



PCAC

PERMANENT CITIZENS
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PCAC Statement on Grand Central Madison Proposed Service Plans June 14th, 2022

After years of speculation, the MTA-LIRR finally released its service plans for Grand Central Madison (AKA East Side Access), the most significant service overhaul in nearly 50 years for the nation's oldest and busiest commuter railroad. This project will be transformative for LIRR riders who are looking forward to faster commutes and better connections to the East Side and comes on the heels of the Third Track project, which will allow for better reverse commute and job opportunities between New York City and Long Island. It also comes ahead of congestion pricing, so making sure that commuters have the service they want and need is key, to encourage them to get riding the rails again. It's important to get things right, but it's also important that some changes be made to reflect riders' questions and concerns.

With such significant changes proposed for LIRR service, riders deserve a robust and extensive public engagement process with ample opportunity to have their voices heard. With three information sessions and only one meeting currently scheduled for riders to speak, the MTA should add additional public meetings or hearings to listen to riders. Similar to the location-based 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.

One of the biggest changes in the new approach to scheduling is the loss of direct transfers at Jamaica for many riders. Missing connections for trains that have long gaps in service – especially those in diesel territory – can add an extra hour or more to an eastbound trip. For riders heading westbound and continuing onto Penn Station or Grand Central, there will be adjustments as people figure out their next best train. Riders going to Atlantic Terminal won't be as lucky: the long-awaited – and dreaded – Platform F will be coming online to serve as the basis for the scoot service that seems to be the future of Brooklyn service. This will be particularly challenging for disabled riders and people with luggage and is especially disappointing since we have long been assured that Atlantic Terminal destinations wouldn't be relegated to a shuttle at the farthest outpost of Jamaica station. With so many jobs, schools, sports and fast connections to lower Manhattan, riders to and from Brooklyn, Long Island and Queens alike need good access and mobility options. Getting to Brooklyn shouldn't be so onerous that riders instead simply give up, stay on their train to whichever Manhattan terminal it's destined, and then get on already crowded subway lines to complete their trip to Lower Manhattan. We hope to see additional direct, one-seat rides to Atlantic Terminal as well as service increases to allow for faster and easier connections to Atlantic Terminal.

There is a lot to digest with the new draft service plan, and riders understandably have questions – not just about how changes will affect their commutes, but also how planned construction in the coming months and years might further change their day-to-day back and forth. What is the schedule for Port Washington Yard expansion, and will that improve what appear to be increases in travel time along that branch? With the completion of East River tunnel repairs and the arrival of M9A rolling stock, will LIRR service be increased further? Has there been a forecast of increases in Lex line ridership and what that will mean to an already-crowded commute for many? Riders have many thoughts about Grand Central Madison, and many reasons to be excited. But we also have many questions. We appreciate the initial meetings the MTA has set up, but hope to see more public engagement sessions to inform the LIRR Grand Central Madison service plan to ensure that riders get the service they need and deserve.