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Last Stop For Long Island: Transit, Business and Community Leaders and Advocates Unveil Report Showing MTA Doomsday Cuts Would Devastate Property Values, Development, Education Across Nassau and Suffolk Counties

Per new analysis, slashing Long Island Rail Road service – as threatened without federal aid – would undermine Long Island’s economic recovery for decades to come, a crisis which could be averted with bipartisan support from Long Island elected officials, including influential Rep. Lee Zeldin.

Ronkonkoma, NY--A diverse coalition of transit, community and business leaders and advocates released a new report on the devastation Long Island can expect from major Long Island Rail Road cuts threatened without federal COVID aid to the MTA. The group urged bipartisan support for a stimulus package that includes aid to transit, asking US Representative Lee Zeldin to use his influence with the Trump administration in Washington, DC to save Long Island from the impending disaster that would follow catastrophic LIRR cuts.

The MTA began losing hundreds of millions of dollars at the farebox each week – and spending millions more on cleaning and disinfecting the system – when COVID hit New York in March. The federal CARES Act provided the agency rescue funding that maintained operations through the spring and into the summer.

Faced with a 50% budget shortfall, the MTA has announced planned cuts that would eviscerate service on the Long Island Rail Road, drastically weakening Long Island's connection to New York City and beyond. Property values, real estate and job development and access to higher education could be especially hard hit. The North Fork could lose all rail service and, with just a few trains heading to the Hamptons, the South Shore could become utterly choked with road traffic and helicopter noise, undermining the attractiveness of the area's famed luxury destinations.

"Long Islanders depend on public transit to get to work, school, and appointments and to realize their investments in their homes, businesses, and communities," said **Riders Alliance** Policy & Communications Director Danny Pearlstein. "Congressman Zeldin's constituents are extremely vulnerable in the event the MTA must make doomsday service cuts. He should use his political capital in Washington and with the Trump administration to make sure that the MTA receives the \$12 billion in federal aid it needs to get itself and all of us back on our feet as we recover from COVID."

Gerard Bringmann, chair of the **Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council** (LIRRCC) said, "As Long Islanders, the LIRR plays a critical role in our lives – we ride to work and home with the same people, who often become lifelong friends. We go to school, to the doctor, to the theater and to see our families. Simply put, the LIRR is central to everything we do. Without federal relief, riders face deep service cuts, significant fare hikes and reduced cleaning. We desperately need critical federal aid from Washington to maintain our way of life and ensure our economic recovery. Our message to Congress is loud and clear: Long Islanders rely on the MTA and the MTA is relying on you!"

"Our Main Street businesses, residents and local workforce rely on robust and reliable LIRR service for economic recovery. Service cuts, fare increases, and potential station closures are on deck due to the Coronavirus shutdown and we need Federal funding to help reverse these draconian measures. We

are hopeful that bipartisan action from our Senate and Congressional delegation can bring these critical Federal resources to our transportation infrastructure," said Eric Alexander, Director, **Vision Long Island/Founder, LI Main Street Alliance**.

Lisa Daglian, Executive Director of the **Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC)** said, "Millions of daily riders across the metropolitan area rely on the MTA; without it we couldn't get to work, school or play. Our transit system is the spine that supports our economy and our way of life. Domsday predictions of 50% cuts in service and eliminations of stations and lines could become our next normal if Congress doesn't act to approve emergency funding for the MTA. We are asking that Long Island's Congressional delegation to use one strong, bipartisan voice on behalf of Long Island Rail Road riders and the entire MTA."

Brian Fritsch, Manager, Advocacy Campaigns, **Regional Plan Association**, said, "A well-functioning Long Island Rail Road is essential to the economic health of Nassau and Suffolk County. The MTA's current budget shortfall absolutely requires intervention from Congress. Without it, the prospects for repairing the region's economic damage, which has inequitably affected those people who can least afford it, is very bleak. We need leadership in D.C. that understands the importance of public transit to Long Island and the greater NYC region."

"As a part-time resident of the North Fork, I know first-hand how important the Long Island Railroad is to the region. If anything, the East End needs more rail service, not less. Representative Zeldin needs to be doing everything he can to convince the President and his Congressional colleagues to deliver the \$12 billion the MTA needs to survive," said Eric McClure, Executive Director, **StreetsPAC**.

Patrick McClellan, Policy Director of the **New York League of Conservation Voters**, said, "This report shows that abandoning the MTA is not an option. We need federal COVID aid to save our region from catastrophic cuts which will cause more congestion, vehicle emissions, and air pollution. We urge Congressman Zeldin to use his influence with the Trump Administration to prioritize vital investments in Long Island's mass transit system."

"While it is clear that it will take some time for our region to recover, it is clear that the majority of people in Congressman Lee Zeldin's district expect to return to their routines within the next year or so," said Felicia Park-Rogers, Director of Regional Infrastructure Projects for **Tri-State Transportation Campaign**. "When the public health emergency ends and businesses reopen, transit ridership will climb back up. In the meantime, Representative Zeldin risks turning Long Island into the world's biggest parking lot if he does not call for emergency funding for transit, including \$12 billion dollars to keep the MTA, and therefore the Long Island Rail Road, running."

In May, the House voted in favor of the HEROES Act, which would continue funding through the fall and into the winter. The Senate has yet to vote on another COVID relief package that includes support for transit, with bilateral negotiations instead happening in an on-again-off-again pattern between the House and White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows and US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

Like his upstate colleague Rep. Elise Stefanik, Rep. Zeldin is a rising star in his party and recently addressed a nationwide audience on President Trump's behalf at the Republican National Convention. In his convention speech, Zeldin argued "we are the land of opportunity right now, because we have a president who wants to empower the best of who we are, to be the best of what we can be." The report released today argues that all of that is on the line without a desperately needed aid infusion for the basic public infrastructure that ties Long Island together, infrastructure that Rep. Zeldin is well-positioned to support given his access to the White House.

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