

**Testimony of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council
Before the MTA Board on the
Proposals for Fare and Crossing Charges, Service,
Station Changes and Administrative Changes
Hilton NY, 1335 Avenue of the Americas, Manhattan
January 14, 2009**

Good Evening. My name is Gerard Bringmann. I am the Chairman of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council (LIRRCC), the legislatively mandated representatives of the Long Island Rail Road riders.

While the members of the LIRRCC certainly do not support a fare increase during this time of economic uncertainty, our remarks this evening will focus on other actions that we demand be taken if any fare increase is forthcoming.

To our elected officials, who repeatedly said over the last year that they should be asked for additional resources for transit, we are now demanding that help. While we recognize the financial constraints faced by the State, the effects of the economic meltdown here in New York City region are on a fast track. The MTA and its customers have never been adequately supported by the State and the legislature cannot once again turn its back on us. It is the obligation of our elected officials to make good on their promises and fund the MTA whose transit system fuels the economic engine of New York State.

Without this relief from the State, Long Islanders will be especially hard hit. Exacerbating their plight is that 63 percent of LIRR's 300,000 daily commuters transfer to NYC Transit services in order to complete their trips. They were hit twice by the 2008 fare hike and cannot absorb another double fare increase.

To the members of the MTA Board we say that if there is going to be a fare increase of any amount, we demand that the quality of service on the LIRR be substantially improved. You must understand that the operating statistics and monthly reports that you see do not accurately or adequately reflect the experiences of commuters who ride on a daily basis. Improving the quality of service means that the proposed service reductions must be reexamined and new objectives put in place and met.

Having fewer, more tightly packed trains, coupled with deferred maintenance and reduced cleaning on-board and at the stations, is unacceptable! This devastating combination will severely hamper Long Island's ability to attract new economic activity, to maintain real property values, and to retain and attract residents. There is a special concern about Long Island's young adults whom we are losing to other locales at an alarming rate. According to the Long Island Index, during the years from 1990 to 2006, the number of 25 to 34 year-olds on Long Island declined by 35%.

The feeling among commuters is that the ride is unpredictable, inefficient, and uncomfortable; and the deferral of maintenance work is unconscionable and unacceptable. Furthermore, If there are going to be many more stations without open ticket offices, it is imperative that the LIRR purchase and install additional Ticket Vending Machines throughout the LIRR network. Even without proposed reductions in ticket window staff, the long lines at the machines often cause commuters to miss their trains.

The proposed fare increase, service cuts, and quality of life reductions are a body blow to all LIRR riders. At a time when many Long Islanders are struggling to remain afloat financially, these draconian actions could leave many without viable choices, unable to afford the commute to travel to jobs or to look for a new job because of layoffs. We stand at a crossroads, and we demand that immediate action be taken to preserve and protect the future of Long Island, our region, and our populace.