



Meeting Minutes of May 12, 2022

A virtual meeting of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council (LIRRCC) was convened at 4:00 pm on Thursday, May 12, 2022 via Zoom.

Member Attendance

Gerard P. Bringmann (Chair)	Present
Bryan Peranzo	Absent
Larry Rubinstein (Vice-Chair)	Present
Christy Tolbert	Present
Peter Gorry	Present

Staff Attendance

Lisa Daglian (Executive Director)	Present
Bradley Brashears (Planning Manager)	Present
Kara Gurl (Research & Comms. Associate)	Present
Jessica Spezio (Administrative Assistant)	Present
Shaul Picker (Research Intern)	Absent

Non-member Attendance

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
Hector Garcia	Senior Director External Affairs (LIRR)
Cathy Rinaldi	President of LIRR
Jessica Mathews	Sr. Advisor Special Projects MTA HQ
Nick Fasano	Assistant Director Government Affairs (LIRR)
Ron Troy	Concerned Citizen

C. Rinaldi: I'm thrilled to be with you, it's been quite an adventure the last two months running both railroads.

G. Bringmann: Thank you for taking the time to stop by our meeting, we appreciate it.

C. Rinaldi: I've gotten a lot of support; I have two great teams to work with. I've been ping-ponging back and forth and spending equal times with both railroads.

G. Bringmann: Do you have an idea about the service plans for East Side Access? I know we are still in the early stages.

C. Rinaldi: We are working on putting the finishing touches on it to get it out to groups like yours. We are focusing on shortening commutes, regional connectivity, and addressing Covid ridership changing travel times and patterns.

L. Daglian: Thank you for joining, I just wanted to introduce you to our staff. Jessica is our Administrative Assistant who is a former conductor; Kara is our Communications and Research Associate, and Bradley has just accepted the position of Associate Director. I also want to thank Nick and Hector for keeping me in the loop when they were doing some work on my block in Long Island City. We are looking forward to a preview of East Side Access as well.

C. Rinaldi: I'm looking forward to it connecting the region together. The ability and leisure in both systems are going to give people a much easier regional connectivity.

L. Rubinstein: Hi Cathy, I wanted to ask if they can keep us here on the Council involved in the process with East Side Access and coordination of schedules.

C. Rinaldi: Yes, of course, and Hector will update you on some further information when he gives his update later in the meeting. Thank you for having me and we will be working together soon.

G. Bringmann: Thank you for letting us use your conference room yesterday and thank you for joining our meeting.

Chair's Report:

- Another fairly quiet month. Third Track & East Side Access continue to move ahead on schedule, as well as Penn Station Concourse Expansion.
- Some of our Council members have expressed concerns regarding the motorized bikes/scooters which are becoming more & more common on the LIRR. We are reaching out to MTA senior management regarding this issue while simultaneously doing research on this subject. Later in this meeting, we will discuss further.
- PCAC has been tasked with making recommendations to the MTA and New York State (via legislation passed during the last session) regarding making the MTA system more accessible to bicycle riders. Unfortunately, we are on a very tight schedule, being required to issue these recommendations by June 1st. Needless to say, we will be

looking for input from all of our Councils and will be discussing this further – later this afternoon.

- Bradley Brashears has agreed to the salary offered by the MTA (after a bit of negotiation) and will formally be accepting the position of PCAC Associate Director. We will now begin the process of backfilling his vacated position.

L. Daglian: Yes, we need to reach out to vacancy control and update the job description and begin looking to fill our Planning Manager position.

G. Bringmann: I also wanted to update you on the news we just got this morning about WageWorks. The legislation will be introduced in Congress with WageWorks for the people who have money in those accounts.

L. Daglian: I also want to give you both a shout-out. Gerry and Larry have been relentless in your efforts since you first addressed this issue back in June of 2020. A large part in your efforts that this legislation was passed.

L. Rubinstein: Thank you, Lisa, it's a start in the right direction. Only people still working with their employers are getting this benefit. I wish legislation could also help the people who have lost the money who aren't with their employers anymore – they are at a loss.

G. Bringmann: I get what you're saying but not everyone will be happy. It's unfortunate, but it's progress and there is hope for those who can still benefit from this progress.

L. Rubinstein: This isn't just a New York issue. It's all across the country and many people have been affected by this. This was proposed today, so does it mean it will get debated?

L. Daglian: I'm not sure if it gets debated, but it does have to go through a process and hopefully it'll be a good outcome.

G. Bringmann: That concludes my report. Lisa, are there any staff updates or issues to update us on?

L. Daglian: Yes, I was at a Crain's breakfast yesterday with Gerry and Andrew. In his remarks, Janno mentioned some of the fare discounts and recognized Gerry and Andrew. That was very welcoming and rewarding, especially with mentioning Atlantic Ticket and 20 trip discounts. He reinforced the need for operating funding as well. And now, I'll turn it over to Kara for social media updates.

