



# FreedomTicket

## Phase II: *Now, More than Ever!*



October 2021

Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC)









# PCAC

PERMANENT CITIZENS  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE MTA

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## Executive Summary

After two years of steadily increasing ridership on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) and Metro-North Railroad (MNR), the COVID-19 pandemic essentially brought the region – and its regular stream of daily commutes – to a halt. Both railroads saw initial decreases in ridership of more than 90 percent. The good news is that the ensuing months have seen more people returning to the rails: as of July 2021, the year-to-date ridership levels have rebounded to 41 percent for LIRR and 39 percent for MNR, compared to pre-pandemic levels for July 2019.<sup>1</sup> These figures show signs of surpassing McKinsey & Company estimates from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)-funded analysis that anticipated a return of 80-to-90 percent of pre-pandemic ridership by 2024.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, however, it is anticipated that a significant number of commuters will continue to work from home, and that travel patterns and times have changed for years to come, if not forever.

The decline in ridership and ensuing farebox losses, coupled with added cleaning and disinfecting expenses, have wreaked havoc on the MTA's budget and wrought what former chairman Pat Foye called, "a once in-100-years fiscal tsunami."<sup>3</sup> The challenge over the coming years is multifold, including bringing riders back into the system and addressing the MTA's huge budget hole, while acknowledging that ridership may not fully return to pre-pandemic levels or patterns.

Thanks to Senator Chuck Schumer, his colleagues in government, the work of MTA agency heads, and the advocacy community, the MTA benefitted from federal stimulus funding to the tune of \$14 billion, which saved riders from the most severe service cuts and fare hikes – but the agency is still facing

large deficits through 2025.<sup>4</sup> Given the MTA's dire financial situation it may seem counterintuitive to offer fare reductions, but there is evidence that discounts produce ridership and revenue increases. The LIRR's Atlantic Ticket Field Study (Pilot Program), based on the Freedom Ticket proposal put forth by the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC) of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC), bears that out: from implementation in June 2018 through June 2021, more than 2 million Atlantic Tickets have been sold, filling empty seats and resulting in nearly \$16 million in revenue for the LIRR.<sup>5</sup> The pilot program's fare reductions of 53 percent and 44 percent for one-way and weekly tickets, respectively, led to an overall 45 percent increase in revenue at eligible stations in 2019 over 2016, according to the LIRR Today – showing that lowering fares does not necessarily mean lower revenues.<sup>6</sup> Most importantly, riders who were taking buses to connect to the subway were able to reduce their travel times: many traveled up to two hours each way and are now able to afford the LIRR with a much shorter commute that is often only 40-45 minutes each way.

The MTA is no stranger to transformation, as it has been pursuing a restructuring effort to improve coordination among its operating agencies to provide better service for riders.<sup>7</sup> In the same vein, the MTA will have to reinvent the way it provides service, while also ensuring that all riders – including those on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) and Metro-North Railroad (MNR) – have affordable access to transit.

- 1 Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Joint Long Island & Metro-North Committees Meeting*, (September 2021), Date accessed: September 20, 2021, <https://new.mta.info/document/52716>.
- 2 Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *MTA Press Release, Facing Worst Financial Crisis in its History, MTA Outlines Proposed 2021 Budget and Four-Year Financial Plan*, (November 18, 2020), Date accessed: December 16, 2020, <https://www.mta.info/press-release/mta-headquarters/facing-worst-financial-crisis-its-history-mta-outlines-proposed-2021>.
- 3 Robbins, Christopher, *MTA Losing \$200 Million Every Week Thanks To "Fiscal Tsunami" Caused By Pandemic*, The Gothamist, (July 22, 2020), Date accessed: September 15, 2020, <https://gothamist.com/news/mta-losing-200-million-every-week-thanks-fiscal-tsunami-caused-pandemic>.

- 4 The MTA is facing a "potential \$605 million deficit in 2025 even with use of \$2.9 billion in deficit proceeds." [NYS News, *Federal Funding Provides MTA with Financial Stability Through First Half of 2024; No Fare Increase in 2021*, (July 21, 2021), Date accessed: August 5, 2021, [https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/mediacontact/public/view.cfm?parm=E35B7F42-0B84-0B72-8DAA2C5E83FA4BAE\\_EBC9704F-B388-9A4D-977E19D29433091E](https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/mediacontact/public/view.cfm?parm=E35B7F42-0B84-0B72-8DAA2C5E83FA4BAE_EBC9704F-B388-9A4D-977E19D29433091E)].
- 5 Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Atlantic Ticket sales data. These ticket and sales data only reflect actual Atlantic Ticket figures and do not incorporate riders who have switched from LIRR regular fares or from those who have switched from NYC Transit fares to the Atlantic Ticket options.
- 6 The LIRR Today, *Atlantic Ticket continues impressive ridership and revenue growth*, (September 20, 2020), Date accessed: September 27, 2020, <https://www.thelirrtoday.com/2020/09/atlantic-ticket-continues-impressive.html>.
- 7 Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Transforming the MTA*, (January 21, 2020), Date accessed: August 5, 2021, <https://new.mta.info/transformation>.

Both railroads are only collecting off-peak fares at all times until December 31, 2021 due to lower ridership and to encourage more people to take the train; however, more permanent and far-reaching solutions are needed. Therefore, this report addresses both city and suburban fare restructuring and calls for the following three phased in actions:

- Phase I: Atlantic Ticket Pilot Program – improve purchasing options and marketing strategies to reach more riders.
- Phase I: Expand the Freedom Ticket concept to all LIRR and MNR city stations, with transfers to NYC Transit subways and buses.
- Phase II: Implement Off-Peak & Reverse Peak Suburban Discount Pilot Programs on both the LIRR and MNR for riders traveling to and from New York City and within suburban zones; and make Phase I pilot programs permanent and establish benchmarks for Phase II permanence.

The economic hardships for many riders caused by the pandemic and the available capacity created by the decrease in ridership on both the LIRR and MNR, combined with the MTA Board’s interest in restructuring fares and the agency’s need for revenue, makes this exactly the right time to expand the Atlantic Ticket Pilot Program within the Freedom Ticket framework.<sup>8</sup> Such expansion would be particularly beneficial to the essential workers who are not able to work from home and would not benefit from a hybrid work schedule. In Northeast and Central Queens, Far Rockaway, and the Bronx along the Hudson and Harlem Lines, 35 percent of the more than 834,000 workers in the proposed Freedom Ticket expansion areas are employed either in healthcare or the service industry; and 25 percent of the over 2.1 million workers in the proposed suburban discount areas of Nassau, Suffolk, Dutchess,

Putnam and Westchester counties are employed in healthcare and service industry jobs.<sup>9</sup>

The MTA must find ways to attract commuters back, attract new riders, and better accommodate regional essential workers in the changing paradigm. Reducing long travel times and providing a more equitable regional fare structure will allow the following to happen:

- Help regional riders and essential workers travel more affordably and efficiently.
- Fill empty commuter rail seats with fare-paying riders.
- Support regional economic recovery efforts.
- Attract drivers out of their cars in time for congestion pricing implementation, reducing roadway congestion and CO2 emissions.

8 MTA Board members discuss upcoming fare hike hearings calling for no increases at this time, and that the agency should consider fare discounts to incentive the ridership to return [Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *MTA Board & Committee Meeting*, (November 18, 2020), <https://new.mta.info/transparency/board-and-committee-meetings/november-2020>].

9 Essential workers: Healthcare workers include practitioners; technical occupations; healthcare support occupations; Service occupations include firefighters; law enforcement; food preparation/serving occupations to include maintenance occupations and personal care and service occupations [American Community Survey 2019 1 Year Estimates, Public Use Microdata Area, Date accessed: January 15, 2021. <http://data.census.gov/>].



In 2015, the New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC), one of three rider advisory Councils of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC), first proposed the *Freedom Ticket: Southeast Queens Proof of Concept*.<sup>10</sup> The focus was to substantially reduce 2+ hour intra-city commutes by creating an affordable city rail fare with a free transfer to the subway and bus networks. The concept would increase access to the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) for those living near rail stations in Southeast Queens who might not otherwise be able to afford it, and add revenue by filling empty seats. In response, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) implemented the Atlantic Ticket Field Study (Pilot Program) for Southeast Queens and Brooklyn residents as a starting point due to relatively low ridership on the Atlantic Branch.<sup>11</sup> Riders have embraced the program: from implementation in June 2018 through June 2021, more than 2 million Atlantic Tickets have been sold, resulting in nearly \$16 million in revenue for the LIRR.<sup>12</sup>

As the COVID-19 pandemic struck, PCAC was in the midst of conducting a ridership analysis to determine the feasibility of expanding the Freedom Ticket concept to serve even more riders, finding substantial off-peak commuter rail capacity within and outside city limits on both the LIRR and Metro-North Railroad (MNR). Even more capacity is now available throughout the day due to changes in ridership patterns borne from the pandemic: in response, both commuter railroads are only collecting off-peak fares at all times to help riders and incentivize more to take the rails. As of July 2021, year-to-date ridership levels rebounded to 41 percent for LIRR and 39 percent for MNR, compared to pre-pandemic levels for July 2019.<sup>13</sup> These commuter rail ridership

losses have resulted in severe farebox revenue reductions, exacerbated by ongoing pandemic response expenses. Furthermore, based on McKinsey mid-point projections, the MTA has determined that LIRR's 2025 annual ridership will be 78 million – 13 million less than 2019 levels; MNR's 2025 annual ridership is projected to be 66 million – 20 million less than 2019 levels. As a result, based on mid-point projections, by 2025 combined commuter railroad farebox losses could total over \$3.3 billion.<sup>14</sup> The MTA faces the challenges of developing more creative and far-reaching solutions to support the region's riders and encourage more people to return to transit.

Atlantic Ticket-type pilot programs can be part of the solutions needed for both the MTA and riders alike. Patrick Foye, former MTA chairman, has expressed the need to take a closer look at the commuter rails – to have them do more – especially as commuting patterns have changed due to the pandemic.<sup>15</sup> Atlantic Ticket has shown that decreasing commuter rail fares can entice riders with more affordable and efficient options – getting more out of our region's commuter rails.

Transit agencies, both past and present, have lowered fares to increase ridership and revenue with promising results. In 1993, Metro-North reduced fares on its New Haven Line to support reverse and intra-suburban commutes, resulting in ridership increases of up to 10 percent – revenue grew for these stations, but not for stations where fares were not lowered. The success of this initiative resulted in further fare reductions for reverse commuting from the Bronx to Greenwich and Stamford, Connecticut, with fares being lowered by as much as 20 percent. During that time, ridership at those stations increased by 34 percent, producing a net revenue gain of 17 percent. In 1997, after continued success,

10 New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC), *Freedom Ticket: Southeast Queens Proof of Concept*, (December 2015), Date accessed: April 16, 2020, <https://www.pcac.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Freedom-Ticket-reduced.pdf>.

11 Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Atlantic Ticket Field Study*, Date accessed: April 29, 2020, <https://new.mta.info/fares/atlantic-ticket>.

12 Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Atlantic Ticket sales data. These ticket and sales data only reflect actual Atlantic Ticket figures and do not incorporate riders who have switched from LIRR regular fares or from those who have switched from NYC Transit fares to the Atlantic Ticket options.

13 Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Joint Long Island & Metro-North Committees Meeting*, (September 2021), Date accessed: September 20, 2021, <https://new.mta.info/document/52716>.

14 Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), MTA 2022 Preliminary Budget, July Financial Plan 2022-2025, (July 2021), Date accessed: October 6, 2021, <https://new.mta.info/document/44476>.

15 Martinez, Jose, *MTA Eyes Commuter Rails as Discount Subways Substitutes With Crowds Expected Back*, The City, (March 25, 2021), Date accessed: August 5, 2021, <https://www.thecity.nyc/2021/3/25/22351465/mta-eyes-commuter-rails-as-discount-subways-substitutes-with-crowds-expected-back>.

fares were further discounted by 6 percent for reverse commutes and 5 percent for intra-Connecticut commutes, resulting in 15 percent ridership growth.<sup>16</sup>

The Los Angeles region has also experimented with lowering fares several times dating back to 1980 on L.A. Metro to increase ridership and revenue; and fare reductions have been made on multiple lines on southern California's Metrolink commuter rail service as recently as 2018. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) in Boston is currently embarking on a "Fare Transformation" initiative, overhauling its fare structure to be more equitable. The agency's Fairmount Line is the first test in this initiative; a pilot program has been implemented to reduce fares and provides transfers to subway lines and local bus routes (See Appendix D for more details about fare reduction efforts in Los Angeles and Boston, p.35).

Restructuring fares – like these agencies have done and are doing – will also greatly contribute to the goals of the Biden Administration's "Build Back Better" agenda, increasing affordable access to help reverse long-standing inequities, especially when coupled with the MTA's expansion projects (i.e. East Side Access) that will not only increase capacity, but also improve service in transit underserved communities.<sup>17</sup> Implementing an expanded Freedom Ticket concept will benefit more riders and provide a more seamless and equitable fare structure, supporting regional and national goals.

Freedom Ticket can:

- Help regional riders and essential workers travel more affordably and efficiently.
- Fill empty commuter rail seats with fare-paying riders.

- Support regional economic recovery efforts.
- Attract drivers out of their cars in time for congestion pricing implementation, reducing roadway congestion and CO2 emissions.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the PCAC is urging the MTA and its operating agencies to restructure fares for city and suburban riders using the Freedom Ticket model to benefit all stakeholders. Freedom Ticket concept expansion is timely and appropriate – riders and the MTA need improved options. Plus, with the advancement of the OMNY fare payment system, the agency will have more flexibility to adjust fares and truly become – as the name implies – One Metro New York. Originally scheduled for 2021 implementation, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a delay in OMNY's commuter rail roll-out, now anticipated for 2022 for both LIRR and MNR. However, planning and implementation must come to fruition more expeditiously, as Freedom Ticket is needed now, more than ever.

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16 Regional Plan Association (RPA), *Four Transit Issues on Long Island*, (April 2002), Date accessed: February 23, 2021, <https://rpa.org/work/reports/four-transit-issues-on-long-island>.

17 The White House, *FACT SHEET: The American Jobs Plan*, (March 31, 2021), Date accessed: April 9, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/31/fact-sheet-the-american-jobs-plan/>.

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18 Not only can commuters save money by switching to public transportation, the environment benefits from less car pollution – individuals can save over \$9,000 annually and can reduce their carbon footprint by at least 4,800 pounds for 20 mile-round-trip commutes [Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, *Reducing Your Transportation Footprint*, Date accessed: February 9, 2021, <https://www.c2es.org/content/reducing-your-transportation-footprint/>].

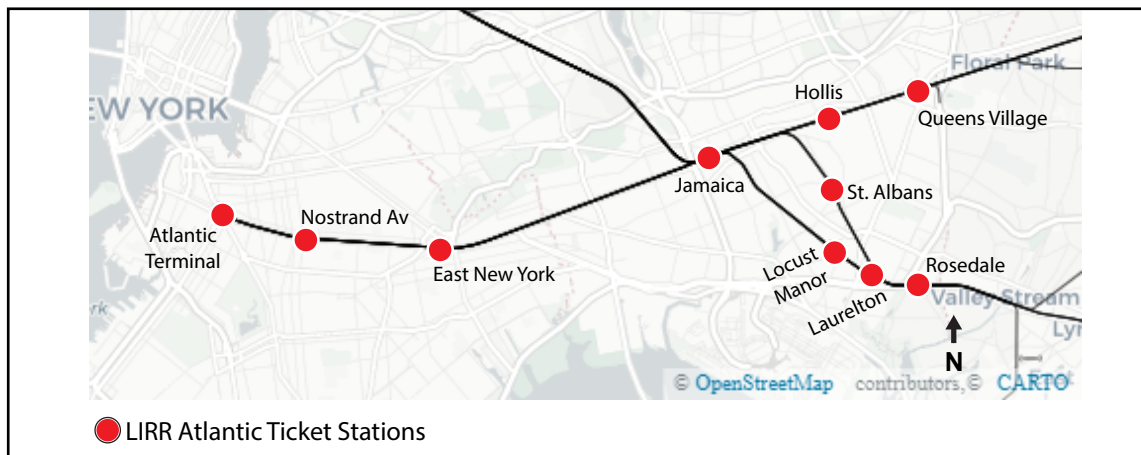


## Atlantic Ticket Field Study

In June 2018, the MTA-LIRR implemented the Atlantic Ticket Field Study to determine the ridership effects of a reduced LIRR fare between ten Southeast Queens and Brooklyn LIRR stations, including Atlantic Terminal, with transfers to NYC Transit subways and buses; this was recommended as a first step by the NYCTRC's Freedom Ticket proposal.<sup>19</sup>

and buses.<sup>20</sup> Pre-pandemic, approximately 140,000 monthly trips were taken using Atlantic Ticket, affording those riders with reduced commuting times and travel costs.<sup>21</sup> In some instances, two-hour commutes dropped to just 45 minutes each way, while producing needed revenue on the underutilized Atlantic Branch.

### LIRR Atlantic Ticket Station Map



Selection of the Atlantic Branch for the Field Study was logical: many peak-hour trains were running half empty, while many working-class riders from Southeast Queens and Brooklyn were priced out of the LIRR – often the closest transit option available. Long and slow bus rides to Jamaica Center to access the subway led to two-hour one-way commutes for some, while Brooklyn riders barely used their LIRR stations, hampering economic and community growth and development.

As enacted, the Atlantic Ticket Field Study (Pilot Program) reduces the LIRR one-way fares by 53 percent and provides an unlimited \$60 weekly fare (a 44 percent decrease when factoring in both LIRR and MetroCard weekly fares) with a transfer to subways

While this is good progress, the PCAC and riders have voiced concerns during the course of the Pilot Program regarding both ticket availability and visibility and have called for several improvements in both regards.<sup>22</sup> Ensuring the continued success of the program is crucial to providing more riders with an affordable option and helping the MTA-LIRR gain much-needed revenue.

<sup>19</sup> New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC), *Freedom Ticket: Southeast Queens Proof of Concept*, (December 2015), Date accessed: April 26, 2020, <http://www.freedomticket.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> One-way LIRR peak fares are currently \$10.75 compared to Atlantic Ticket's \$5 one-way fare; LIRR weekly fare is \$75.00 – MetroCard weekly fare is \$33.00 – totally \$108.00 compared to the Atlantic Ticket's \$60 weekly fare with transfers. [Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *MTA Fares & Tolls*, Date accessed: August 9, 2021, <https://new.mta.info/fares>].

