**MTA Joint LIRR/MNR Committee Meeting**

**‘East Side Access Public Engagement and Fare Discounts”**

**By Bradley Brashears, PCAC Associate Director**

**June 27, 2022**

Good morning, I’m Bradley Brashears, Associate Director at the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC). What an exciting time for the MTA’s commuter railroads – from Penn Station Access to Penn Station reconstruction and East Side Access, these projects will truly transform commuter rail around our region.

Long-awaited East Side Access, bringing the LIRR to Grand Central, is getting closer to becoming reality with recently released service plans. This project will be transformative for riders, looking forward to faster commutes and better connections to the East Side, and comes on the heels of Third Track, which will allow for better reverse commute and job opportunities between the city and Long Island.

To be truly transformational on a regional level, extensive coordination between LIRR, Metro-North, and New York City Transit is essential so that riders from Montauk to Grand Central to Wassaic have smooth connections. That includes ensuring that subway connections won't be overloaded with changing ridership patterns.

The long-awaited major improvements heighten the need for fare discounts with transfers to subways and buses to ensure that all riders can afford to benefit from new service options. As we celebrate the four-year anniversary of the Atlantic Ticket Field Study that PCAC fought to make reality, and the MTA’s recent fare reduction pilot programs like CityTicket, 10 percent off monthlies and 20 percent off 20 trip tickets, these programs must be extended and expanded. The broader Freedom Ticket concept, calling for reduced commuter rail fares and free transfers, can be made possible by the OMNY fare payment system – truly making it One Metro New York.

But riders have questions about service changes. For some Penn-bound riders, the new service plan may feel more like a cut with fewer trains to Penn than an addition of trains to Grand Central. Riders going to Atlantic Terminal will be impacted by the long-awaited – and dreaded – Platform F, bringing shuttle-esque service with potentially longer wait times at Jamaica. This will be particularly challenging for disabled riders and people with luggage.

With such significant changes proposed for LIRR service and with increasing off-peak and weekend ridership, including 100% and 97% of pre-pandemic levels on Father’s Day for Metro-North and LIRR, respectively, riders deserve additional public meetings. Similar to the location-based and robust Queens and Bronx Bus Network Redesign public meetings, the MTA should ideally hold these public sessions as branch-by-branch meetings for more detailed information sharing and rider input. Four meetings is a start, but more are needed.

Thank you!