K. Gurl: We did not receive any direct emails this month. We are monitoring the LIRR social media – mask compliance has been the most common topic. Another concern is the 20-trip tickets and eTix and how to use them regarding peak versus off-peak. People are getting emails to activate their tickets, but mostly only after they are already on board.

Ridership and mask enforcement update

H. Garcia: Ridership is 56 percent of pre-Covid levels on weekdays. I have seen people still wearing masks – it is still being enforced but you also have people who aren't wearing them.

P. Gorry: I just want to say that mask-wearing riders are in the 50- 60 percent are not wearing masks. I even see some police officers not wearing a mask.

G. Bringmann: This is something that I bought up to Pat Warren. How can you have police trying to enforce the use of masks if they aren't doing so themselves?

L. Rubinstein: I've seen LIRR representatives distributing them by 33rd Street at the bottom of the escalators.

G. Bringmann: I've also seen them distributing there as well.

L. Daglian: Are they on the way out, like in the evening rush? Is the weekend/ off-peak ridership higher?

H. Garcia: Yes, it depends on the weather and if there are any events, but it's in the high 70s or low 80's percentage of riders.

P. Gorry: It seems that Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday are busier travel weekdays. Mondays and Fridays are quieter and possible because of hybrid schedules.

L. Rubinstein: Hector, any ideas for the Belmont Stakes coming up?

H. Garcia: Yes, they're paying us to run extra trains. Saturday, June 11th is the date this year. They're limiting the number of people able to attend, but we should have enough service running to handle the crowd.

Gerry says something here about a cap of 90,000 people – still a sizable crowd – please include. Thanks!

G. Bringmann: Speaking of schedules, can you fill us in on the summer schedules?

H. Garcia: A handful of trains are coming back; it goes into effect on May 23rd. The release went out, not sure if you guys saw it. We have Nick on the call as well, he can update us on track work that will be occurring.

N. Fasano: Yesterday was our highest ridership at 178,000, which puts us at 65 percent of pre-pandemic levels. For the next two weekends, we are doing Mainline outages. We have a couple of perry testing that will occur in the coming weeks. It's mostly the Montauk Line but it affects the Babylon Line. Port Jefferson will be affected on the 25th and the 26th of May; I'm not sure if they are doing a full bussing program or a reduction in service. On June 1st it will occur on the West Hempstead Line. Lastly, June 13th through the 16th will affect Ronkonkoma to Greenport.

L. Daglian: I saw an article on work happening near Jamaica and the Harold interlocking saying it was no longer part of East Side Access. What does that mean, and does it go with anything you just mentioned?

N. Fasano: Harold interlocking is the biggest interlocking system in North America. That work probably connected our service to East Side Access, where it turns north and then heads west by the 63rd Street tunnel.

H. Garcia: I just want to add to what Nick said. We are building new tracks but also repairing current tracks in the process. The new Elmont Station will be done by August and the Third Track project should be done by October. We replaced seven bridges as part of the project. The Denton Ave bridge was the last bridge to be done. All grade- crossings that were eliminated were all completed. The last two stations are Westbury and Mineola and those should be completed by the fall.

L. Rubinstein: I just want to say kudos to the track workers replacing bridges on a 48-hour turnaround. The work that they do is amazing.

H. Garcia: The Cherry Valley bridge is also always getting hit and that is scheduled to start this summer.

L. Daglian: There's a question in the chat about the double-deckers. Are they allowed to go through the tunnels for East Side Access? Ron said they don't fit in the tunnels.

H. Garcia: They don't fit in those old tunnels to go into Grand Central.

G. Bringmann: I also just want to bring up the scooters and bike issues on the railroad.

H. Garcia: We updated the regulations and policies just this year. Motorized bikes are not allowed at any time. This is really an enforcement issue. Headquarters is working on the overall view of all these new forms of bikes and scooters.

G. Bringmann: I read something in the news today that someone had an electric bike in for service and it caught on fire and burned the whole building down. We would hate to see that happen on one of our trains.

L. Daglian: I just wanted to add that they're banned from Transport for London because even when they're not charging, they've been known to cause fires.

G. Bringmann: One of the suggestions we had was to reconsider getting bike permits, where you show the bike in person in order to get the permit.

L. Rubinstein: I've seen foldable motorized scooters that get folded up and get put on the rack. The foldable bikes are fine, but these are assisted bikes.

H. Garcia: The foldable bikes are allowed but not the motorized bikes.

L. Daglian: The rules are easy to find but the rules of conduct haven't been updated in some time.

G. Bringmann: Hector do you have an update on the Penn Station work?

H. Garcia: We are looking at late August or early September. We will be opening half of it and the rest later in the year.