<sup>21</sup> The LIRR Today, *Atlantic Ticket continues impressive ridership and revenue growth*, (September 20, 2020), Date accessed: September 27, 2020, <https://www.thelirrtoday.com/2020/09/atlantic-ticket-continues-impressive.html>.

<sup>22</sup> The Atlantic Ticket is not available for purchase via eTix or through onboard conductors. Ticket vending machines do not direct riders to the Atlantic Ticket option at participating stations [Ford, James, *LIRR pilot program lowering cost to travel between Queens, Brooklyn Manhattan is a success*, Pix11 News, (February 18, 2020), Date accessed: June 10, 2020, <https://pix11.com/news/local-news/lirr-pilot-program-lowering-cost-to-travel-among-queens-brooklyn-manchattan-is-a-success>].

- **Improve the Atlantic Ticket purchasing options for riders.**

- Provide expanded ticket options such as monthlies and 20-trip tickets with included transfers to NYC Transit subways and buses.
- Provide a transfer option with the current one-way fare, and extend the expiration date to 60 days, just as it is for regular one-way tickets.
- Include Atlantic Ticket on eTix, and ultimately on OMNY.
- Fix and reprogram LIRR ticket vending machines (TVMs) to not only function properly, but to also make Atlantic Ticket the default option for lower fares at all eligible stations.<sup>23</sup>
- Include the Atlantic Ticket at JFK AirTrain ticket vending machines, with advertisements to inform incoming airline passengers of its availability; and provide similar subway station advertisements informing riders of a faster way to get to the airport.

- **Expand the Atlantic Ticket marketing campaign to attract more riders.**

- Increase the amount of electronic and paper advertisements in LIRR city stations and onboard trains; in subway stations and onboard trains; and at bus stops and onboard buses.
- Better utilize social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the MTA's website and YouTube channel with targeted Facebook and Instagram ads by neighborhood.
- Include commercial advertising blasts on radio and television and in newspaper and newsletter ads, both print and online.
- Distribute marketing information at targeted locations such as at nearby subway stations, express bus stops, schools and houses of worship in Southeast Queens and along the Atlantic Branch while collecting voluntary rider contact information (emails) to conduct follow-up.
- Create marketing campaign benchmarks to ensure progress is being made and develop an Atlantic Ticket-specific rider survey to better understand how riders learned of the program and what improvements they would like to see.

<sup>23</sup> Currently, Atlantic Ticket is not one of the initial options on the TVMs. Unless a rider knows about the Atlantic Ticket, they could choose a station combination like Hollis to Atlantic Terminal and pay the full peak fare. If a rider chooses any station combination where Atlantic Ticket can be used, the fare should automatically go to the lower value instead of the full-price fare. In fact, many riders have been overcharged: 188,000 in 2018; 300,000 in 2019; and 231,817 in 2020 [The Long Island Rail Road Today, *LIRR overcharged 566,635 riders in 2020*, (September 30, 2021), Date accessed: October 6, 2021, <https://www.thelirrtoday.com/2021/09/lirr-overcharged-566635-riders-in-2020.html> ].



## Freedom Ticket Expansion

While the pandemic has resulted in many New Yorkers working from home, which many will continue to do, that is not the case for essential workers, many of whom live in the outer boroughs. Of the more than 834,000 workers in the combined proposed Freedom Ticket expansion areas, 35 percent (293,000) are employed either in healthcare or the service industry. Of these total workers who took transit pre-pandemic, only 4 percent took commuter rail to work on weekdays, while 95 percent took subways and buses – illustrating the extreme cost difference.<sup>24</sup>

There is also a reduced amount of teleworking ability in the outer boroughs overall: according to the New York City Department of City Planning. Only 33 percent of residents living near the Bayside, Queens LIRR station have teleworking capabilities; and only 28 percent of residents living near the Bronx's Tremont MNR station – compared to 48 percent teleworking capabilities for many Manhattan residents, like those in Midtown.<sup>25</sup> According to the Partnership for New York City survey results released in June 2021, the total share of office employees expected to return by the end of September 2021 is 62 percent. The vast majority (71 percent) of

employers plan to adopt a rotating or “hybrid” office schedule; of those employers implementing a hybrid model, most (63 percent) will require employees to be in the office three days per week.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, a more recent survey released in August 2021 from the Association for a Better New York found nearly 35 percent of responding organizations are already back in the office, and 44 percent are targeting a return to the office after Labor Day. A full one-third indicated that the predominant style of work will be a hybrid of in-person and remote.<sup>27</sup>

Connectivity in the Bronx comes with its own set of issues. On MNR's Hudson Line, the University Heights, Morris Heights, Spuyten Duyvil, and Riverdale stations are far from subway stations; and near the Harlem Line, residents close the Third Avenue corridor in the Bronx have suffered poor transit access since the demolition of the Third Avenue “el” in the 1970s. Better connecting this corridor has long been debated with differing proposals, including those in the Regional Plan Association's (RPA) 2008 report, *Tomorrow's Transit*.<sup>28</sup> In the report, RPA acknowledges the need to provide improved transit options for Bronx residents, which is still an issue today – thirteen

**Table 1: Essential Workers**

DEMOGRAPHIC AREA	HEALTHCARE WORKERS	SERVICE INDUSTRY WORKERS	COMBINED HEALTHCARE & SERVICE INDUSTRY		TOTAL WORKFORCE
Northeast & Central Queens	23,520	76,784	100,304	27%	371,827
Far Rockaway	2,146	17,519	19,665	39%	50,058
Bronx: Metro-North Hudson & Harlem Line	18,380	154,792	173,172	42%	412,239
TOTALS	44,046	249,095	293,141	35%	834,124

24 American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 1 Year Estimates, Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA), Date accessed: January 15, 2021, <http://data.census.gov/>.

25 New York City Department of City Planning, NYC Metropolitan Region Telework Capability, Date accessed: February 3, 2021, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?layers=9248f61177e441aeb9bf2952c7feb858>.

26 Partnership for New York City - *Return to Office Survey Results Released* (June 2021), Date accessed: August 2, 2021, <https://pnyc.org/news/return-to-office-survey-results-released-june-2021/>.

27 Association for a Better New York (ABNY), *Return to Office Survey*, (August 2021), Date accessed: August 19, 2021, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N7Rhxyzlp8Z3\\_Zktmi4KFWWLLj2TzJPNK/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N7Rhxyzlp8Z3_Zktmi4KFWWLLj2TzJPNK/view).

28 Regional Plan Association (RPA), *Tomorrow's Transit*, (2008), Date accessed: March 23, 2021, <https://rpa.org/work/reports/tomorrows-transit>.

**Table 2: Weekday Commuting to Work by Mode**

DEMOGRAPHIC AREA	SUBWAY & BUS RIDERS		CAR DRIVERS		COMMUTER RAIL RIDERS		TOTAL COMMUTERS (subway, bus, commuter rail, car)
Northeast & Central Queens	167,945	52%	143,147	44%	8,362	3%	321,766
Far Rockaway	16,439	37%	27,742	62%	327	1%	44,414
Bronx: Metro-North Hudson & Harlem Line	247,595	71%	87,394	25%	11,675	3%	347,840
TOTALS	431,979	60%	258,283	36%	20,364	3%	714,020

years later. Recommendations they put forth include the extension of the Second Avenue Subway (SAS), a Metrolink Connector, Bus Rapid Transit, and lower fares for the current MNR stations in the area. Given the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic and extremely limited funding and competing demands for the MTA's Capital Program, extending the SAS to the Bronx is unrealistic at this time. If it does come to fruition, it will be in the distant future, and riders need options now.

Additionally, only a few blocks away from the Melrose, Tremont, and Fordham MNR stations, the Third Avenue corridor is a major commercial district that includes several hospitals and educational facilities. Along the corridor and in the surrounding neighborhoods are St. Barnabas Hospital; Lebanon Hospital Center; Fordham University; and the Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics, among other institutions and destinations. Providing affordable access to these locations will help essential workers of today and tomorrow get to school, work, and home.

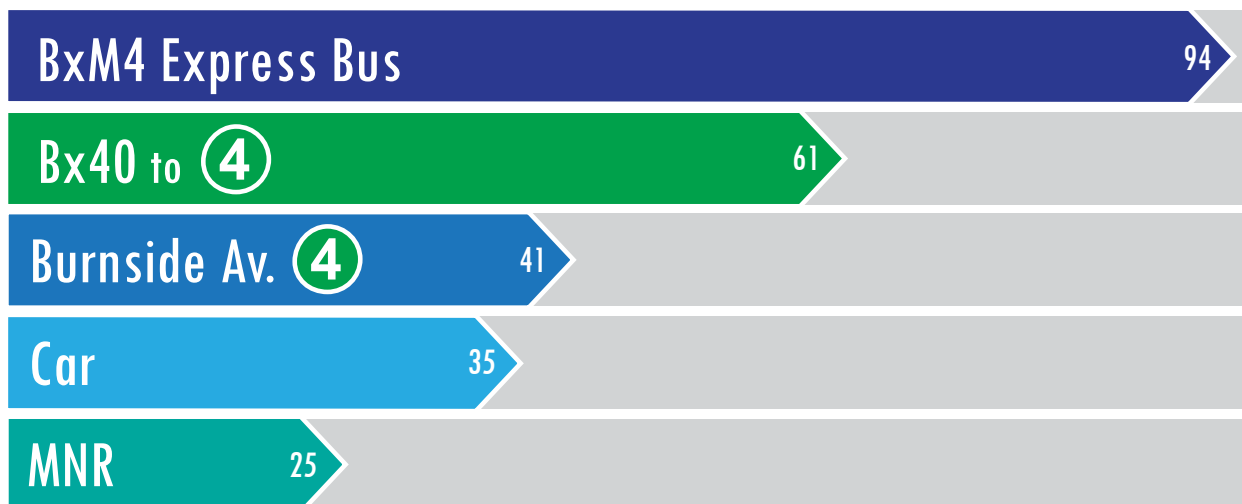
As Atlantic Ticket has slashed Southeast Queens commutes from nearly two hours to just 45 minutes, discounts provided to these Bronx residents and to LIRR commuters in Far Rockaway and Northeast and Central Queens will offer more affordable access and improved travel times to many more New Yorkers. Pairing discounted commuter rail fares with transfers to NYC Transit subways and buses will help attract riders to a faster service – supporting a more equitable system and city.



**Figure 1: Northeast Queens Travel Times (minutes)**



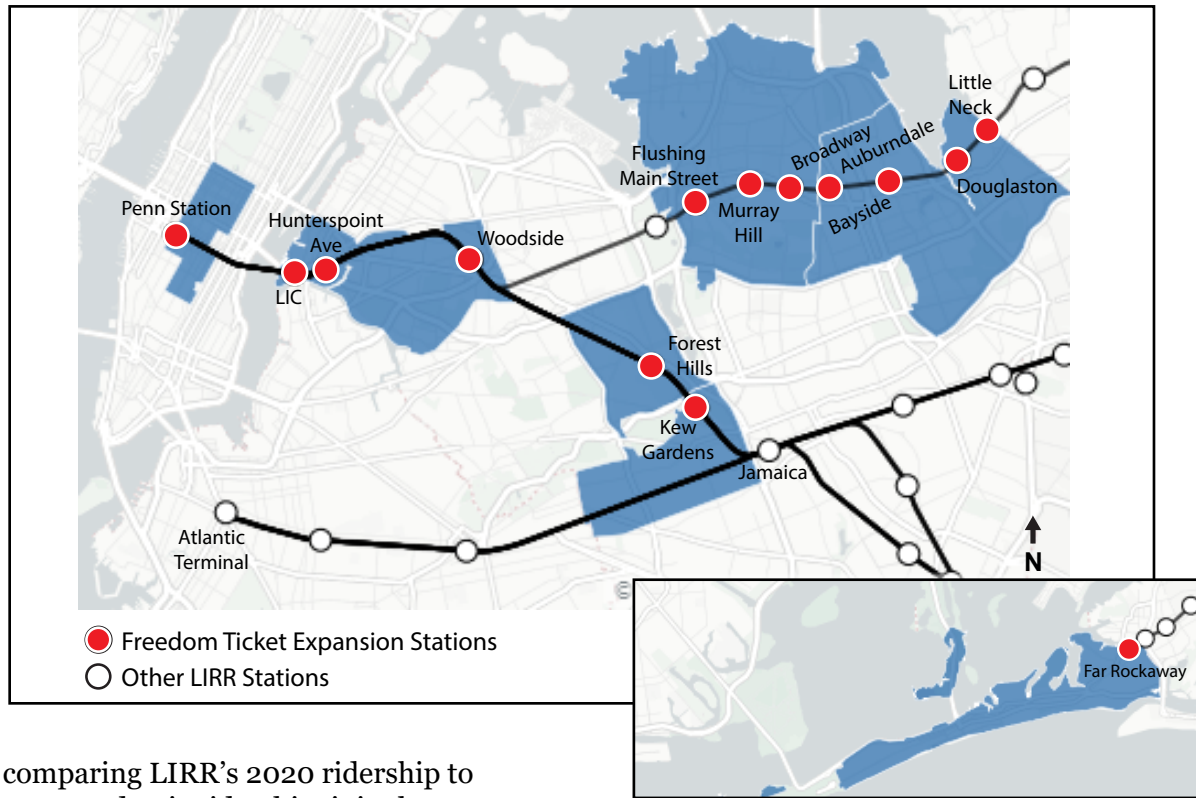
**Figure 2: Bronx - Metro-North Hudson Line Travel Times (minutes)**



**Notes:**

- Figure 1: Bayside LIRR Station to Midtown Manhattan (LIRR to Penn Station; 7 train to Times Square-42nd Street; QM3 to Midtown Manhattan)
- Figure 2: Morris Heights Station/Burnside Av. 4 Train Station to Grand Central Terminal; BxM4 from E. Tremont Av. to Grand Central Terminal
  - Depending on origin point, riders can board the Bx40 to the 4 train at the Burnside Avenue station or simply walk to the station.
  - The closest and easiest to access express bus is near E. Tremont Avenue - closer to the MNR Tremont Station.

## LIRR Freedom Ticket Expansion Map



When comparing LIRR's 2020 ridership to 2019's pre-pandemic ridership, it is clear to see the devastation that has been wrought. Although ridership has been returning in greater numbers, it is still merely a fraction of what it used to be, standing at 41 percent of pre-pandemic levels as of July 2021 – indicating thousands of unused seats. In its MTA-funded analysis, McKinsey & Company estimated that in a best-case scenario, 80-90 percent of ridership will return by 2024. According to the MTA's July Financial Plan, consistent with current ridership trends, the agency used the midpoint of best-case and worst-case scenarios and has projected that LIRR 2025 annual ridership will be slightly over 78 million – 86 percent of pre-pandemic levels.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, by the time this anticipated ridership level is met, major capacity-building expansion projects are slated

to open including East Side Access (ESA),<sup>30</sup> Long Island's Third Track, and eventually Penn Station Access (PSA) in 2025. These expansion projects will provide even more capacity to accommodate an expanded Freedom Ticket concept: advancing the vision of a more integrated MTA network. Therefore, the purpose of the following analysis is to illustrate where we were before the pandemic, during the height of the pandemic, and where we need to go from here to bring more riders back.

<sup>29</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), July Financial Plan 2022-2025 Volume 2, (July 2021), Date accessed: August 9, 2021, <https://new.mta.info/document/44476#page=236>.

<sup>30</sup> East Side Access (ESA) will reduce AM-peak LIRR commuter activity at Penn Station by 45 percent – 65,000 daily riders will be diverted to Grand Central Terminal during the morning rush (Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *East Side Access MTA Long Island Rail Road Grand Central Connection – Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)*, March 2001, Date accessed: September 10, 2020, [http://web.mta.info/capital/esa\\_docs/feisfiles/09\\_transportation.pdf](http://web.mta.info/capital/esa_docs/feisfiles/09_transportation.pdf)).

## West-bound Trips

## Jamaica & Little Neck to Penn Station

The following data analyzed includes all 2019 and 2020 trains traveling between Penn Station and Jamaica, and on the Port Washington Branch as far as Little Neck.<sup>31</sup>

In 2020, trains traveling from Jamaica to Penn Station and trains traveling from the Port Washington Branch to Penn Station had an overall 86 percent of seats empty, totaling over 212,000 available seats on any given weekday.

JAMAICA/  
PORT WASH.



PENN

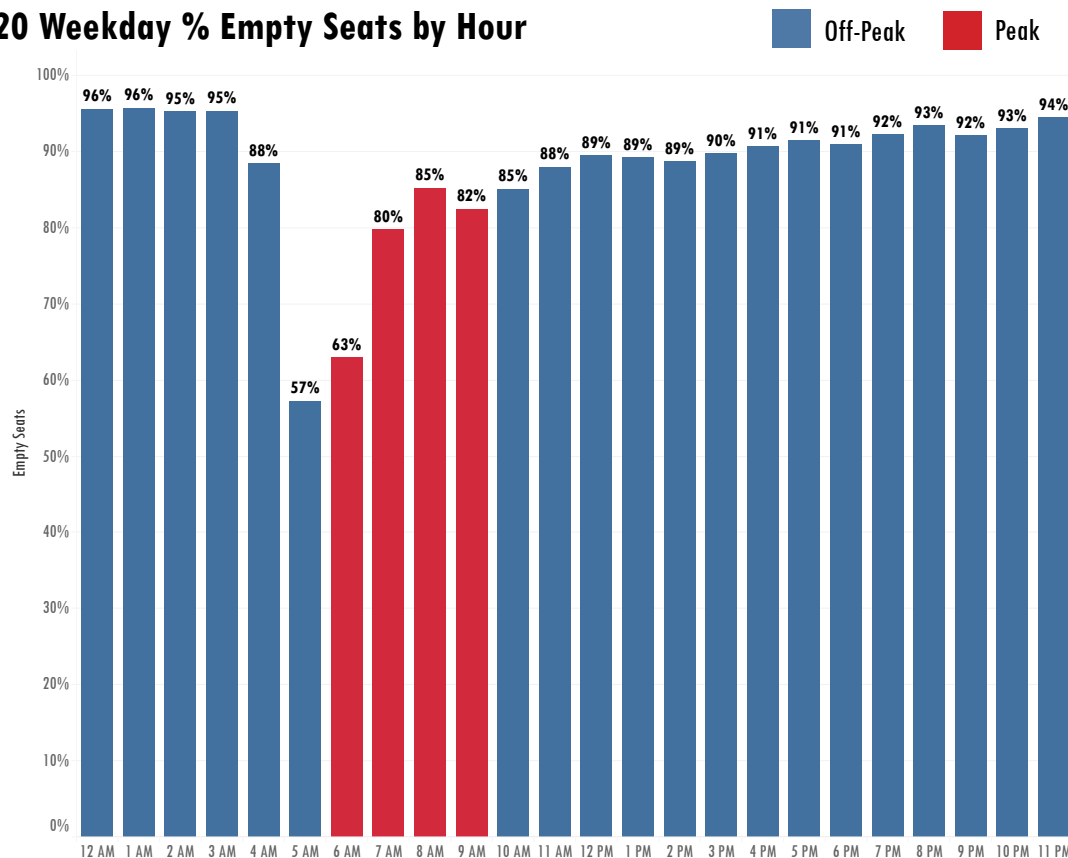
WESTBOUND-TRIPS



The percentage indicates a steep escalation in empty seats compared to 2019, as seen in Charts 1 and 2. While pre-pandemic there were ample off-peak empty seats, this was not the case during peak hours. In 2019, during the 8 AM hour, from Jamaica to Penn

Station from Little Neck on the Port Washington Branch to Penn Station, only 19 percent of overall seats were empty; in 2020, 85 percent of overall seats were empty.

