

LONG ISLAND RAIL ROAD COMMUTER COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THURSDAY, JULY 13, 2017

A meeting of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council (LIRRCC) was convened at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 13, 2017 in the LIRR Transportation Services Conference Room at 1 Penn Plaza, Penn Station.

The following members were present:

Gerard P. Bringmann
Sheila Carpenter
Mark Epstein
Owen Costello
Ira Greenberg
Raymond Pagano

The following members participated in the meeting via Phone:

Bryan Peranzo
Larry Rubinstein

The following members were absent:

Michael Godino

In addition, the following persons were present:

William Henderson	-PCAC Executive Director
Bradley Brashears	-Transportation Planner
Hector Garcia	-LIRR
Logan Crawford	-Fios 1 News
Richard Schulman	-Concerned citizen
Matthew L. Kessler	-Concerned citizen

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Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The agenda for the May 11, 2017 meeting was approved. The minutes of the July 13, 2017 meeting were approved.

Chair's Report

Mark Epstein commented on the Chair's Report, which is attached to these minutes. Mr. Epstein noted that Congressman Zeldin had offered to hand deliver the letter calling for the MTA and LIRR to be reimbursed for costs associated with Penn Station construction to the office of U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao.

Board Report

Ira Greenberg gave the Board Report. He said that it is now clear that there are factions on the Board and that there is a difference in interests between the New York City members and the members more directly tied to the Governor. Despite this, there is broad agreement that someone other than Amtrak should operate Penn Station, as the current situation is not positive for the MTA and its commuter railroads. He said that there was not much news of note regarding the LIRR in the June meetings, but that the equipment that has been leased from the State of Maryland's MARC system has been delivered and is expected to free up existing LIRR locomotives and coaches to increase service during the busy summer season.

Staff Report

William Henderson said that there have been some comments received by the staff from commuters since the last meeting, much of which has been related to the ten press releases that the Council has issued since the spring derailments in Penn Station. Mr. Henderson also said that the record of decision has been issued for the Tier 1 environmental impact statement for the NEC Future study. He said that there are two places where the LIRR might be impacted by this. First, the crossing of Long Island Sound with passenger rail was not judged to be feasible, and second, the project emphasizes increased use of through running of trains from New York to New Jersey, which could influence future equipment design. Mr. Henderson also noted that he is working with the MTA Human Resources department to move forward on hiring a part time employee to represent the interests of the LIRR on Long Island.

Member Reports

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Sheila Carpenter asked that a speaker be provided from the LIRRCC for an upcoming Ronkonkoma Rotary Club meeting. Mr. Epstein stated that the Council will work out a way of getting a speaker to a future meeting.

Old Business

Hector Garcia of the LIRR presented a review of construction at Penn Station and its impact on operations and noted that the timetable change that will occur the week after next is mainly to allow for the LIRR's summer track program. He said that modified service has gone smoothly thus far, in large part because of a shift of about 7,000 riders to Atlantic Terminal and 3,000 riders to Hunterspoint Avenue. There have been corresponding reductions in ridership to and from Penn Station. A limited number of riders have used ferries and buses, and Mr. Garcia noted that the MTA is reducing the alternative bus service that it is providing.

Mr. Epstein asked whether the work in Penn Station will be finished by September 1. Mr. Garcia stated that Amtrak has indicated that it will complete the work, and if there is anything to be completed can proceed on weekends. Gerry Bringmann asked whether the LIRRCC can get the grand scheme of all repairs that will be completed at Penn Station. Mr. Garcia said that he believes that Amtrak is undertaking the current project now and will reassess the situation when the summer work is completed. Mr. Bringmann said he would like to know what work is happening at what times and to be assured that the LIRR and Amtrak are coordinated with regard to this work. Mr. Epstein stated that Senator Schumer has not received satisfactory answers with regard to Amtrak's work on Penn Station and the East River Tunnels.

Mr. Epstein asked for an update on the Main Line third track project. Mr. Garcia said that the release of the schedule will officially need to wait until the end of the month, but the project will be receiving proposals in the summer and will award contracts to begin the work in the fall. The work on the project will be done in many locations concurrently. Work on grade crossings will be staggered to avoid disrupting any single area. Ray Pagano asked how many contractors are involved in the bidding, and Mr. Garcia said that four firms had been prequalified. Ms. Carpenter asked if there are likely to be LIRR union issues with the work. Mr. Garcia responded that most of the labor for the projects is hired through the contractors and that the LIRR does not anticipate problems.

