**MTA Joint LIRR/MNR Committee Meeting**

**“A More Unified Future for LIRR and Metro-North”**

**By: Kara Gurl Research & 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, PCAC.

As the seasons change and leaves fall onto the tracks, we’re glad to hear that both railroads are sharing best practices to minimize the impacts of Mother Nature on riders. The new laser trains on Metro-North, first piloted by the LIRR a few years ago, are a great example of what’s possible when the railroads use shared technology and ideas to solve common issues. The improved TrainTime app is another example of how sharing information benefits riders. Being able to toggle between timetables and buy tickets in one place makes life much easier. Collaboration also extends to the communities you serve, and the first mile last mile initiative will help increase access and ridership across both railroads. We’re excited to learn more about the next steps.

We see these as hopeful symbols of increasing synergy between Metro-North and the LIRR. A more integrated approach to fare policy would also provide a more seamless experience. Implementing Freedom Ticket would offer discounted fares for city riders on both railroads, with transfers to the subway and bus, 24/7. It would also reduce confusion due to numerous types of tickets available, and when they can be purchased and used.

To that end, we would also like to see a pilot program implemented where half fares for seniors and disabled riders are extended to morning peak hours. It's clear from ridership patterns that times have changed. Both railroads have seen non-commutation ridership rates – and revenues – come in higher than expected, especially compared to commutation rates. As the old way of riding changes, so too should the old way of thinking – that morning trains will be too crowded to accommodate these riders. It’s confusing to riders when their half fare discount might apply during the evening peak, but not in the morning. Similarly, travel in the city zones should be available at a Freedom Ticket rate during peak hours on both railroads.

East Side Access and Penn Access will represent a new, more unified future for the commuter railroads. We’re glad to see this, and hope that fare policy and best practices will continue to be united as well. Thank you.