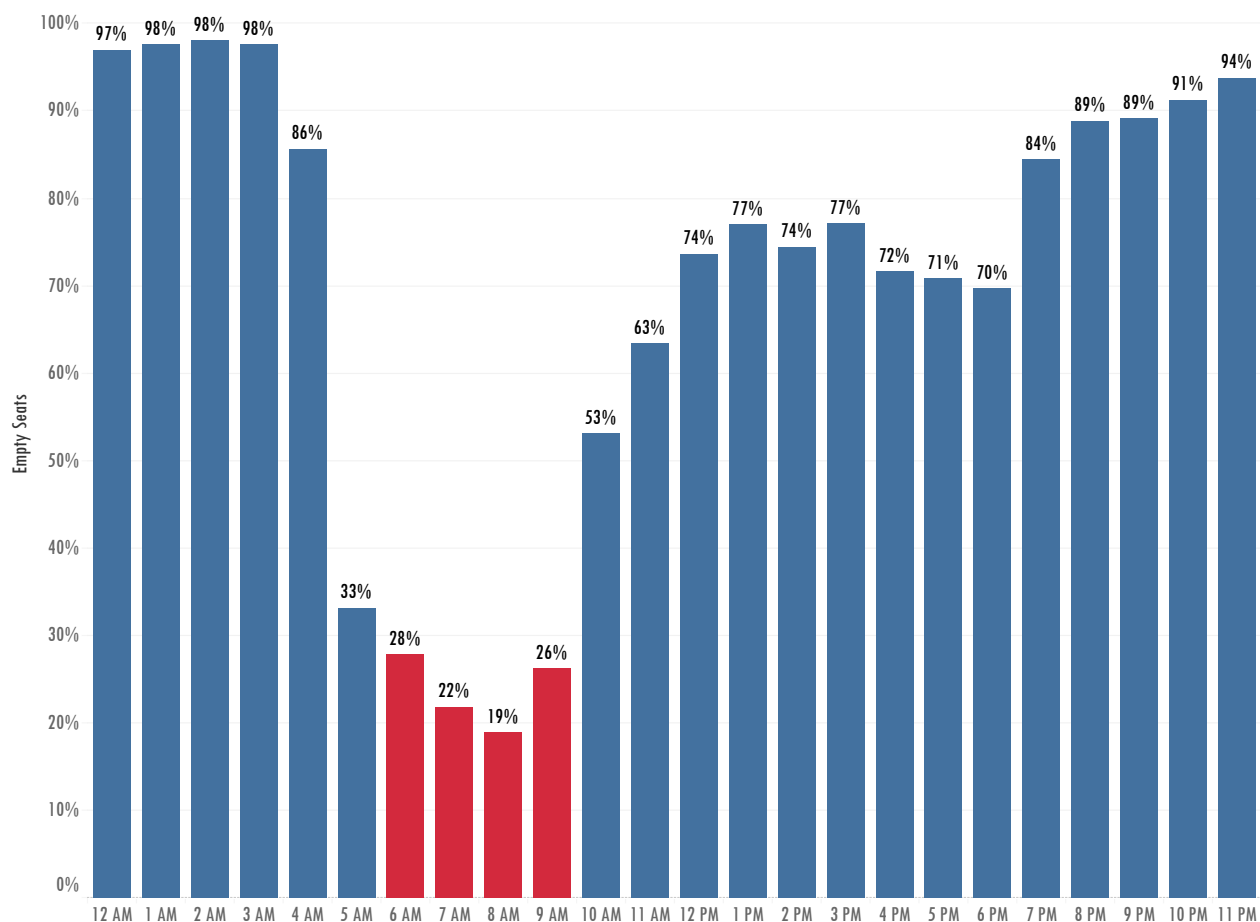
**Chart 1: 2020 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour**



<sup>31</sup> Trains stopping at and/or terminating at Kew Gardens, Forest Hills, Woodside, Hunterspoint Avenue, Long Island City, and Far Rockaway were included in the ridership data analysis. In addition, seat count data is released annually – the LIRR 2021 data will be available early 2022. The complete methodology can be found in Appendix A, p.30. All ridership data was obtained from the LIRR 2019 & 2020 Ridership Books.



**Chart 2: 2019 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour**



Peak hour empty seats increased by **233%** from 2019 to 2020 between Jamaica and Penn Station.

## East-bound Trips

## Penn Station to Jamaica & Little Neck

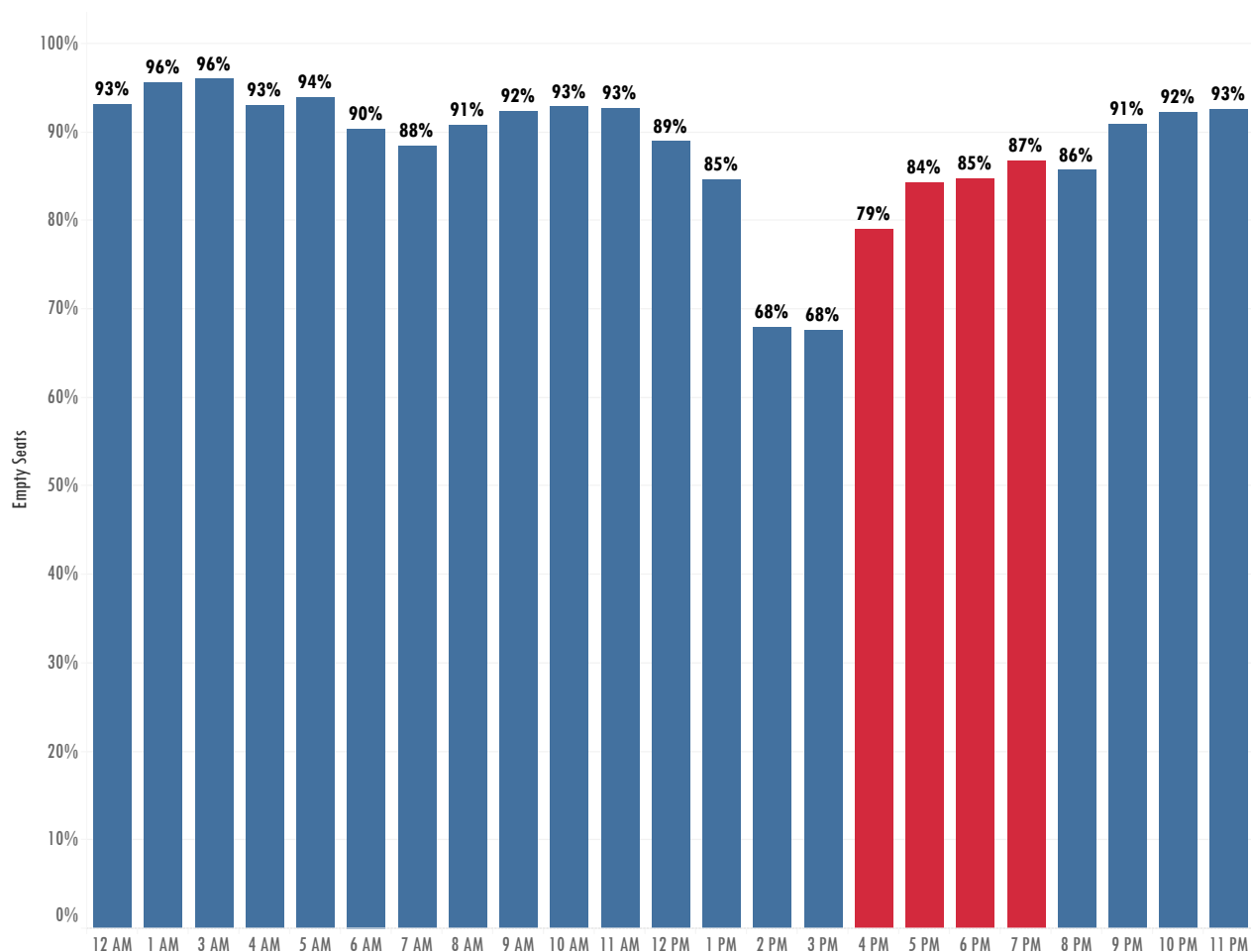
In 2020, trains traveling from Penn Station to Jamaica and along the Port Washington Branch were similar to those traveling in the opposite direction, with an overall 86 percent of seats empty. The total available seats between Penn Station, Jamaica, and the Port Washington Branch in 2020 amounted to over 202,000 on any given weekday.



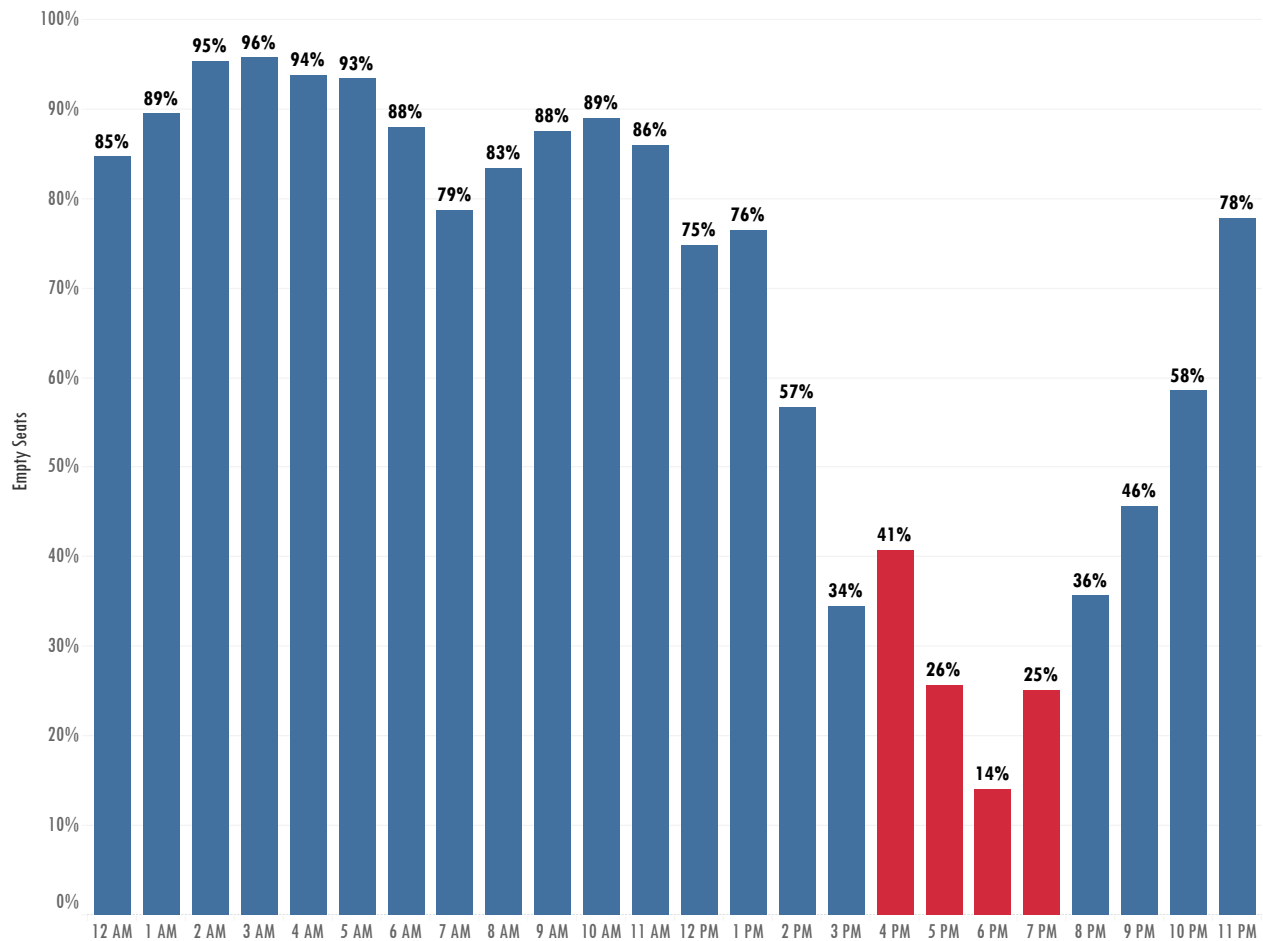
The percentage rise of empty seats during afternoon peak hours is similar to that of the morning peak – from Penn Station to Jamaica and Penn Station to Little Neck on the Port Washington Branch during

the 6 PM hour, only 14 percent of overall seats were empty; in 2020, 85 percent of overall seats were empty.

**Chart 3: 2020 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour**



**Chart 4: 2019 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour**



Peak hour empty seats increased by **200%** from 2019 to 2020 between Penn Station and Jamaica.



# MNR City Ridership Analysis

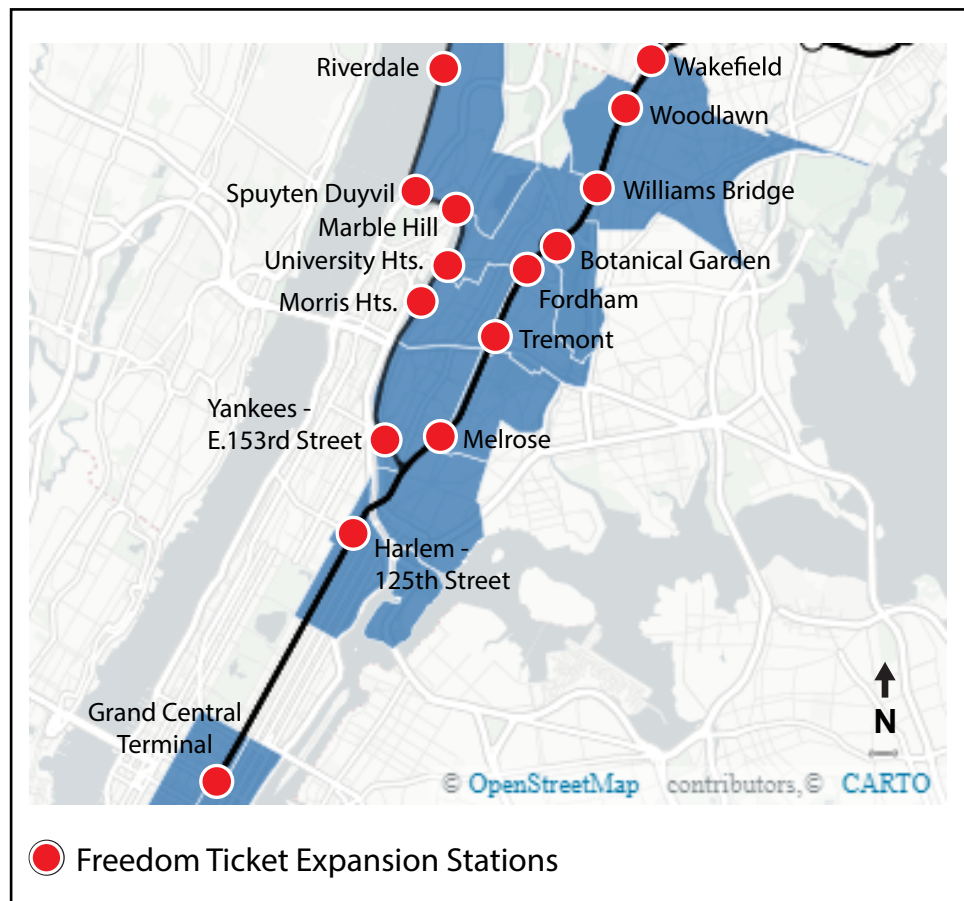
In April, MNR released its 2020 ridership analysis, comparing it to pre-pandemic ridership levels of 2019. Overall, the Railroad saw nearly 60 million fewer rides in 2020. Both the Hudson and Harlem Lines' ridership was down nearly 68 percent, and the New Haven Line's ridership was down 69 percent compared to 2019. Throughout 2020, total weekday ridership in and out of Grand Central Terminal was down nearly 84 percent, with a nearly 80 percent decrease in weekday off-peak ridership<sup>32</sup> – clearly illustrating the need to attract riders back at all hours of the day.

At the time of this writing, while overall ridership numbers were available, up-to-date empty seat count data was not available for us to conduct a 2020 vs. 2019 comparison; however, as indicated above, low ridership levels have left many seats empty at all times. According to the MTA's July Financial Plan, consistent with current ridership trends, the agency

used the midpoint of McKinsey & Company's best-case and worst-case scenarios and has projected that MNR 2025 annual ridership will be slightly over 66 million – 76 percent of pre-pandemic levels.<sup>33</sup> By the time the projected 2025 ridership has returned, MNR's Penn Station Access (PSA) is anticipated to be in operation – expanding faster service to East Bronx underserved communities and freeing up track space at Grand Central Terminal to potentially accommodate increased service. This freed up capacity could be used to increase service to Bronx stations like Tremont and Melrose, which experienced an 81 percent ridership increase<sup>34</sup> following the doubling of midday and weekend service and the extension of the service span in mornings and evenings in 2016.<sup>35</sup> Adding Freedom Ticket discounts at MNR city stations, and for the eventual four new Bronx stations, will help complete the vision of a more integrated MTA network.

