached out to him as there was currently no Amtrak staff member serving as representative to the LIRRCC. Mr. Hollister said that he and Mr. Cole were there to listen to the riders' perspective and to explain the problems that Amtrak is addressing. He said that those at Amtrak understand that there is frustration with the delays that have occurred and wants to convey the apologies of Amtrak President and Chief Executive Officer Wick Moorman for the problems in Penn Station and their impacts on riders. Mr. Hollister also thanked Hector Garcia and LIRR Senior Vice President – Operations Dave Kubiczek for their remarks earlier at an NY State Assembly hearing.

Mr. Cole introduced himself, saying that he has been with Amtrak for ten years and started in media relations, but has since moved to the business side of the railroad. He said that operations are handled day to day in close communication with trains and crews, while a larger transportation group works on scheduling and is located outside of New York. Other parts of the railroad work with functions such as communications, marketing, and social media, and in this capacity he had previously worked with Mr. Epstein to come up with some ways of communicating during difficult situations.

Mr. Epstein stated he has heard about shutdowns of tracks this summer but that the members do not know exactly what this means and how it will affect riders. Mr. Cole replied that at some points this summer there will be multiple tracks out of service, which will reduce Penn Station's capability to handle trains. All work will be done at track level, so activities in the passenger concourses will not be affected.

LIRRCC MINUTES

- 3 -

Mr. Epstein said that one of the LIRRCC's major concerns is signal problems and asked whether anything can be done on the signals while the shutdown is underway. Mr. Cole responded that Amtrak has had personnel out fixing signals, but noted that the ability to do some work on signals is limited because of an inability to shut down tracks. Gerry Bringmann asked whether signal improvements are on the radar screen for the future and Mr. Cole responded that they are.

Mr. Bringmann said that he understands that the East River Tunnels will have to be repaired and Mr. Cole agreed that Amtrak is on record saying that they have to address the tunnels. Mr. Bringmann said that what riders want to see is a master plan for repairs and to mitigate the pain that riders will have to endure. He speculated that tunnel and track work could be coordinated to reduce disruptions. Mr. Hollister said that there is a master plan for repairs and that some of it was condensed to schedule years of Penn Station work into eight weeks this summer.

Mike Godino asked why the rails in Penn Station were neglected for so long. Mr. Cole responded that Amtrak maintenance of way staff worked within a schedule that they were provided and that they were hamstrung by the need to operate a certain amount of traffic through Penn Station, limiting the amount of track access that they had. Mr. Hollister noted that when Pennsylvania Railroad was running trains through Penn, it was operating 500 trains and assuming that it was functioning at peak capacity, although current traffic is more than double that. He said that the plan that is being developed is an effort to minimize operational impacts.

Mr. Godino noted that many everyday commuters do not understand that Penn Station is Amtrak's infrastructure. They are having issues with Penn Station and blame their carrier. Mr. Cole said the customers do not want to hear that it is Amtrak's problem, but Amtrak and its President have taken responsibility for Penn Station's problems. Amtrak understands that communication is a problem and have implemented a passenger information system with an audio component. He said that he believes that the reality of the situation is that people will tend to blame their carrier for problems with their travel. Mr. Hollister said that one of the results of the recent problems is the establishment of a task force to improve communication. Mr. Epstein asked that there be a rider representative on these groups. Mr. Cole noted that there will be social media efforts and a page on the NYPrenewal.com website that will give riders information.

Owen Costello said that the comments that are being made are similar to ones in the past and asked why it is taking so long to address problems from Superstorm Sandy, which happened five years ago. He wondered if the work should be completed now with tunnel shutdowns occurring at the same time Penn Station tracks are taken out of service. Mr. Costello said that for years he heard that switches in the East River tunnels are causing problems, but they never seem to

LIRRCC MINUTES

- 4 -

get fixed. Mr. Cole said that they do understand the riders' perception of repair needs.