Mr. Garcia noted that the LIRR has just awarded a contract for the Second Track project that will complete this work from Wyandanch west to the end of the line. Mr. Epstein said that there is a problem at the Wyandanch parking garage with commuters not wanting to park near open walls in the decks and avoiding spaces that are open to the surrounding area. Mr. Garcia commented that the local

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governments are no longer building the station, so the LIRR has taken over this element of the project.

Mr. Bringmann asked about progress on a Republic Airport station. Mr. Garcia responded that the funds for design are in the current Capital Program.

Mr. Garcia said that at Hicksville between Memorial Day and Labor Day workers will be completely rebuilding the north platform. After Labor Day they will continue working on station renovations sections for a completion by next spring. Bryan Peranzo said that he had made some suggestions for changes in the design of the signage and asked if they are being made. Mr. Garcia said he would check on this.

Ms. Carpenter commented that there is nowhere to charge a mobile phone at Ronkonkoma. Mr. Garcia responded that there will be charging stations installed there.

Mr. Peranzo asked why there is a retaining wall being built at Hicksville. Mr. Garcia said that the wall was originally planned to provide for a siding and is now being incorporated into the Main Line Third Track project.

Mr. Rubinstein said that there are now charging stations near tracks 12 and 13 in Penn Station West End concourse. He questioned why there are no charging stations near the tracks past 13 that are used by the LIRR. Mr. Garcia said he is not sure but will check into it.

Mr. Garcia said Suffolk County has retained consultant to advise it on how to improve the connection between MacArthur Airport and the LIRR and is paying for this work with a grant from the State. Mr. Bringmann there needs to be coordination with the Main Line Third Track project on this issue.

Ms. Carpenter clarified her earlier comment about charging facilities, noting that that there were no electrical outlets available at the Ronkonkoma station, and that the taxi stand will not let people charge electrical equipment.

Mr. Epstein asked about the status of the order for M9 cars. Mr. Garcia said that he does not have current information about the order.

Mr. Epstein asked about the Stewart Manor artist review session that Ray Pagano attended. Ray Pagano said that the session was very interesting, and that it looked like one artist is the favorite of the selection committee and will receive the commission. He said that the project will enhance the station and that more generally the Nassau Council of Civics will be launching a project to rate LIRR stations and will take art in the stations into account in these ratings.

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Mr. Garcia said that a number of stations would be receiving treatments and recited the locations of Enhanced Station Initiative.

Mr. Epstein asked where the mobile ticketing project stands, and Mr. Garcia said he will check on it and get back to the Council.

Mr. Bringmann asked what is happening with the Huntington station elevator. Mr. Garcia replied that repair of the elevator is under the Town's control. Mr. Epstein said that the Town reached out to the LIRRCC and that the Council provided some recommendations that improved the process. Mr. Bringmann said that he had heard comments on people needing transportation from one side of the station to another and the steps that the Town had taken to meet these needs.

Ira Greenberg asked whether anyone is using the Hunterspoint Avenue station. Mr. Pagano said that he has used it and it is a very poor station both in terms of design and condition. He noted that he had mentioned its condition during the Stewart Manor artist selection process.

Mr. Bringmann asked whether there are any plans to open stations during very hot weather. Mr. Garcia said that stations will be open if there is extreme weather. He said that sometimes individual towns request closure of their stations and that the Town of Babylon has requested closure of its station buildings. Ms. Carpenter commented on the possibility of coordination with local officials to make it possible to extend station hours.

Mr. Bringmann asked about the status of the announced MTA reorganization. Mr. Greenberg said he did not know the details and will provide members with information when he gets it.

Mr. Rubinstein said he has seen people email a "screen grab" video image of an electronic LIRR ticket to a friend who then presented it to a conductor as evidence of payment. Mr. Greenberg said visual inspection is not sufficient and will be replaced as the system is more fully implemented.

The Council discussed the rail and vehicle crossing discounts provided during summer Penn Station work. Mr. Greenberg said some City members of the Board disputed the need for a discount, but other members including Mitch Pally supported the rationale for a discount. He suggested that the Council may want to look at fare policy for the next round of fare hearings and make recommendations for changes. Richard Shulman noted that the MTA commuter railroads refuse to let seniors and persons with disabilities ride at a reduced fare in AM peak. Mr. Bringmann said the Council has asked about this and has received an explanation that the policy is in place due to high demand for morning peak service.

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Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,

William Henderson
Executive Director