Furthermore, before the pandemic hit, we found ample available capacity during 2019 off-peak hours with some trains as high as 90 percent empty. To illustrate those findings, visuals for overall weekday empty seats for the Hudson and Harlem Lines are on page 14 (Methodology and full-ridership analysis can be found in Appendix B, p.30):

## MNR Freedom Ticket Expansion Map



<sup>32</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Joint Long Island & Metro-North Committees Meeting*, (April 2021), Date accessed: April 22, 2021, <https://new.mta.info/document/37071>.

(September 26, 2016), Date accessed: October 6, 2021, <https://www.mta.info/press-release/metro-north/new-metro-north-schedules-take-effect-sunday-october-2-improve-o>.

<sup>33</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *July Financial Plan 2022-2025 Volume 2*, (July 2021), Date accessed: August 9, 2021, <https://new.mta.info/document/44476#page=270>.

<sup>34</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Press Release, *Metro-North Increases Service at Melrose and Tremont Stations*, (October 17, 2017), Date accessed: October 6, 2021, <https://www.mta.info/press-release/metro-north/metro-north-increases-service-melrose-and-tremont-stations>.

<sup>35</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Press Release, *New Metro-North Schedules Take Effect on Sunday, October 2, To Improve Reliability and Convenience*,

The following visuals illustrate 2019 off-peak empty seats between MNR Hudson and Harlem Line stations and Grand Central Terminal.

### Hudson Line



### Harlem Line



- **Transparency:** Create a Freedom Ticket Task Force to oversee a thorough fare restructuring study to help provide timely recommendations; make ridership and revenue data public; identify funding opportunities; and provide quarterly reports to the MTA Board.<sup>36 37</sup>
- **Service:** Restore pre-pandemic service, expand service frequency where needed, and make necessary adjustments to midday and shoulder-of-the-peak service to accommodate more riders traveling during these times.
- **Crews:** Ensure appropriate staffing levels and necessary training for all railroad personnel to be equipped with the knowledge of the new fare program to better assist riders.
- **Transfers:** Improve bus service to outer borough commuter rail stations to enable more seamless connections between the two modes.<sup>38</sup>
- **Fare Payment Flexibility:** Expedite OMNY rollout on the commuter railroads to allow for easier reduced fare implementation.
- **Expansion Projects:**
  - Include Freedom Ticket discounts while developing service plans for East Side Access, Third Track, and Penn Station Access.<sup>39</sup>
  - Build platform extensions at various stations to accommodate more passengers.<sup>40</sup>

### Integrated and Flexible Fare Structures Elsewhere

**Boston:** The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's (MBTA) fare payment systems can be loaded with subway, bus, commuter rail tickets, but free transfers are not available between modes unless riders get a monthly CharlieTicket pass.<sup>41</sup> However, the CharlieCard pilot program for Zone 1A at Fairmount Line stations provides free transfers between commuter rail and subways and buses. The system uses fare validators on station platforms.<sup>42</sup>

**London:** London has contactless cards (available on mobile devices) and Oyster Cards, which can be used for buses, tubes (subway), trams, the London Overground, the DLR (Docklands Light Railway), TfL Rail, and most National Rail service within London. Both cards support daily fare capping, but contactless cards also support weekly fare capping. Riders can add travelcards to Oyster Cards, allowing for unlimited day, week, or monthly travels within valid zones.<sup>43</sup>

**Paris:** Paris's Navigo Pass provides weekly, monthly, and annual fare packages that can be used on all modes-metro within specified fare zones.<sup>44</sup> Cardboard T+ tickets are available for single trips, and allow for free transfers between buses and trams, or between the RER and the Metro in 90 minutes. There is a mobile app for fares, where riders can get daily, weekly, and monthly fare packages.<sup>45</sup>

36 CH2M Hill (CH2M) and LTK Engineering Services (LTK) studied California's MetroLink fare system, evaluating ridership, fare elasticities, fare changes, and revenue impacts [Metrolink – Southern California Regional Rail Authority, *Metrolink Board of Directors Meeting*, (July 24, 2015), Date accessed: February 5, 2021, [http://metrolink.granicus.com/DocumentViewer.php?file=metrolink\\_3a03b149d424633411daodfoa22d59a7.pdf&view=1#page=45](http://metrolink.granicus.com/DocumentViewer.php?file=metrolink_3a03b149d424633411daodfoa22d59a7.pdf&view=1#page=45)].

37 PCAC sees an expanded Freedom Ticket concept as revenue generating. However, there may be situations that may require additional funding (i.e. transfers). Funding opportunities should be evaluated to help support the program (See Outer Borough Transportation Account, p.28).

38 See Appendix E: Outer Borough and Suburban Bus Connections, p.39.

39 Penn Station Access includes four new Bronx stations: Hunts Point; Parkchester/ Van Nest; Morris Park; Co-Op City.

40 See Appendix F for a list of stations that need platform extensions, p.41.

41 Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), *Fares Overview*, Date accessed: August 9, 2021, <https://www.mbta.com/fares>.

42 Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), *Fairmount Line Weekday Service Pilot*, Date accessed: August 9, 2021, <https://www.mbta.com/projects/fairmount-line-weekday-service-pilot>.

43 Transport For London (TfL), *Oyster pay as you go*, Date accessed: August 9, 2021, <https://tfl.gov.uk/fares/how-to-pay-and-where-to-buy-tickets-and-oyster/pay-as-you-go/oyster-pay-as-you-go?intcmp=55536>.

44 Ile-de-France, *Navigo Week package*, Date accessed: August 9, 2021, [https://www.iledefrance--mobilites-fr.translate.google/titres-et-tarifs/detail/forfait-navigo-semaine?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=fr&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=en-US&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=ajax,elem](https://www.iledefrance--mobilites-fr.translate.google/titres-et-tarifs/detail/forfait-navigo-semaine?_x_tr_sl=fr&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en-US&_x_tr_pto=ajax,elem).

45 Ile-de-France, *Ticket t+*, Date accessed: August 9, 2021, [https://www.iledefrance--mobilites-fr.translate.google/titres-et-tarifs/detail/ticket-t?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=fr&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=en-US&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=ajax,elem](https://www.iledefrance--mobilites-fr.translate.google/titres-et-tarifs/detail/ticket-t?_x_tr_sl=fr&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en-US&_x_tr_pto=ajax,elem).



## Suburban Discounts: Off-Peak & Reverse Peak Pilot Programs

Providing fare relief for commuters outside the city will help ease the more immediate crises of low ridership and revenue caused by the pandemic and provide long-term travel options which can help support the workforce and economy for the region's suburban communities. Both railroads currently have intermediate fares for travel between some zones and stations; however, more must be done to encourage more riders to get onboard. The PCAC recommends providing more fare relief for riders traveling to and from New York City and within suburban zones by implementing steeper Off-Peak & Reverse Peak Suburban Discount Pilot Programs when peak fares are again instituted in 2022. Of the more than 2.1 million workers in the proposed suburban discount areas of Nassau, Suffolk, Dutchess, Putnam and Westchester counties, 25 percent overall are employed in healthcare and service industry jobs.<sup>46</sup>

LIRR commuters who live the furthest out on Long Island, and Metro-North riders who live in the most northern suburban counties, pay up to \$500 per month – well over \$600 per month when factoring in city subway/bus fares.<sup>47</sup>

These high costs are prohibitive for some riders and provide reason for a discounted commuter rail fare program. Lowering these fares will also support reverse commuting and inter-and intra-county travel on Long Island and in the MNR region. An increase in these types of commutation could promote job creation, economic recovery, and growth in our suburban communities, and could attract new riders to reduce the number of car trips – reducing congestion and CO2 emissions.

In LIRR territory there are over 120,000 Queens residents who work in either Nassau or Suffolk counties, not far behind the 126,000 Queens residents who work in Brooklyn.<sup>48</sup> These Queens residents will greatly benefit from Long Island's Third Track project that is planned to add eight additional reverse-peak trains in both the AM and PM peak periods – totaling a 60 percent increase in reverse-peak service.<sup>49</sup> To take full advantage of the \$2.6 billion investment the MTA has made in the Third Track project, fare discounts should be provided, which would incentivize riders to use this service – allowing more affordable access to Long Island job locations.

**Table 3: Essential Workers**

DEMOGRAPHIC AREA	HEALTHCARE WORKERS	SERVICE INDUSTRY WORKERS	COMBINED HEALTHCARE & SERVICE INDUSTRY		TOTAL WORKFORCE
Nassau	59,209	117,415	176,624	25%	697,994
Suffolk	55,572	135,791	191,363	25%	774,500
Dutchess	10,680	27,942	38,622	26%	149,344
Putnam	3,927	10,479	14,406	27%	52,900
Westchester	34,075	82,193	116,268	24%	485,843
TOTALS	163,463	373,820	537,283	25%	2,160,581

46 American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 1 Year Estimates, Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA), Date accessed: January 15, 2021, <http://data.census.gov/>.

47 Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *LIRR and Metro-North fares*, Date accessed: September 23, 2020, <https://new.mta.info/fares/lirr-metro-north>.

48 United States Census Bureau, *On The Map*, (2018), Date accessed: August 10, 2021, <https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>.

49 A Modern LI, *Long Island Rail Road Expansion Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)*, (November 28, 2016), Date Accessed: August 10, 2021, <https://www.amodernli.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/10-Transportation.pdf#page=8>.

Increasing reverse-peak service in coordination with fare decreases has been proven to work in the Metro-North region. In the early 1980s, reverse-peak travel from Manhattan and the Bronx to jobs in Connecticut and Westchester County was growing. MNR began increasing service and lowering fares for these riders, which led to major ridership increases. The railroad continued making reverse-peak adjustments between 1982<sup>50</sup> and 2014, producing a 398 percent increase in reverse-peak AM ridership to White Plains<sup>51</sup> – service was increased in this market by 54.5 percent.<sup>52</sup> Alongside the implementation of suburban discounts, MNR and LIRR should consider adding service, when warranted.

Providing 191,000 daily pre-pandemic commuter rail users<sup>53</sup> with more affordable fares will help attract them back, while generating revenue for both MNR and LIRR by filling empty seats with paying customers. During the course of the pandemic, both railroads have been only collecting off-peak fares to help riders and draw them to use the service; however, at the end of 2021, peak fares will be reinstated and longer-term and more far-reaching discounts will be needed. In addition, suburban drivers will need an attractive alternative to driving with the implementation of congestion pricing - that alternative must be the commuter rails.

**Table 4: Weekday Travel to Work Mode**

DEMOGRAPHIC AREA	CAR DRIVERS		COMMUTER RAIL RIDERS		TOTAL COMMUTERS (Car & Commuter Rail)
Nassau	508,203	87%	74,676	13%	582,879
Suffolk	659,353	95%	36,270	5%	695,623
Dutchess	121,190	96%	4,403	4%	125,593
Putnam	45,846	93%	3,546	7%	49,392
Westchester	307,352	81%	72,815	19%	380,167
TOTAL	1,641,944	90%	191,710	10%	1,833,654

<sup>50</sup> Hearth, Amy Hill, *The Commuter's Destination Is the County*, The New York Times, (March 17, 1991), Date accessed: October 11, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/03/17/nyregion/the-commuter-s-destination-is-the-county.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Marchwinski, Thomas, *Applications in Transit Planning*, (April 22, 2016) Date accessed: October 6, 2021, [https://associationdatabase.com/aws/APAOH/asset\\_manager/get\\_file/125598?ver=6159#page=22](https://associationdatabase.com/aws/APAOH/asset_manager/get_file/125598?ver=6159#page=22).

<sup>52</sup> Metro-North Railroad, Service Schedules (change in service between 1984 & 2014 timetables), Date accessed: October 6, 2021, [http://web.archive.org/web/20140114022434/http://www.mta.info/mnr/html/planning/schedules/pdf/Har\\_MF\\_JAN182014.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20140114022434/http://www.mta.info/mnr/html/planning/schedules/pdf/Har_MF_JAN182014.pdf).

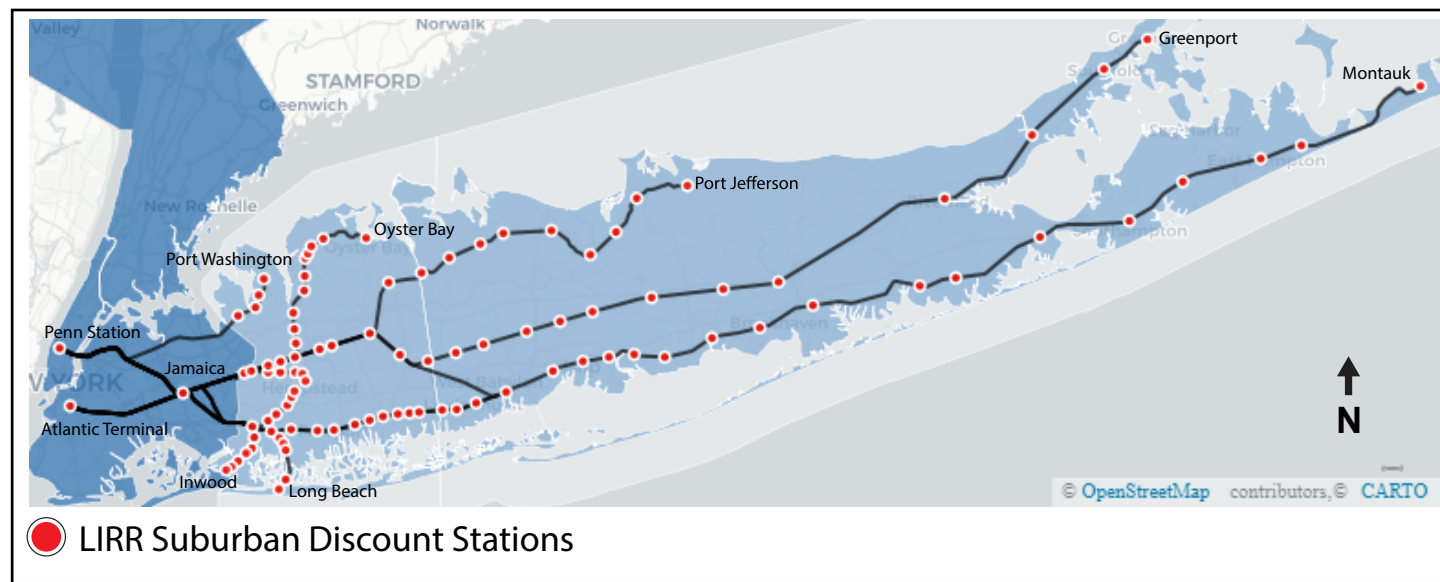
<sup>53</sup> American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 1 Year Estimates, Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA), Date accessed: January 15, 2021, <http://data.census.gov/>.

## LIRR Suburban Ridership Analysis: 2020 vs. 2019

In concert with the city ridership analysis comparing LIRR's 2020 ridership to 2019's pre-pandemic ridership, COVID-19's impact is clear. The 2019 ridership has started to return but is only at 41 percent of what it used to be as of July 2021 –

leaving thousands of seats still empty. All 2020 and 2019 trains traveling between Long Island and Jamaica and along the Port Washington Branch between Penn Station and Port Washington were included in the analysis.<sup>54</sup>

### LIRR Suburban Discount Map



<sup>54</sup> Since the Port Washington Branch does not run through Jamaica, all Port Washington Branch data is for the entire Branch – between the Port Washington LIRR station and Penn Station in both directions. This data also includes trains servicing intermediate stations like LIC and Woodside.



## West-bound Trips

Long Island to Jamaica & Port Washington to Penn Station

In 2020, 87 percent of seats were empty on trains traveling from Long Island to Jamaica and on city-bound Port Washington Branch trains, totaling over 244,000 available seats on any given weekday.

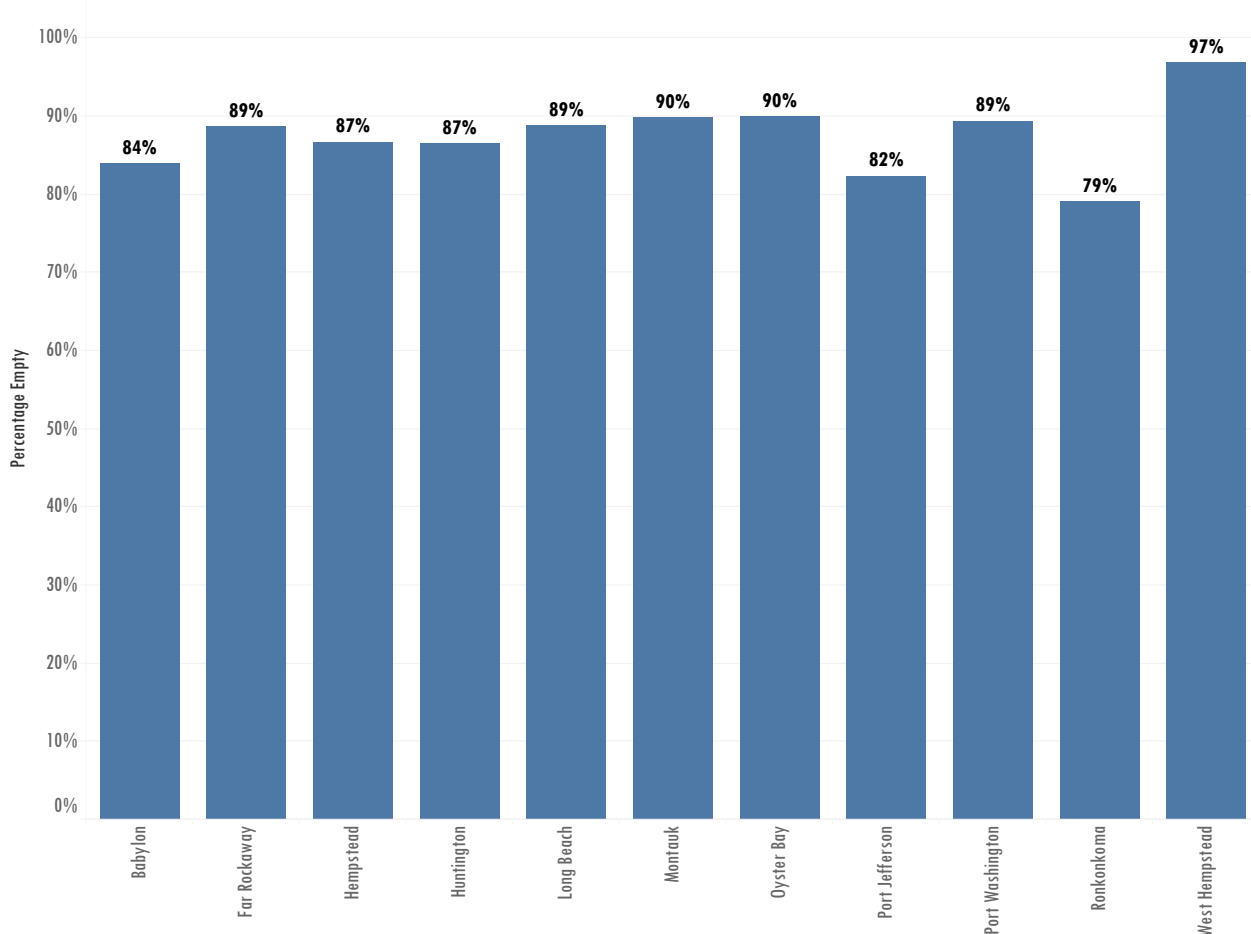


Note: All Figures include Port Washington Branch empty seats between Port Washington and Penn Station.

