**MTA Joint LIRR and Metro-North Committee Meeting Testimony**

**Open Waiting Rooms to Bring Back Riders**

**By Kara Gurl, PCAC Research and Communications Associate**

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Good morning! I’m Kara Gurl, Research and Communications Associate at the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA.

I’ll start with the good news: congratulations on the recent announcement that the LIRR has the best on-time performance in modern history. It’s promising that delays are going down and riders are getting to their destinations faster. But it’s hard to use on-time performance as a metric for good service when ridership and frequency are both at low points. We hope that you can tout this on-time performance as a way to entice riders back on board and that you can maintain such good metrics when ridership does bounce back. The best way to show riders who return to the railroads that they made the right decision is to give them a safe, fast, reliable, and pleasant ride.

But no one wants to wait outdoors in below freezing temperatures, especially when locked indoor waiting rooms are right before their eyes. The MTA should give LIRR riders a warm welcome back — literally — instead of leaving them out in the cold. Riders deserve to have open waiting rooms and restrooms for many more hours of the day. We understand that it’s not feasible to keep them open 24/7, but as the meaning of “rush hour” continues to evolve and riders take the train during non-traditional commuting hours, it’s important that the LIRR and Metro-North meet their needs. This includes expanding the SOS teams announced by Governor Hochul to the commuter rails to provide mental health services and resources to those in need along the LIRR and Metro-North, so that people have better options than using waiting rooms as shelter.

We all know that ridership on the railroads has taken a hit lately. The most important thing the MTA can do to get LIRR and Metro-North riders back on board is to listen to their concerns. LIRR riders have spoken, and they want to see open waiting rooms at their stations. You’re on the right track with great on-time performance and fewer delays; now, let’s prove to riders that taking transit really is the best way to get around the region.