



LIRRCC

LONG ISLAND RAIL ROAD
COMMUTER COUNCIL

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**Statement of LIRRCC Chair Mark Epstein
At the LIRR Expansion Project Scoping Meeting
Mack Student Center, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY
May 24, 2016**

My name is Mark Epstein, and I am Chair of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council. The Council is composed of LIRR riders who serve as the legislatively mandated voice of LIRR riders. I am here today to offer our support for the improvement of the Main Line.

The LIRR and its riders have a special relationship. In this relationship, the riders are doing their part. Ridership is up on the Long Island Rail Road, to a total of 87.6 million in 2015, the Rail Road's highest total since 1949. It's important to note that this growth occurred even in the face of gasoline prices as low as they have been in many years. That's the good news.

The bad news is that as ridership has increased on-time performance has decreased, and about 40 percent of those riders are traveling over an outdated and overburdened section of track that we know as the Main Line. The volume of train traffic on this section prevents any serious consideration of two way service and often reduces rush hour travel to a crawl. And that's only if nothing goes wrong. A stalled train, malfunctioning crossing gate, or track defect can bring the LIRR to its knees, not only affecting those who ride the Main Line, but backing up traffic and delaying trains behind them.

The East River tunnels that most Long Island riders must travel through are likewise severely overburdened, but at least we're doing something about them. The East Side Access project is under construction and will add new capacity to get LIRR trains under the East River. The problem with this is, once East Side Access is completed, trains will still have to deal with the same old chokepoints on the Main Line, making goals such as increased reverse commuting only a dream.

You may ask, "what's so bad about the current rail service?" Well if you ask that, you clearly are not a regular commuter on the LIRR. The time, inconvenience, and stress resulting from a severely constrained Main Line is clearly not working for riders, their families, and their employers.

As a regular commuter on the LIRR since 1986, I say there has to be a better way to run a railroad. For many years, community leaders and the LIRR have studied and proposed expanding the Main Line to three tracks. Early proposals had large impacts on

neighboring properties, and we must take these impacts into consideration. Local communities must be involved in the development of this project so that the final proposal will take into account local sensitivities, but also achieve the original objective of increasing capacity and operational flexibility so that the LIRR can operate as a modern railroad.

The Main Line Improvement Project is critical to Long Island's economic health, quality of life and desirability as a community. We have a unique opportunity to move forward and leverage the increased capacity that will be generated by new East River tunnels to create real benefits for Long Island and those who call it home. We must take advantage of this opportunity. The commuters of the LIRR, whom we represent, need this project and thank the Governor for his personal involvement in seeing that this project finally progresses.