While there were ample off-peak empty seats pre-pandemic, this was not the case during peak hours. During the 8 AM hour in 2019, only 24 percent of

overall seats were empty from Long Island to Jamaica and along the Port Washington Branch; however, in 2020, 85 percent of overall seats were empty.

**Chart 5: 2020 % Empty Seats Branch Breakdown**



**Chart 6: 2020 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour**

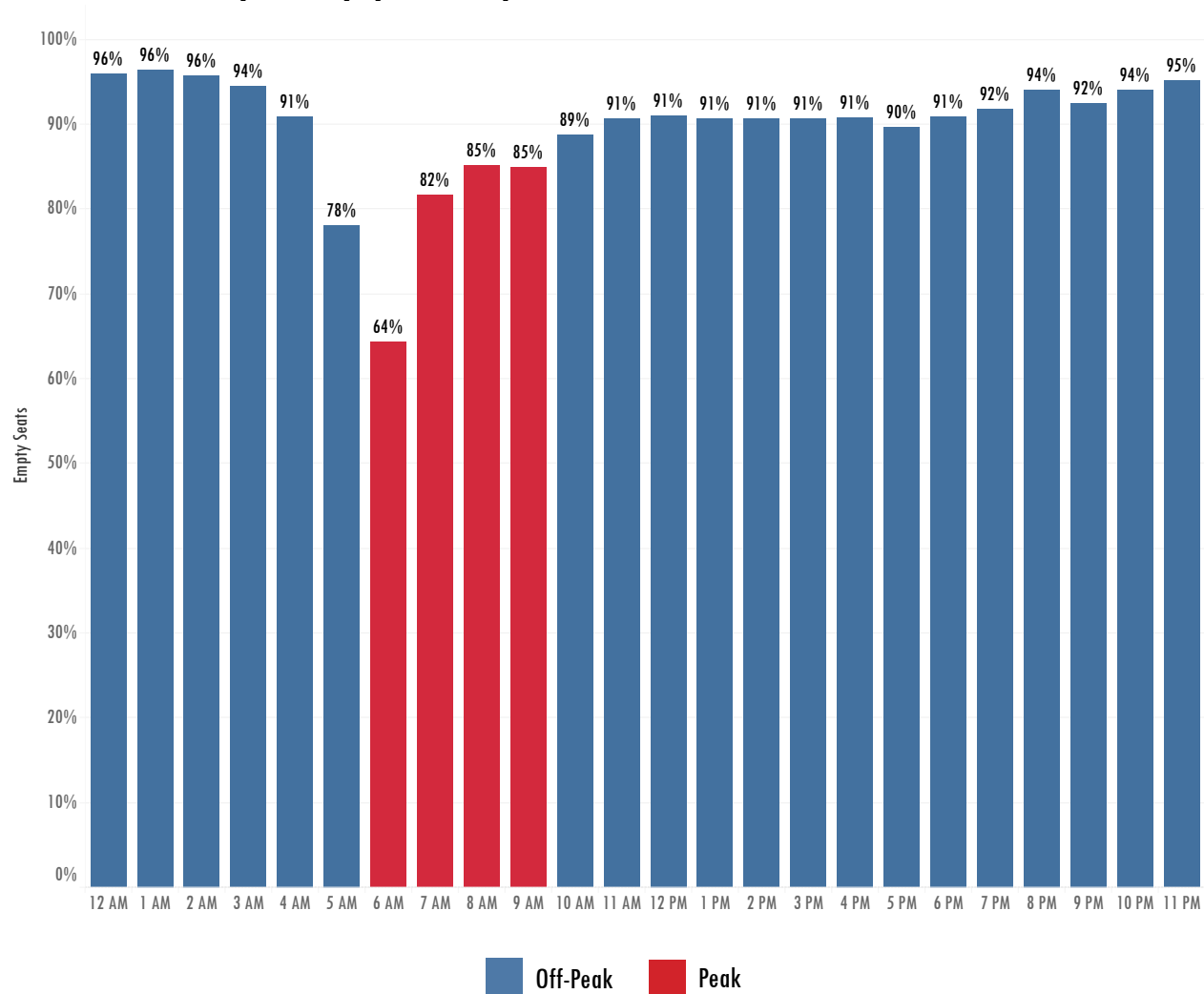
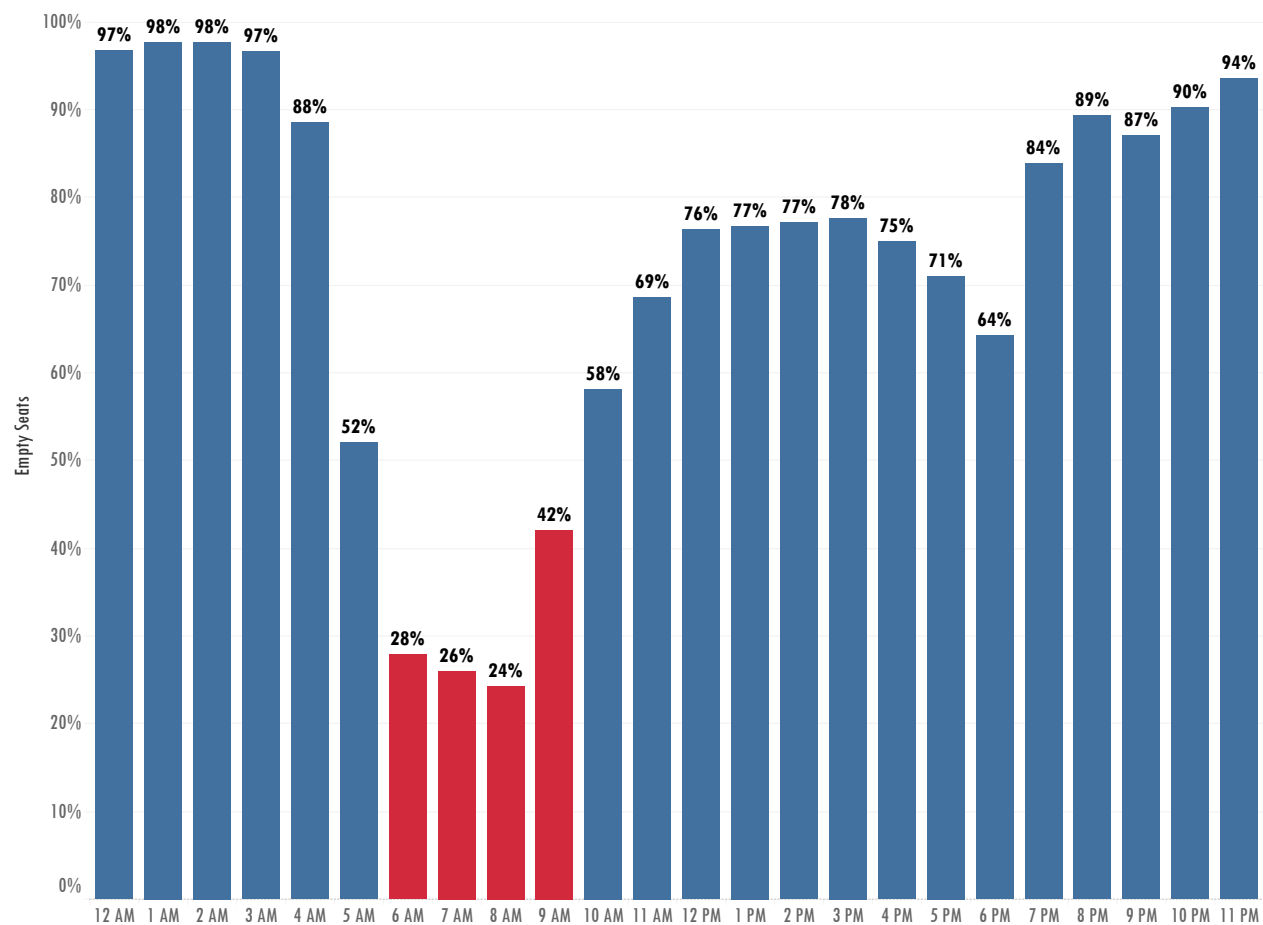


Chart 7: 2019 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour



▶ Peak hour empty seats increased by 149% from 2019 to 2020 between Long Island stations and Jamaica.



## East-bound Trips

Jamaica to Long Island & Penn Station to Port Washington

In 2020, 86 percent of seats were empty on trains traveling from Jamaica to Long Island and on Port Washington-bound trains, totaling over 213,000 available seats on any given weekday.



While there were ample off-peak empty seats pre-pandemic, this was not the case during peak hours. From Jamaica to Long Island and on the Port

Washington Branch, only 27 percent of overall seats were empty during the 6 PM hour; however, in 2020, 84 percent of overall seats were empty.

**Chart 8: 2020 % Empty Seats Branch Breakdown**

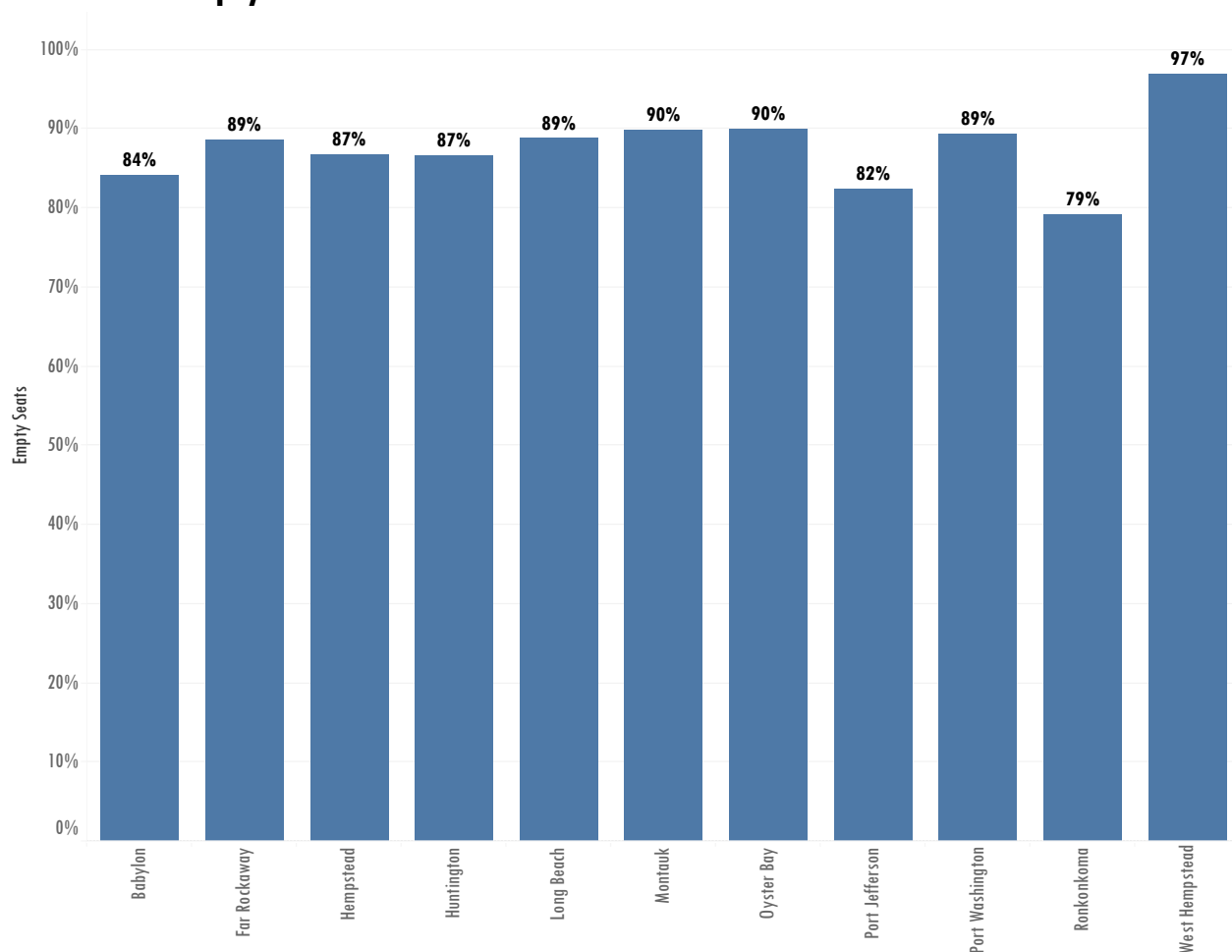
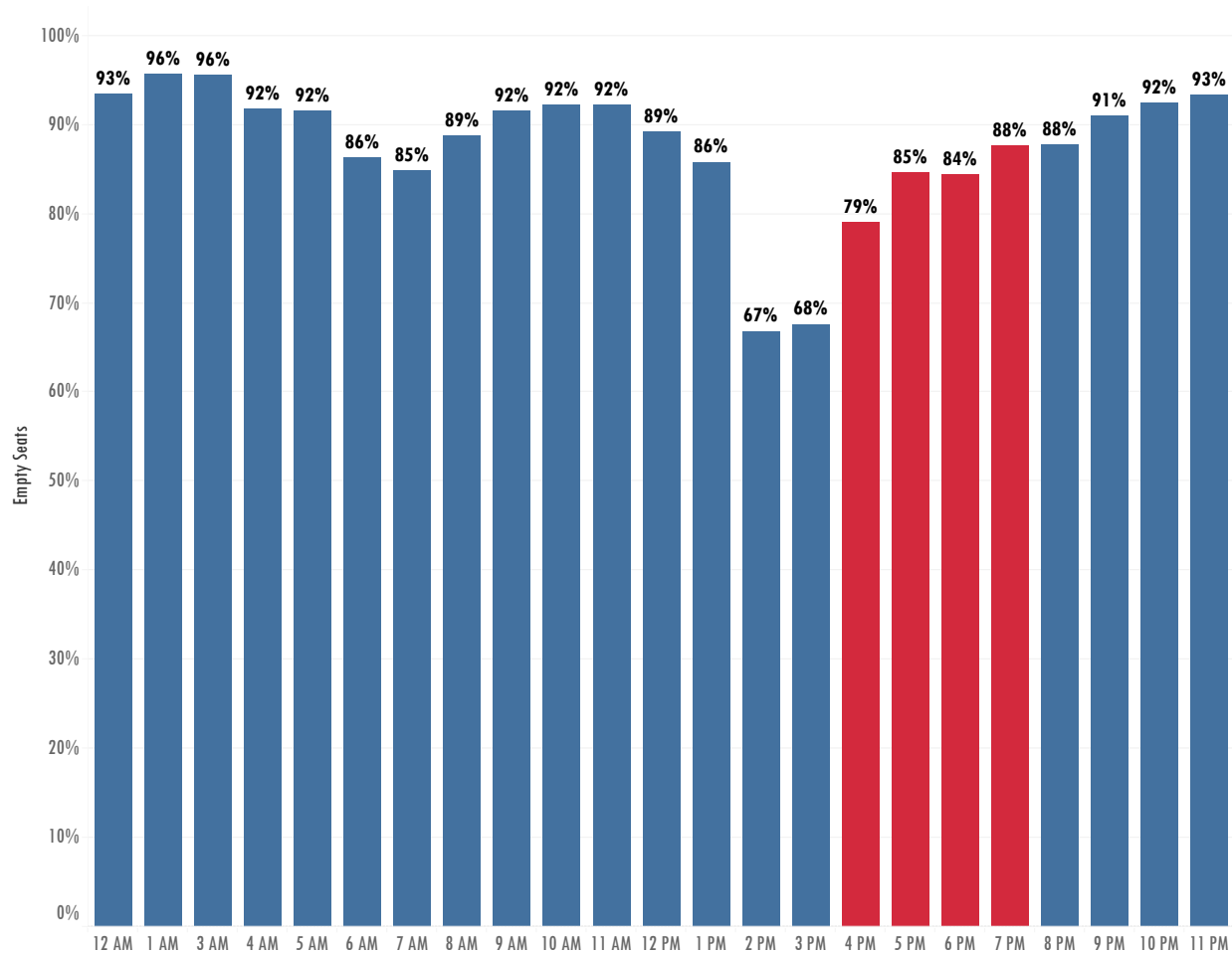
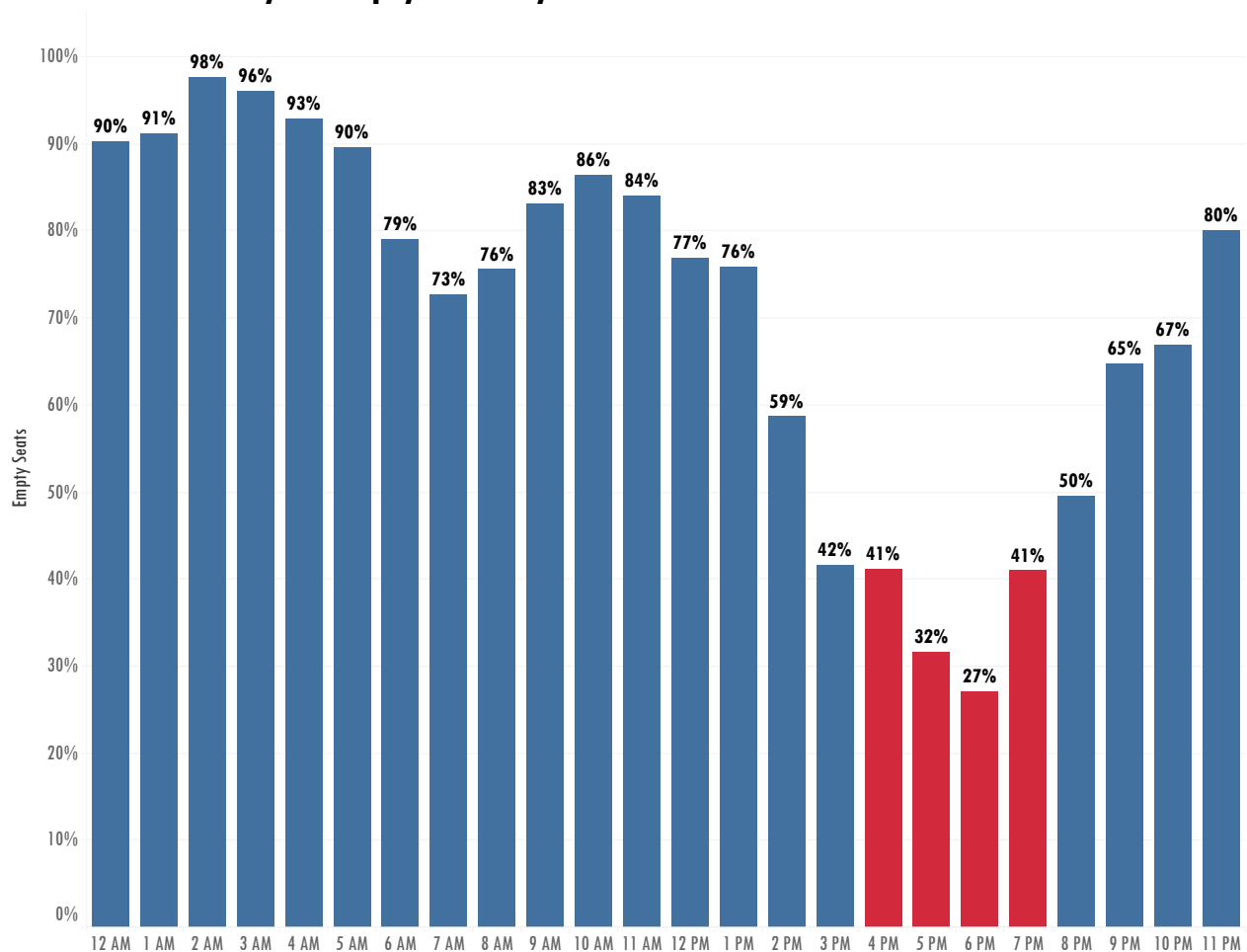


Chart 9: 2020 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour



**Chart 10: 2019 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour**



Peak hour empty seats increased by **114%** from 2019 to 2020 between Jamaica and Long Island stations.