Mr. Costello asked who is in charge of security in Penn Station. Mr. Epstein noted that the head of the Amtrak police union recently said that there have been no drills conducted for ten years. Mr. Cole replied that there also is an Amtrak Emergency Management Department that plans for emergencies in Penn Station. The responsibility for security is a part of work of the task force. Amtrak owns the station and has a police force, but other agencies have roles. The entrances to the station are not closed by Amtrak, but instead another police agency makes decisions to close station entrances. The idea is to get everyone in the same room to make decisions about emergencies. Mr. Hollister said that now each entity has responsibility for security in their area of the station.

Mr. Greenberg said that he is not so much concerned about short term deficiencies and fixes as he is about major issues like the East River tunnel track outages. He had hoped that East Side Access would be in place to relieve pressure when there is a problem in the East River tunnels, but there is a perception that the project is being delayed by Amtrak's failure to fulfill track access agreements with the MTA. Mr. Greenberg said that he often sees trains sitting in Penn Station and that, at least this summer, there should be an effort to move trains through the station. He said that although it is necessary, the Gateway project extends beyond is behind the time horizon of fixing Penn Station and East River Tunnel problems.

Mr. Hollister said Amtrak has been discussing infrastructure for a long time and that several of its Presidents have talked extensively about what needs to be done.

Mr. Epstein asked about the structure of oversight for Amtrak. Mr. Hollister said that there is a Board of Directors appointed by the President, but there is also Congressional oversight and that Congress passed a law, PRIA, which set up a Northeast Corridor Commission, which functions as another oversight body.

Mr. Greenberg asked about moving trains out of Penn Station. Mr. Hollister said from Amtrak perspective there is a push to get trains in and out quickly. He said that peak periods are where service is going to be adjusted this summer.

Mr. Bringmann asked whether the emergency notification boards in Penn Station operated the previous night. Mr. Cole said they did not operate and that there is discussion in Amtrak about what they can be used for.

Mr. Epstein said that when there are problems there is a perception that Amtrak is affected less than the commuter railroads. Larry Rubinstein said that it seemed that last night's problems did not affect Amtrak greatly. Mr. Greenberg said that

LIRRCC MINUTES

- 5 -

many decisions are made in Penn Station Central Control and that all carriers operating at Penn Station are on site there.

Mr. Rubinstein asked who will prevent cases of mismatched rail, which is said to have contributed to one Penn Station derailment. Mr. Hollister said that Amtrak inspected systemwide to find any issues in this area. He said mismatched rail is allowed by the Federal Railroad Administration, but that Amtrak's standards are higher.

Mr. Greenberg reiterated that the LIRRCC would like to see a long term improvement plan. Mr. Cole said that getting the word out on what Amtrak is doing is key. Mr. Hollister noted some contacts for the Gateway project.

Old Business

No Old Business was discussed.

New Business

Hector Garcia updated the Council on several projects including the rebuilding of the William Floyd Parkway crossing and the Post Avenue Bridge in Westbury. He noted that mobilizing for the project will require the loss of 30 parking spots, which will increase in August when the bridge structure is delivered. The Main line will be shut down on August 21 and 22 for the installation of the bridge. There will also be work on Phase II of the Hicksville Station project between now and Labor day and there are new renderings of the Main Line third track available on the project's website.

Member Reports

Larry Rubinstein and Mr. Bringmann addressed the Communication Working Group's work. Mr. Bringmann said that last night was a horror show and one of the worst nights in years in terms of communication. He said that there was lots of confusion and unannounced track changes in Jamaica. Mr. Rubinstein said that there was also little information for inbound riders.

Mr. Bringmann also said that there is a rumor that the Town of Islip will start charging parking fees at some stations, but so far there are no changes. It is said that the Town needs LIRR approval to charge, and Mr. Bringmann asked for the LIRR to attempt to dissuade the Town from charging for parking.

LIRRC MINUTES

- 6 -

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

William Henderson
Executive Director