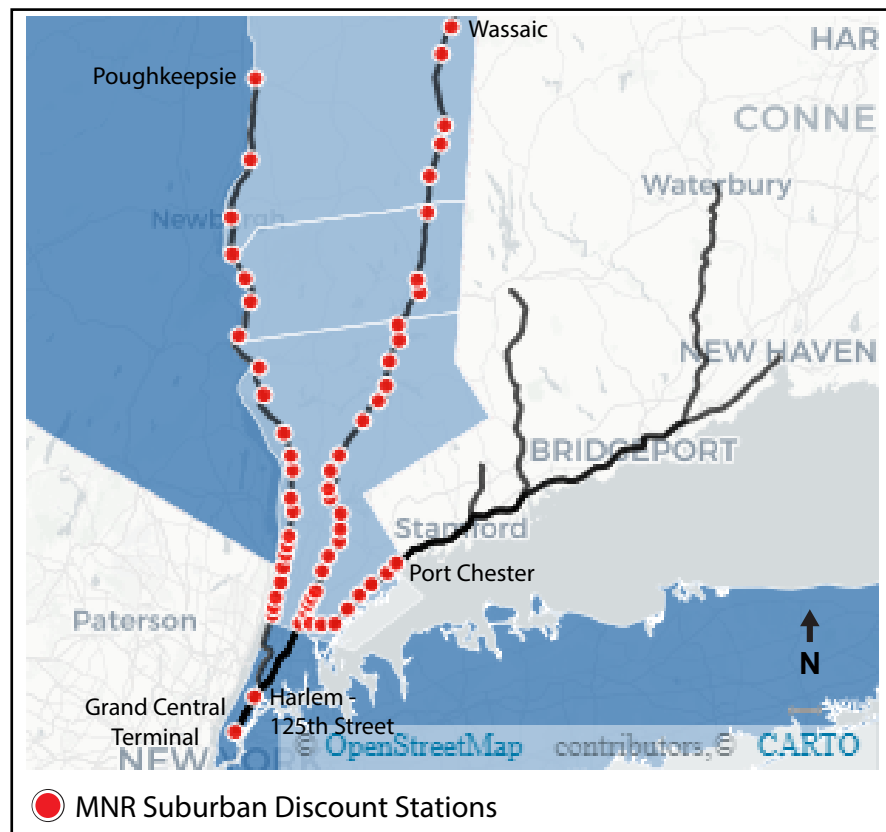
## MNR Suburban Ridership Analysis

As mentioned in the MNR City Ridership Analysis above, the railroad released its 2020 ridership analysis, comparing it to pre-pandemic ridership levels of 2019. Overall, the Railroad saw nearly 60 million fewer rides in 2020.

For the PCAC's MNR ridership analysis, the maximum load point of trains traveling to and from Grand Central Terminal was used to determine seating availability for both city and suburban riders. The maximum load point is the count of the highest number of passengers recorded on each line between two outlying stations at any given point – therefore, the city and suburban analyses are one and the same.

For inbound trips, counts are conducted at least one stop prior to Harlem-125th Street; and outbound trips counts are conducted at least one station stop after Harlem-125th Street.<sup>55</sup> For these findings, refer to the MNR City Ridership Analysis (p.13), and Appendix B & C (p.30 & 37) for more detailed methodology and ridership findings for 2019.

### MNR Suburban Discount Map



<sup>55</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Metro-North Railroad Fall 2019 Ridership Book – GCT Line Counts*.

The following visuals illustrate 2019 off-peak empty seats between MNR Hudson, Harlem, and New Haven Line stations and Grand Central Terminal.



### Hudson Line



### Harlem Line



### New Haven Line



## Phase II

## Implement Off-Peak & Reverse Peak Suburban Discount Pilot Programs

Provide suburban discounts for all commuter rail riders traveling to and from New York City and within suburban zones, including discounts for MNR riders within New York State on the New Haven Line.

- **Transparency:** Incorporate an Off-Peak and Reverse Peak Suburban Discount Pilot Program component into the fare restructuring study of the Freedom Ticket Task Force included in Recommendation 2 to provide timely recommendations; make ridership and revenue data public; identify funding opportunities; and provide quarterly reports to the MTA Board.
- **Service:** Restore pre-pandemic service, expand service frequency where needed, and make needed adjustments to midday and shoulder-of-the-peak service to accommodate more riders traveling during these times.
- **Crews:** Ensure appropriate staffing levels and necessary training for all railroad personnel to be equipped with the knowledge of the new fare program to better assist riders.
- **Transfers:**
  - Work with local elected officials to help identify funding opportunities to provide transfers to New York City Transit subways and buses for city-bound commuters and suburb-bound reverse-commuters.
  - Work with suburban bus operators to improve connections to rail stations and develop funding strategies to provide transfers between modes and providers.<sup>56</sup>
- **Fare Payment Flexibility:** Expedite OMNY rollout on the commuter railroads to allow for easier reduced fare implementation.

### • Expansion Projects:

- Include these discounts in developing service plans for East Side Access (ESA), LIRR's Third Track, and Penn Stations Access (PSA), and examine ridership data to determine feasibility of including peak-hour suburban discounts as operational capacity expands.
- In addition to weekday discounts, include weekend one-way discounts similar to the CityTicket program to support inter-zone suburban weekend travel.<sup>57</sup>

### Current Suburban Discounts:

Both railroads have intermediate fares between certain zones and stations. On the LIRR, one-way fares within a specific zone and between neighboring zones are just \$3.25. For example, in Zone 10 the \$3.25 fare is good for travel within Zone 10 and to Zones 9 and 12. This fare is in place to encourage local travel.

On MNR's Harlem Line, travel between Scarsdale through North White Plains is just \$3.00. This is also true for travel between stations like Valhalla and Chappaqua, and Mount Vernon West and Crestwood.

While these discounted fares are low and provide relief to some riders, more can still be done. Between zones 4 and 10 on the LIRR, one-way off-peak fares are \$7.50, with some off-peak one-way fares climbing to \$17.00 - \$22.25. While these riders are traveling further distances, these fares could be lowered to encourage even more people to get onboard.<sup>58</sup>

## Phase II

## Make Phase I Pilot Programs permanent and establish benchmarks for Phase II permanence

<sup>56</sup> See Appendix E: Suburban Bus Connections for more details on the need to provide improved connections and transfers between suburban bus operators and the MTA's commuter railroads' which also includes discussion points on the relatively unknown UniTicket program, p.39.

<sup>57</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *CityTicket*, Date accessed: February 9, 2021, <https://new.mta.info/fares/Cityticket>.

<sup>58</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *LIRR and Metro-North fares*, Date accessed: September 23, 2020, <https://new.mta.info/fares/lirr-metro-north>.



## Outer Borough Transportation Account (OBTA)

The Outer Borough Transportation Account (OBTA)<sup>59</sup> was created in 2018 as part of the New York City Transportation Assistance Fund and came out of an agreement reached when Central Business District Tolling became law. Funds from this account are to be used specifically for MTA operating and capital expenditures in Bronx, Kings, Queens and Richmond counties and for any projects that improve transportation connections from these counties to New York County. The goal of this legislation is to address inequities in communities that are underserved by transit and includes a funding mechanism that will support it. However, while the merits of this legislation are pointing in the right direction, the PCAC believes that the legislation is outdated, especially when considering the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including that some commuters may no longer purchase a monthly ticket but rather may look for more flexible options like 20-trip tickets to better accommodate hybrid work schedules, and that the legislation does not go far enough in providing real relief to outer borough commuters. Furthermore, the PCAC believes that the legislation should be expanded to include resources for suburban commuters as well.

As is, the legislation calls for 20 percent discounts for city LIRR monthly ticket holders, while MNR city riders would receive only 10 percent discounts. Comparing these proposed discounts to the current Atlantic Ticket discounts, the difference is clear. Plus, Atlantic Ticket weeklies include transfers to subways and buses so riders can complete their trips under one discounted fare option. The PCAC believes the OBTA funds would be more useful if applied to an expanded Freedom Ticket concept.

The Freedom Ticket proposal is more overarching and will attract more riders back to the system. As commuting patterns are changing, riders will need improved options that are more flexible to reflect these commutes. Riders need their nearest transit connection to be truly affordable and provide the flexibility that Freedom Ticket can offer. Otherwise, many will still opt for cheaper subway and bus fares, or driving, continuing to render their closest commuter rail option unfeasible.

**Table 5: Outer Borough Transportation Account Discounts vs. Atlantic Ticket Discounts**

MONTHLY TICKETS	LIRR (Zone 3 to Zone 1)	MNR (City Stations to GCT)	OBTA		Freedom Ticket (Atlantic Ticket)
Commuter Railroad	\$234	\$216	(LIRR)* \$188	(MNR)* \$194	\$60 weekly x 4 =
MetroCard	\$127	\$127	\$127	\$127	
Combined Fares	\$361	\$343	\$314	\$321	\$240

(LIRR)\* = 20% discounts

(MNR)\* = 10% discounts

Atlantic Ticket discounts are cheaper than OBTA + MetroCard by:

**24%**  
(LIRR)

**25%**  
(MNR)

<sup>59</sup> The New York State Senate, *SECTION 1270-I: New York City Transportation Assistance Fund*, (April 27, 2018), Date accessed: August 11, 2021, <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PBA/1270-I>.

## Conclusion

The MTA faces significant challenges as it addresses the immediate and longer-term effects of the pandemic, including by finding creative ways to regain ridership and recoup revenue, while addressing equity issues in transit. The MTA must take a proactive approach by reinventing the way it provides and charges for service to ensure that riders in areas with the longest commutes and fewest options have access to transit – especially on the LIRR and MNR, which for many are financially inaccessible.

It is time for the MTA to re-envision its fare structure to:

- Help regional riders and essential workers travel more affordably and efficiently.
- Fill empty commuter rail seats with fare-paying riders.
- Support regional economic recovery efforts.
- Attract drivers out of their cars in time for congestion pricing implementation, reducing roadway congestion and CO2 emissions.

Crucial to achieving these goals are immediately making improvements to the current Atlantic Ticket Pilot Program and expanding the Freedom Ticket concept to city commuter rail stations. These actions must be followed by implementation of suburban commuter discounts and making permanent the Atlantic Ticket and its city expansion. Furthermore, beyond the here and now, the PCAC recognizes how Freedom Ticket expansion – coupled with system expansions – will provide a more efficient and connected regional transit system. The convergence of the MTA's major capital expansion projects including East Side Access, Penn Station Access, and Long Island's Third Track, will add substantial capacity that, when coupled with plans for sufficient service, will allow the Freedom Ticket concept to be made available at all hours of the day. In addition, motorists will have an attractive alternative to driving once congestion pricing is finally implemented: that alternative should be the region's commuter rail system.

Transforming not only the MTA's organizational structure but also its fare structure will be crucial in this new paradigm – now is the time to act as our region and country have pledged to “Build Back Better.” The MTA has a unique opportunity to help guide its ridership back by lowering commuter rail fares – establishing the building blocks to a more equitable future, while helping to restore good faith among riders in this time of great need. Finding creative ways to bring ridership back – and maintain it for years to come – lies within the Freedom Ticket concept, which is needed now, more than ever.

## Appendix A: LIRR City Ridership Analysis

With the Atlantic Ticket already in place for Southeast Queens and Brooklyn residents, the PCAC conducted an updated LIRR ridership analysis of trips between Jamaica and Penn Station to determine opportunities there. Our analysis, pre-COVID-19, found that seat availability during peak hours remained mostly insufficient, while off-peak empty seats were much more plentiful than during peak hours. Our 2020 ridership analysis found substantial seating availability at all hours of the day as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pre-COVID-19 analysis was compared to the 2020 ridership analysis.

### Methodology

- Available capacity was calculated using LIRR weekday ridership counts.
- Peak and off-peak ridership data was analyzed for all trains traveling between Penn Station and Jamaica, and on the Port Washington Branch between Penn Station and Little Neck.
- Since the Port Washington Branch does not run through Jamaica, all Port Washington Branch data is for the entire Branch – between Port Washington and Penn Station in both directions.
- Trains stopping at and/or terminating at Kew Gardens, Forest Hills, Woodside, Hunterspoint Avenue, Long Island City, and Far Rockaway were included in the ridership data analysis.
- **Peak hours:** 6-10 AM; 4-8 PM

The PCAC determined that trains with 25 percent or less available capacity might not be able to accommodate increased ridership from Freedom Ticket – negatively impacting current LIRR riders who have long distances to travel. Many of these trains were mostly full and seats would be difficult to find. However, in 2020, no trains in service had 25 percent or fewer available seats – all trains had room to accommodate additional passengers.

## Appendix B: Pre-Pandemic Metro-North City Ridership Analysis

With the success of the Atlantic Ticket Pilot Program on the LIRR, the PCAC believes it is time for the concept to be implemented for city MNR riders as well. Our pre-COVID-19 analysis found that seat availability during peak hours was mostly insufficient, while empty seats were much more plentiful during off-peak hours.

### Methodology

- Available capacity was calculated using Grand Central Terminal (GCT) weekday ridership counts.
- Peak and off-peak ridership data was analyzed for all trains traveling between the Bronx and GCT. This analysis included Hudson, Harlem, and New Haven Line trains.
- The maximum load point was used to determine seating availability. The maximum load point is simply a count of the most passengers carried at any given time while enroute. The maximum load point varies from train to train – using this count ensured what the availability seating capacity was while trains were at their fullest point.
- **Peak hours:** 6-10 AM; 4-8 PM

The PCAC determined that trains with 25 percent or less available capacity might not be able to accommodate increased ridership from Freedom Ticket. Seats would be difficult to find and with many of the trains mostly full, MNR riders who have long distances to travel would be negatively impacted.

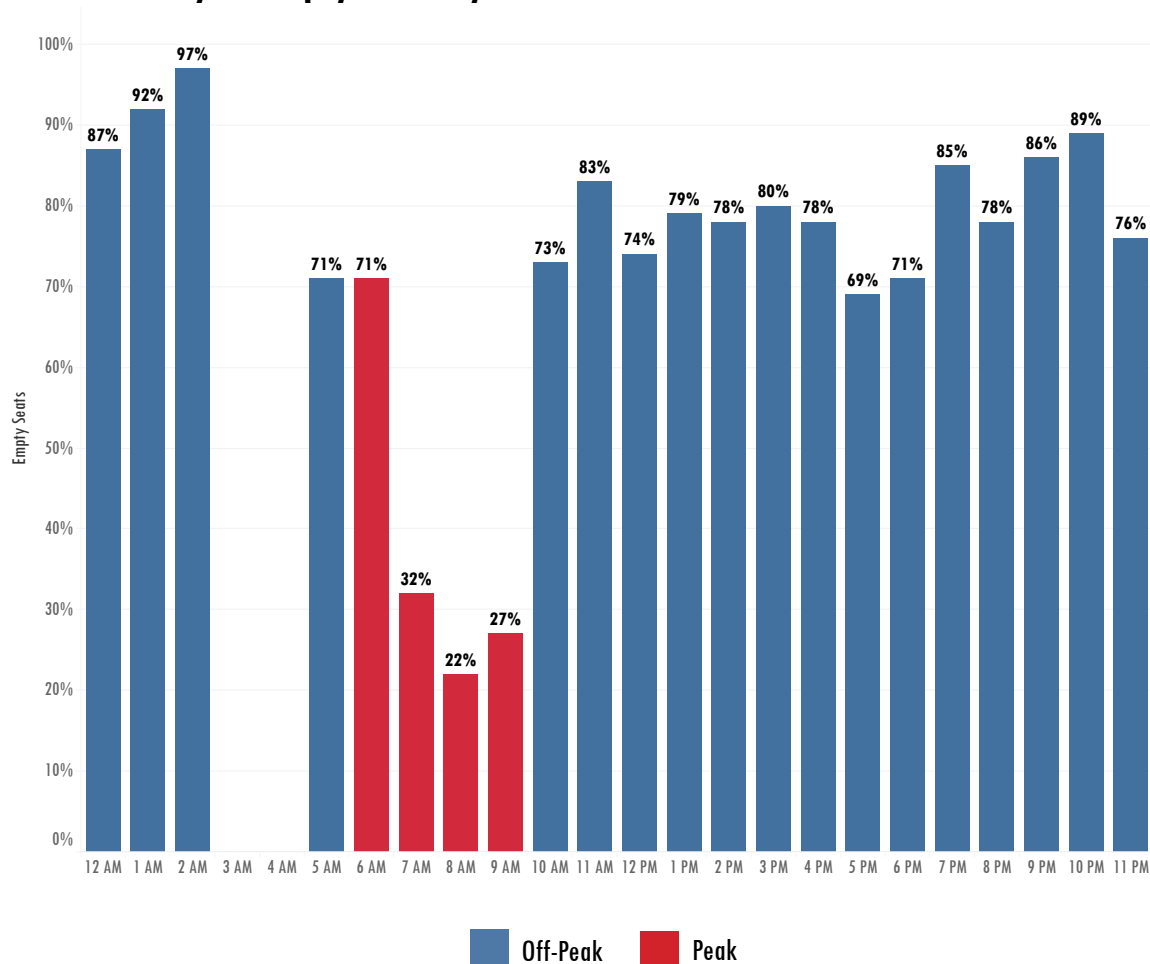


## MNR Hudson Line to Grand Central

During the AM peak, available seating on the Hudson Line going into Grand Central had some capacity constraints overall, with 40 percent of seats being empty; five of the fourteen peak hour trains had at or under 25 percent empty seats. The five trains in question were spread throughout the morning peak;

however, there were no capacity constraints during the 6 AM hour. During off-peak hours, available capacity was at 79 percent total empty seats, with no trains at or under the 25 percent empty seat threshold.

**Chart 1: 2019 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour**

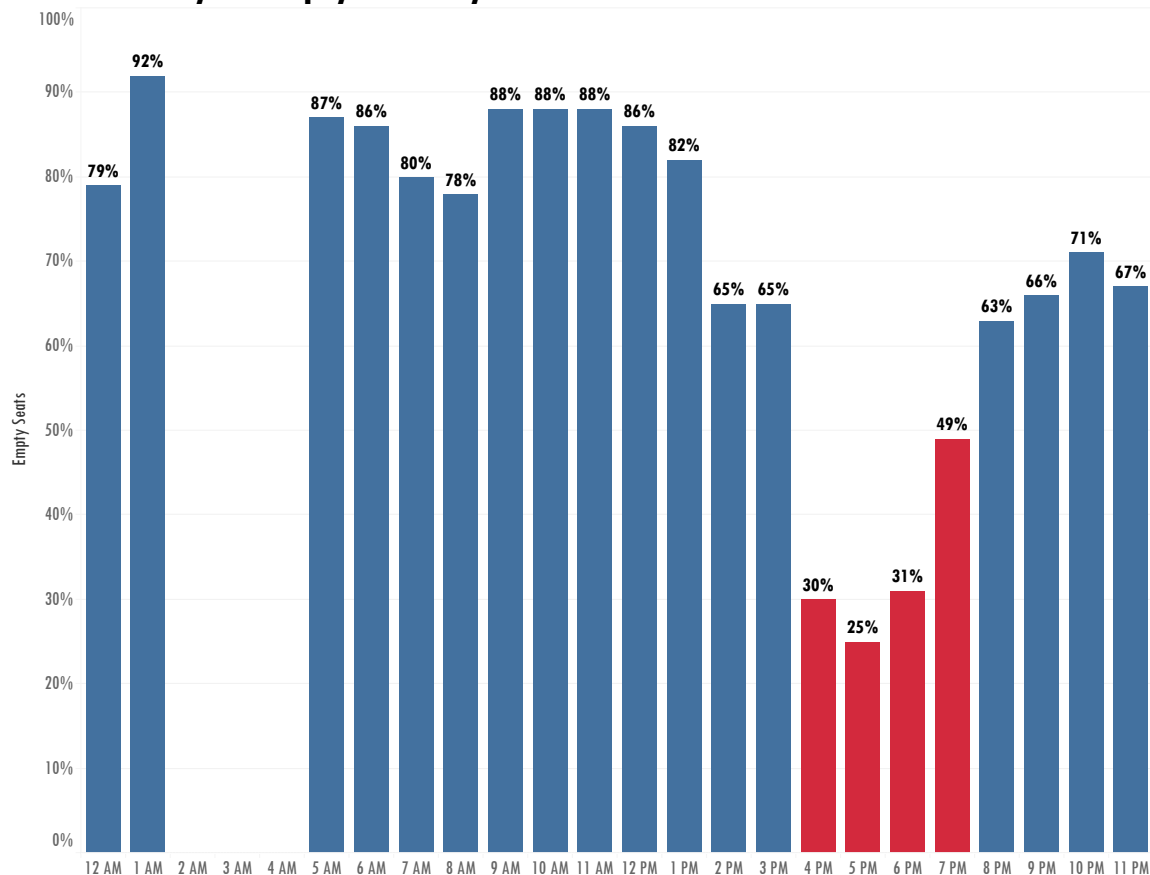


## Grand Central to MNR Hudson Line

During the PM peak, the Hudson Line going north from Grand Central had some capacity constraints with 34 percent of seats being empty – four of the eleven peak hour trains had at or under 25 percent empty seats. The four trains in question were spread

throughout all morning peak hours. During off-peak hours, available capacity was at 79 percent total empty seats, with no trains at or under the 25 percent empty seat threshold.

**Chart 2: 2019 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour**

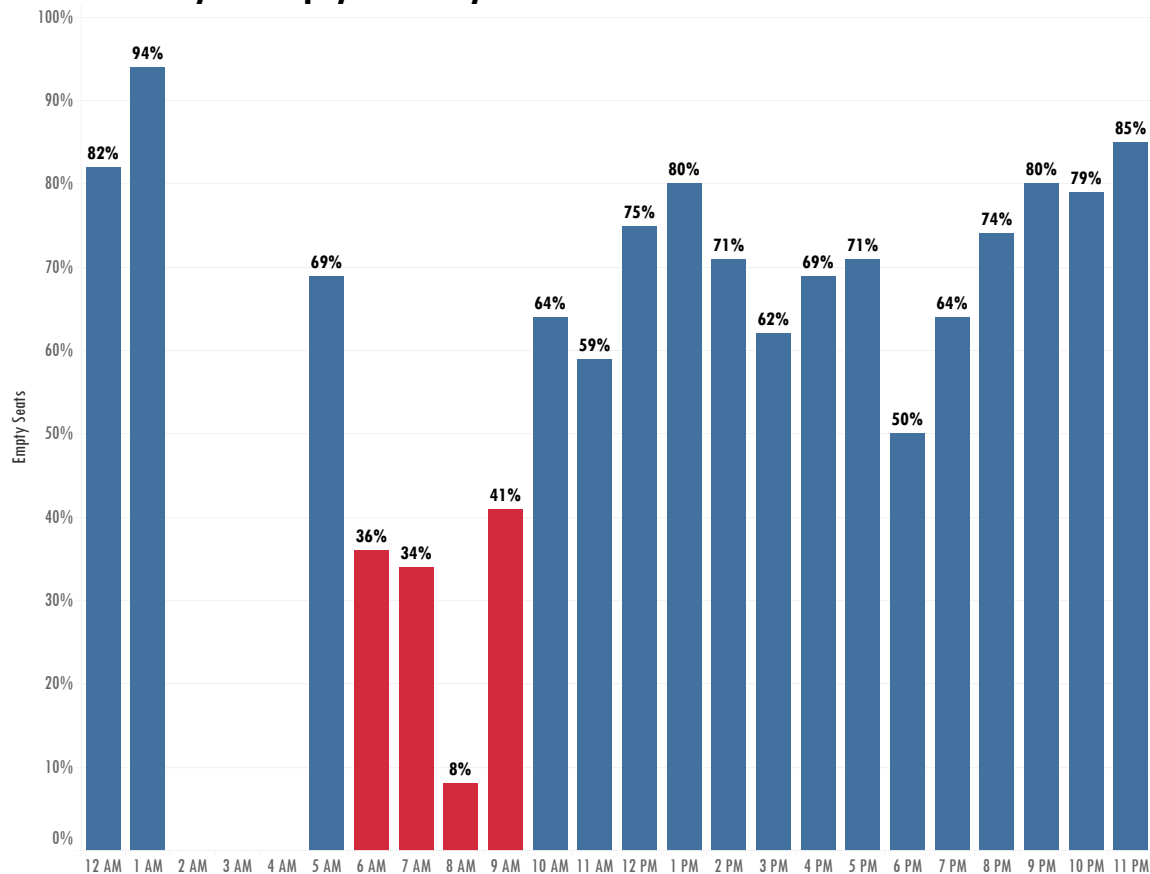


## MNR Harlem Line to Grand Central

During the AM peak, available seating on the Harlem Line going into Grand Central had some capacity constraints, with 35 percent of seats being empty – four of the ten peak hour trains had at or under 25 percent empty seats. The four trains in question were

spread throughout the morning peak, however, there were minimal capacity constraints during the 7 AM hour. During off-peak hours, available capacity was at 70 percent total empty seats, with no trains at or under the 25 percent empty seat threshold.

**Chart 3: 2019 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour**

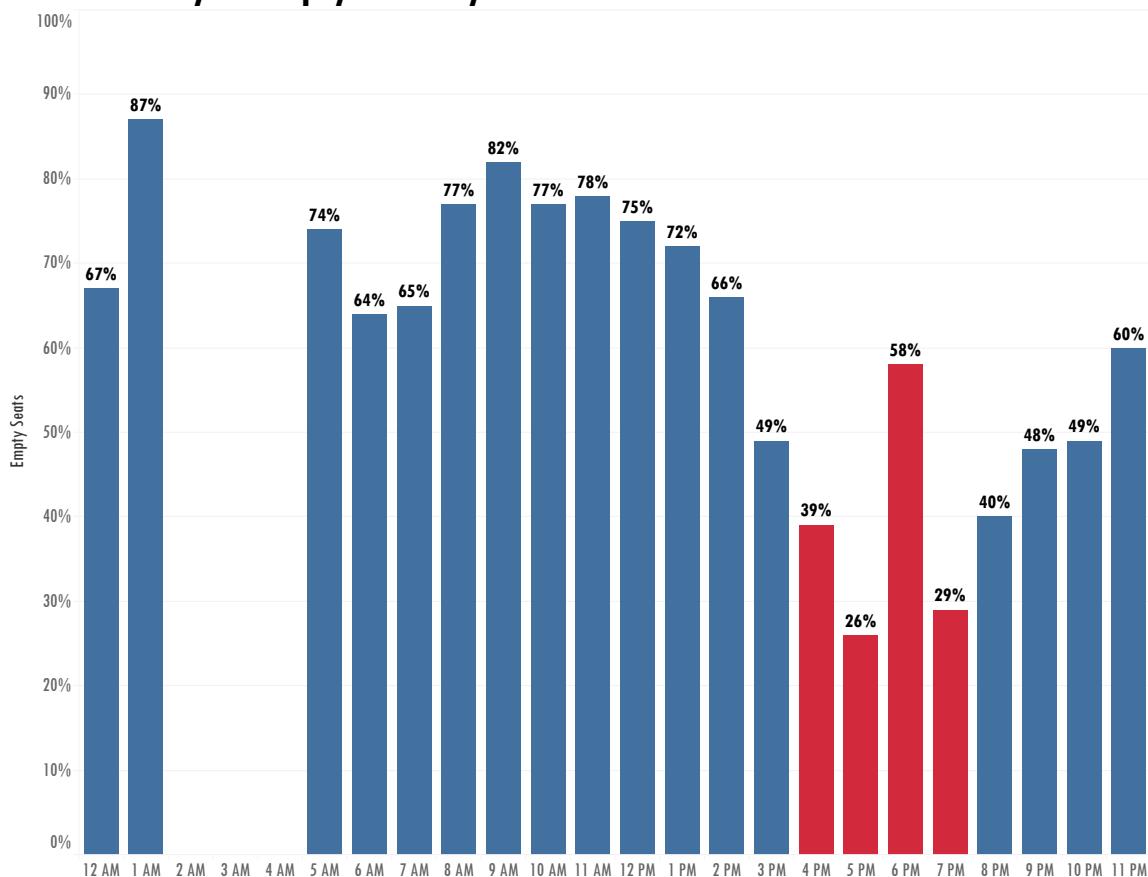


## Grand Central to MNR Harlem Line

During the PM peak, available seating on the Harlem Line going outbound from Grand Central had some capacity constraints with 38 percent total empty seats – two of the eight peak hour trains were at or under 25 percent empty seats. The two trains in question were during the 5 PM and 7 PM hours.

During off-peak hours, available capacity was at 67 percent total empty seats, with no trains at or under the 25 percent empty seat threshold.

**Chart 4: 2019 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour**



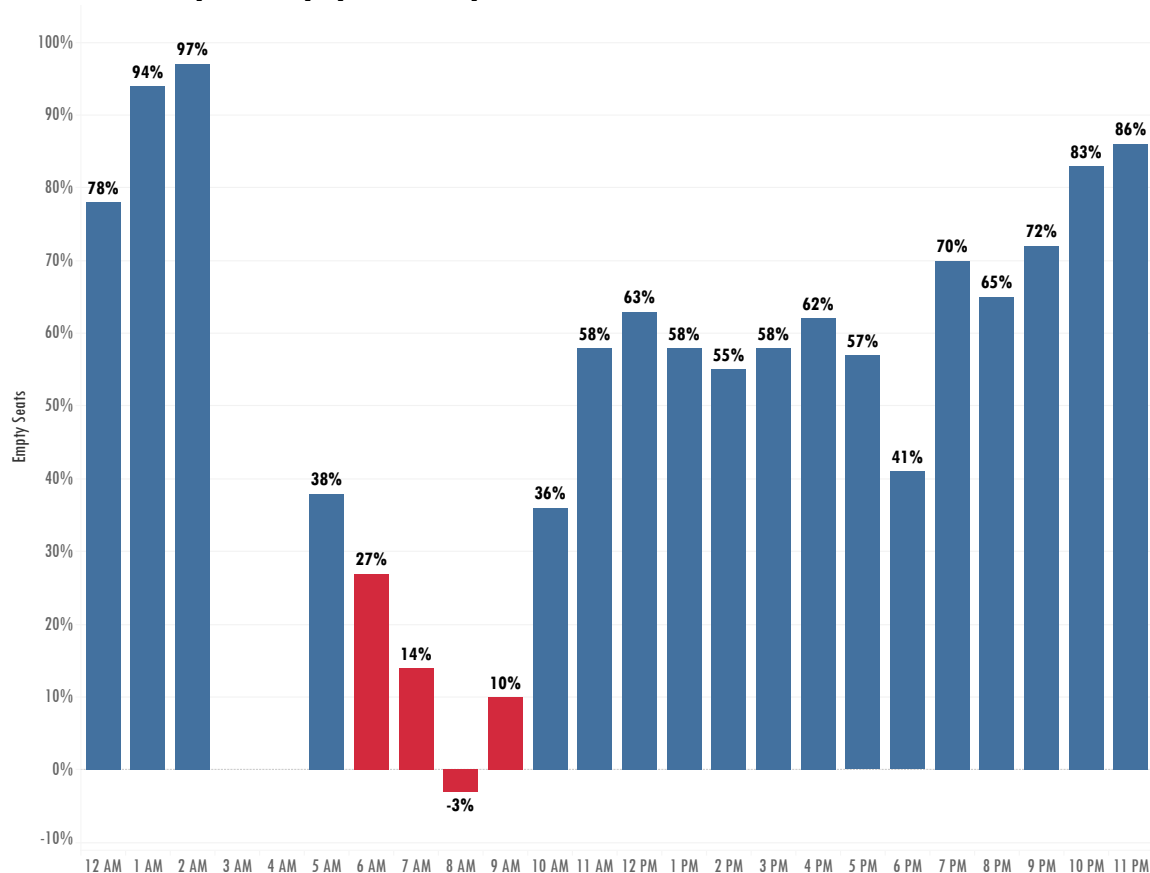


## MNR New Haven Line to Grand Central

During the AM peak, available seating on the New Haven Line going into Grand Central had severe capacity constraints, with only 13 percent of all seats being empty – seven of the nine peak trains were at or under 25 percent empty seats.

During off-peak hours, available capacity was at 62 percent total empty seats, with four trains at or under the 25 percent empty seat threshold.

**Chart 5: 2019 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour**

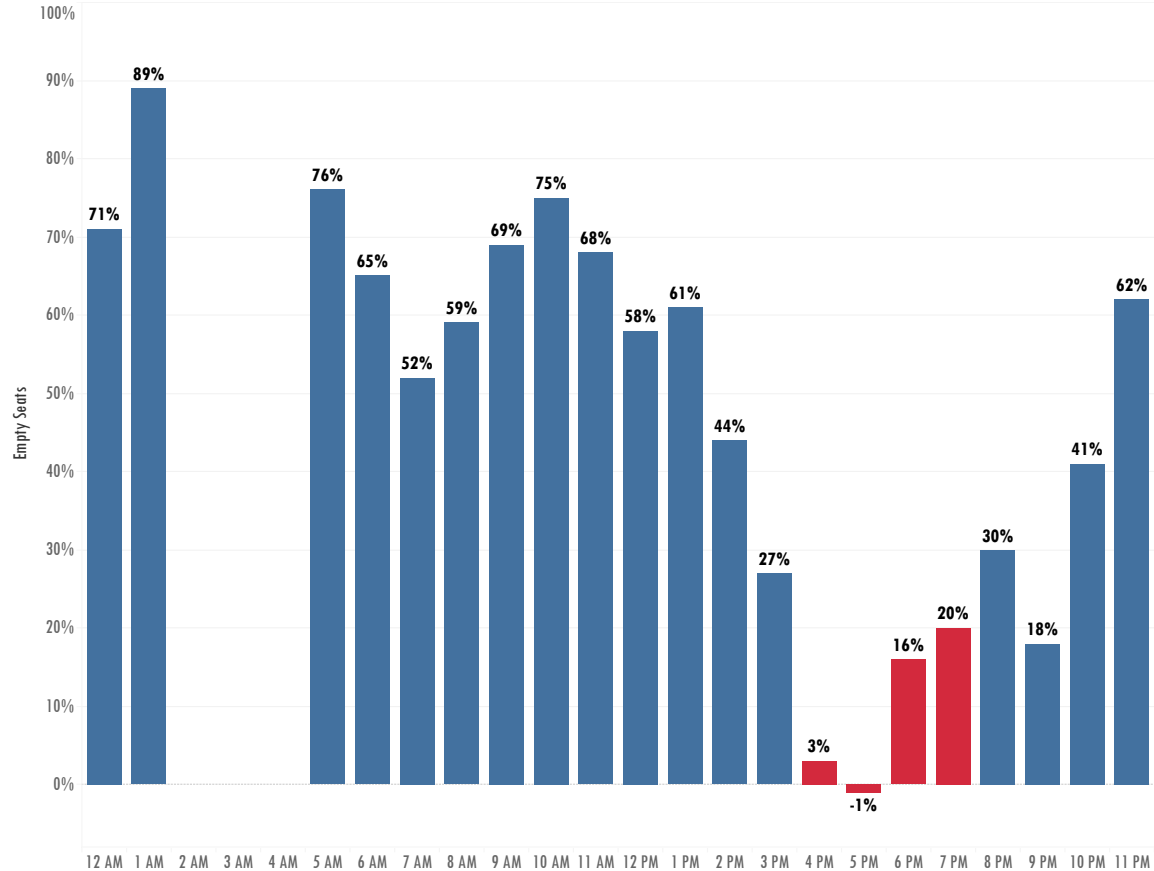


# Grand Central to MNR New Haven Line

During the PM peak, available seating on the New Haven Line going outbound from Grand Central had severe capacity constraints, with only 8 percent of all seats being empty – seven of the eight peak trains were at or under 25 percent empty seats.

During off-peak hours, available capacity was at 56 percent total empty seats, with three trains at or under the 25 percent empty seat threshold.

Chart 6: 2019 Weekday % Empty Seats by Hour



## Appendix C: LIRR Suburban Pre-Pandemic & 2020 Ridership Analysis; MNR Suburban Pre-Pandemic Ridership Analysis

In addition to conducting a New York City-centered ridership analysis, the PCAC also analyzed suburban ridership data for both LIRR and MNR to see what fare adjustment opportunities exist based on ridership capacity findings. Due to data availability, LIRR pre-pandemic and 2020 ridership analyses were conducted and compared; MNR only had 2019 data available so a comparison to 2020 ridership count data could not be conducted.

### Methodology

- **LIRR:** Available capacity was calculated using LIRR weekday ridership counts.
- **LIRR:** Peak and off-peak ridership data was analyzed for all trains traveling between Long Island and Jamaica, and along the Port Washington Branch, in both directions.
- **LIRR:** Since the Port Washington Branch does not run through Jamaica, all Port Washington Branch data is for the entire Branch – between Port Washington and Penn Station in both directions.
- **MNR:** Peak and off-peak ridership data was analyzed for all trains on the Hudson, Harlem, and New Haven Lines traveling between the northern suburbs and Grand Central Terminal, using GCT weekday ridership counts. West of Hudson MNR service in Rockland and Orange counties was not included in the analysis due to operational agreements with New Jersey Transit and since Manhattan-bound riders have to make connections to NJ Transit before entering the city.
- **MNR:** The maximum load point was used to determine seating availability. The maximum load point is simply a count of the most passengers carried at any given time while enroute. The maximum load point varies from train to train – using this count ensures what the available seating capacity is while trains are at their fullest point. Therefore, this data is the same as the MNR City Ridership Analysis above, as the peak load point covers the entirety of each line (See Appendix B for ridership findings).
- **Peak hours:** 6-10 AM; 4-8 PM

The PCAC determined that trains with 25 percent or less available capacity might not be able to accommodate increased ridership from Freedom Ticket – negatively impacting current commuter rail riders who have long distances to travel. Many of these trains were mostly full and seats would be difficult to find. However, in 2020, no trains in service had 25 percent or fewer available seats – all trains had room to accommodate additional passengers.

## Appendix D: Fare Restructuring Lessons Learned

**Boston:** The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has embarked on a massive initiative called “Fare Transformation.” The MBTA’s goal is to provide system riders with a simpler way to get to destinations faster. The Authority has taken advantage of new fare payment technology to lower CharlieTicket and cash fares to CharlieCard levels – starting with the Fairmount Line Pilot Program.<sup>60</sup>

From 2012 through 2016, ridership increased 183 percent from just 800 to over 2,200 weekday trips – showing strong demand for the Fairmount Line.<sup>61</sup> For the pilot program, the Fairmount Line was incorporated into Zone 1A, resulting in lower fares and free transfers to the Red Line at South Station, the Silver Line, and to local buses.<sup>62</sup> The fare changes took effect on September 1, 2020, with additional phases to follow.<sup>63</sup>

**Los Angeles:** In the early 1980s, L.A. Metro enacted Proposition A, which included funds to cut transit fares from 85-cents to just 50-cents between 1982 and 1985. During that time, ridership increased over 39 percent, from 359 million to over 500 million annual boardings. After 1985, when the 85-cent fare resumed, ridership decreased and stayed stagnant for years.<sup>64</sup>

By the 1990s, many bus riders grew tired of poor bus service, overcrowding, and increasing fares. In 1992, the Bus Riders Union (BRU) was created. In 1994 a coalition of groups, which included the BRU, brought a class-action lawsuit against Metro and was awarded a victory that produced a consent decree that allowed for new bus purchases and decreased fares. From 1996 to 2007, L.A. Metro’s ridership

increased from 363 million passenger trips to over 495 million passenger trips. However, since the consent decree expired in 2008, ridership has been steadily decreasing.<sup>65</sup>

Between 2015 and 2018, Metrolink in Southern California experimented with commuter rail fare reductions. In 2015, fares were reduced on the Antelope Valley Line by 25 percent, and led to a 29 percent ridership increase. While revenues initially decreased by 12 percent, after a year and a half the program became revenue neutral. The agency had factored in a total subsidy of \$5.46 million but only needed a \$2 million subsidy that was discontinued by July 2018 as enough collected fares rendered the subsidy unnecessary.<sup>66 67</sup>

In December 2016, Metrolink reduced fares on its Perris Valley Line by 25 percent, resulting in ridership gains over 50 percent, significantly exceeding the 15 percent average rate of fare reduction, producing a net positive revenue effect.<sup>68</sup>

In July 2018, Metrolink reduced fares by 25 percent on its San Bernardino Line, resulting in an 8 percent ridership increase by August 2018, followed by a 10 percent increase in October compared to 2017. The program is still underway and pre-COVID was expected to be revenue neutral by 2022.<sup>69</sup>

60 Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), *Fare Transformation*, Date accessed: February 4, 2021, <https://www.mbta.com/fares/fare-transformation>.

61 The Boston Foundation, *Increasing Ridership On The Fairmount Line*, (April 2017), Date accessed: February 4, 2021, <https://www.tbf.org/-/media/tbforg/files/reports/increasing-ridership-on-the-fairmount-line.pdf>.

62 Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), *Fairmount Line Weekday Service Pilot*, Date accessed: February 4, 2021, <https://www.mbta.com/projects/fairmount-line-weekday-service-pilot>.

63 Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), *Fare Transformation*, Date accessed: February 4, 2021, <https://www.mbta.com/fares/fare-transformation>.

64 LA Metro - The Source, *Farless transit: A Q&A om Metro's study to eliminate fares*, (September 11, 2020), Date accessed: February 5, 2021, <https://thesource.metro.net/2020/09/11/fareless-transit-a-qa-on-metros-study-to-eliminate-fares/>.

65 Zilliac, Chloe, Sierra, *L.A.’s Transit Ridership Is Plummeting*, (November 12, 2019), Date accessed: February 5, 2021, <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/las-transit-ridership-plummeting>.

66 Los Angeles Metro, *Antelope Valley Line Study Update: North Los Angeles Transportation Coalition Meeting*, (July 22, 2019), Date accessed: February 5, 2021, [http://metrolink.granicus.com/DocumentViewer.php?file=metrolink\\_3523eb9d73311fd96ec56797995b7976.pdf&view=1](http://metrolink.granicus.com/DocumentViewer.php?file=metrolink_3523eb9d73311fd96ec56797995b7976.pdf&view=1).

67 Los Angeles Metro, *Metrolink Antelope Valley Line 100% Fare Enforcement and 25% Fare Reduction Pilot Programs*, (March 30, 2016), Date accessed: February 5, 2021, [http://metrolink.granicus.com/DocumentViewer.php?file=metrolink\\_3f89639e956b376f32e4386a348c2be7.pdf&view=1#page=14](http://metrolink.granicus.com/DocumentViewer.php?file=metrolink_3f89639e956b376f32e4386a348c2be7.pdf&view=1#page=14).

68 Metrolink, *Metrolink Board of Directors Meeting*, (February 9, 2018), Date accessed: February 5, 2021, [https://metrolink.granicus.com/DocumentViewer.php?file=metrolink\\_obeab70cabe1f07d9fc4ade3266bd178.pdf&view=1#page=14](https://metrolink.granicus.com/DocumentViewer.php?file=metrolink_obeab70cabe1f07d9fc4ade3266bd178.pdf&view=1#page=14).

69 Metrolink, *Metrolink Board of Directors Meeting*, (November 9, 2018), Date accessed: February 5, 2021, [https://metrolink.granicus.com/DocumentViewer.php?file=metrolink\\_obeab70cabe1f07d9fc4ade3266bd178.pdf&view=1](https://metrolink.granicus.com/DocumentViewer.php?file=metrolink_obeab70cabe1f07d9fc4ade3266bd178.pdf&view=1).



## Appendix E: Outer Borough and Suburban Bus Connections

Improving city and suburban bus connections and transfer abilities to both the LIRR and MNR will be necessary to support successful railroad fare reductions and attract more riders. In order to fill empty seats on the railroads, bus connections and transfers between these two modes must be improved – allowing those who do not own cars and live further away from the railroad to travel via local buses to the train and encourage others to leave their cars at home and use transit for all segments of their trips. This would also help further reduce CO2 emissions.

With the exception of some Long Beach Bus services<sup>70</sup> and some of the MNR connecting services,<sup>71</sup> buses are not scheduled to hold connections with trains or to make specific timed train connections. This is in part due to the difficulty of coordinating more frequent bus service with current commuter rail service, which runs at varying headways. In fact, during the Queens Bus Network Redesign community events and through online input, many riders expressed the need to improve scheduling between buses and trains.<sup>72</sup>

Some commuter rail stations are not directly served by bus service, preventing people who live further than walking distance from using them if they don't own a car. For example, in Northeast Queens, both the Auburndale and Douglaston LIRR stations are not directly served by any bus routes.<sup>73</sup> In addition, instead of taking riders from surrounding communities to the railroads, routes on suburban bus systems often run parallel to the railroads to accommodate the large number of people who do not

use the railroads due to high fares and infrequent service. In fact, most of the highest-ridership NICE Bus routes – such as the N4, N22 and N24 – the most frequent in the system, parallel the LIRR.<sup>74 75</sup>

The last LIRR origin-destination survey, conducted in 2012-14, found that only 6 percent of LIRR riders from Queens and Brooklyn got to their train via bus – the share for Nassau was 3 percent, and for Suffolk was 2 percent. This clearly illustrates that many more riders could benefit from improved bus connections to these stations.<sup>76</sup>

In MNR territory, similar issues exist. The Bee-Line's #1 bus parallels the Hudson Line, connecting to NYC Transit's 1 train at the Van Cortlandt Park – 242<sup>nd</sup> Street station. In addition, the Bee-Line's #2 and #3 bus routes also parallel the Hudson Line, providing service to and from Van Cortlandt Park station before veering off and traveling further east to provide service in Yonkers.

A 2019 study done by Westchester Bee-Line found that these buses were packed. Bus ridership was higher southbound in the AM and northbound in the PM. The #1 bus corridor had 8,315 daily riders, while the #2 bus corridor had 8,359 – making them the second and third highest ranked bus routes in Westchester County. These buses reach full capacity despite frequent service, often causing passengers to have to wait for the next bus. Twenty percent of systemwide Bee-Line ridership transfers to the subway. Service on the combined #1/2/3 bus corridor runs extremely frequently – as often as every three minutes during the peak. 3,879 riders boarded northbound at 242<sup>nd</sup>, and 3,576 alighted southbound on weekdays.<sup>77</sup> Clearly the demand is there, and more options are needed. Providing better connected bus

70 City of Long Beach, *Transportation Brochure*, Date accessed: August 10, 2021, [https://www.longbeachny.gov/vertical/sites/%7BC3C1054A-3D3A-41B3-8896-814D00B86D2A%7D/uploads/1119-4013\\_City\\_of\\_Long\\_Beach\\_TRANSP0\\_BROCHURE\\_UPDATED.pdf](https://www.longbeachny.gov/vertical/sites/%7BC3C1054A-3D3A-41B3-8896-814D00B86D2A%7D/uploads/1119-4013_City_of_Long_Beach_TRANSP0_BROCHURE_UPDATED.pdf).

71 Metro-North Railroad, *Hudson Rail Link Schedule*, (April 12, 2021), Date accessed: August 10, 2021, [https://new.mta.info/sites/default/files/2019-08/367\\_19\\_Queens%20Bus%20Network%20Redesign\\_LATEST.pdf#page=98](https://new.mta.info/sites/default/files/2019-08/367_19_Queens%20Bus%20Network%20Redesign_LATEST.pdf#page=98).

72 Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Existing Conditions Report: A Better Way Forward – Improving Bus Travel in the World's Borough*, (August 30, 2019), Date Accessed: August 10, 2021, [https://new.mta.info/sites/default/files/2019-08/367\\_19\\_Queens%20Bus%20Network%20Redesign\\_LATEST.pdf#page=71](https://new.mta.info/sites/default/files/2019-08/367_19_Queens%20Bus%20Network%20Redesign_LATEST.pdf#page=71).

73 Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *Existing Conditions Report: A Better Way Forward – Improving Bus Travel in the World's Borough*, (August 30, 2019), Date Accessed: August 10, 2021, [http://web.archive.org/web/2021030224015/https://nicev11.msfglobal.net/Passenger-Information/FasterRide-\(1\)](http://web.archive.org/web/2021030224015/https://nicev11.msfglobal.net/Passenger-Information/FasterRide-(1)).

74 Nassau Inter-County Express (NICE Bus), *A Faster Ride: Learn About The Benefits of Bus Stop Rebalancing*, (2017), Date accessed: August 10, 2021, [https://nicev11.msfglobal.net/Passenger-Information/FasterRide-\(1\)](https://nicev11.msfglobal.net/Passenger-Information/FasterRide-(1)).

75 Nassau Inter-County Express (NICE Bus), *NICE Weekday Peak System Map*, Date Accessed: August 10, 2021, [https://www.nicebus.com/getattachment/Tools/Maps-and-Schedules/PRINT\\_WEB-System-Map.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US](https://www.nicebus.com/getattachment/Tools/Maps-and-Schedules/PRINT_WEB-System-Map.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US).

76 Long Island Rail Road, *LIRR 2012-2014 Origin and Destination Report*, (August 23, 2016), Date accessed: August 9, 2021, [http://web.mta.info/mta/planning/data/2012\\_LIRR\\_OD\\_Report\\_Volume\\_I\\_FINAL%2008232016.pdf](http://web.mta.info/mta/planning/data/2012_LIRR_OD_Report_Volume_I_FINAL%2008232016.pdf).

77 Westchester County, *Bee-Line Bus Operations Study: 242<sup>nd</sup> Street to Getty Square Corridor*, (April 2019), Date accessed: August 10, 2021, <https://transportation.westchestergov.com/images/stories/Planning/242studyfinal.pdf>.

service to Hudson Line stations, coupled with fare discounts, will give riders a more seamless and faster commute, rather than taking slow buses to subway connections in the Bronx. Instead of bus service competing with commuter rail service, it would be much more useful to have the two complement each other and coordinate schedules.

The MTA and its hopefully newly-formed Freedom Ticket Task Force should reach out to these suburban bus operators to improve service coordination and identify funding opportunities for both fare reductions and transfers. Furthermore, Westchester County is in the process of redesigning its bus network, and this would be the perfect opportunity for the MTA to coordinate with Bee-Line Bus for better service.

## UniTicket

In 1975, the UniTicket program was created to offer discounts for riders who use both commuter railroads and local bus services. UniTickets are add-ons available with the purchase of monthly or weekly tickets on the LIRR and MNR. They can be used to transfer to a limited number of New York City Transit bus routes in Queens and the Bronx, to NICE bus and Long Beach bus, and to MNR connecting transit services. However, the program is poorly advertised, unaffordable, and limited.

Similar to the Atlantic Ticket, UniTicket is not available on eTix and is at the bottom of the MTA website's fare page with limited and incorrect information – including no information on how to purchase the ticket. UniTickets are available for MNR to limited New York City Transit bus routes in the Bronx and to several connecting services including Hudson Rail Link; however, this information has been omitted from the website.

UniTickets are unaffordable. Tickets to NYC Transit buses cost an additional \$42.75 on top of regularly priced monthly railroad tickets, and \$11.25 more on top of weekly tickets. NICE Bus UniTickets are \$54.75 and \$13.25 for monthly and weekly tickets, respectively – on top of pricy railroad fares.<sup>78</sup>

Over the years, both monthly and weekly UniTickets, and one-trip joint discounted Metro-North-bus tickets, which used to be available for Westchester Bee-Line Bus, were discontinued.

To provide more affordable access between city and suburban buses, the UniTicket program should be revitalized with improved and more affordable options. The MTA should integrate the UniTicket program as part of the overall Freedom Ticket discounts to help ensure riders have affordable options at each end of their commuter rail trips.

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<sup>78</sup> Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), *LIRR and Metro-North fares*, Date accessed: August 9, 2021, <https://new.mta.info/fares/lirr-metro-north>.

## Appendix F: Platform Lengths

**Two-Car Platforms: MNR** – Melrose and Tremont.

**Four-Car Platforms: MNR** – Southbound platform at Spuyten Duyvil; Marble Hill; University Heights; Morris Heights; Williams Bridge; Woodlawn; and Wakefield.

**LIRR** – Murray Hill and Hollis.

**Six-Car Platforms: LIRR** - St. Albans and Nostrand Avenue.

**LIRR** – Kew Gardens and Forest Hills (currently can accommodate 6 cars with temporary platforms).

**Eight-Car Platforms: MNR** – Fordham and Botanical Garden.

**LIRR** - Queens Village.

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## Atlantic Ticket Tweets













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