G. Bringmann: How is the East Side Access service planning coming along? Cathy said you'd have some information.

H. Garcia: We are planning to show the schedule and engage with you all in June. We will also have a new timetable.

R. Troy: What tickets are not accessible via the vending machines? For Port Jefferson and diesel country passengers in general, we have no clue what is being done for us to have access to Grand Central. Is it going to be an up and over that takes 20 or 30 minutes or is going to be a quick transfer? We obviously don't want longer commutes.

H. Garcia: There will be options, I believe the transfer is four minutes for Jamaica. The new discounts are on the eTix app and are not available at the machines. OMNY is being rolled out slowly, so it's going to be a few years for that.

G. Bringmann: There's a question in the chat from Peter on timekeeping and the ongoing problem with recording workers' hours worked?

H. Garcia: We have these time clocks that you swipe when you start your shift and swipe out when your day ends.

G. Bringmann: Thank you Hector for all the updates. We will now turn it over to Jessica.

J. Mathews: Hello Everyone, I'm Jessica Mathews. I'm the Senior Advisor in the Chair's office helping to head up the project around MTA's Bike/ Ped strategic plan. Today I have a couple of slides to update you on where we stand with this project

L. Daglian: Hi Jessica, I wanted to give you a quick overview on the work that we are doing as a Council and are required to present the MTA with a list of recommendations by June 1st. The MTA then develops its strategic plan by the end of the year. We will be coming to you as a Council with some thoughts and some general ideas that we as your staff have put together for bicycle and pedestrian access to Long Island Rail Road facilities. Jessica will now provide an overview of why we are doing this.

Presentation: MTA Bike/Ped Access Strategic Plan Update by *Jessica Mathews*
View the presentation here: <https://youtu.be/o0zAsbs0NMo?t=3162>

L. Rubinstein: Are the bike storage units at some of the stations I see owned by the MTA?

H. Garcia: No, those are owned by the state DOT.

L. Daglian: Do the Oonee Pods need to be in conjunction with the railroad? Optimizing and maximizing revenue as possible on properties that are adjacent to road stations or are part of longer road stations is the goal. I don't know if they bring in rent or that's what the long-term structure of those is? It seems like they make money as well.

H. Garcia: We are paying for the one at Grand Central. If we can get some advertisement, then we can split some of the expenses.

J. Mathews: So in terms of the way we're thinking of sighting these Oonees pods, we aren't looking to take away any parking spaces. We are trying to utilize all the different spaces available.

L. Daglian: Does anyone have thoughts or input as to what we could include in our collective plan? I've added wayfinding and protective bike lanes. Bike lanes in most areas are painted lanes, and that's not protected. We should be working with municipalities.

J. Mathews: As part of the first/last mile there doing studies and running ten pilot programs to provide enhancements and that can be part of one of those pilot projects. They started an outreach process to gauge interest from different towns and where there could be an investment from a municipality or a bike network. Even an enhancement to bike parking that MTA makes could be part of one of those pilot projects.

L. Daglian: We can also encourage them to apply for MPO funds.

L. Rubinstein: I just wanted to add from my earlier comment about the bike storage units that I just looked up online and apparently the lockers that are run by the county at the Bellmore train station cost \$40 a year and when you return the key you get your \$40 back.

G. Bringmann: There obviously encouraging bike use if there practically giving it to you for free.

L. Daglian: Are there any statistics on the usage of these facilities?

J. Mathews: We had put together a comprehensive survey of what bike facilities and bike parking exists at all of the commuter rail stations but the data isn't available for that.

G. Bringmann: Thank you Jessica for your presentation. Can I also get approval for the agenda and the minutes?

Approval of Agenda for May 12, 2022 meeting.
Approval of Minutes for April 14, 2022 meeting.

G. Bringmann: Moving along with what we have been addressing regarding any Council priorities going forward. If anyone has any issues or concerns for us, we encourage you to bring them up at our meetings.

Old Business:

L. Rubinstein: Is the Transit Check WageWorks information made public?

L. Daglian: We will share with you once we hear back (made public), as it was just passed today. I think it's a step in the right direction and we should wait to hear back on what the next steps will be.

L. Rubinstein: Once we hear back, I would like to see if there is anything we can do for the people who lost their jobs or are no longer with the companies who have lost out on their money, to see if there is there anything that can be done for them.

G. Bringmann: I think this is the best that can be done for now. There may be a way that they can get a tax credit and or a deduction for those people who are no longer employed. Senator Schumer said that's why they're actually doing the legislation now. The IRS had finally come around to it and apparently, the IRS did have the power to do this on its own. They're extremely short-staffed and they are having their problems, but maybe they just didn't want to address it then but we are glad it's finally moving along.

L. Daglian: Once they send me the finished press release and they tell me that it's being introduced, I'll ask him what the next steps are? We can also ask if there is anything they can do for the people no longer employed.

R. Troy: If we could get a follow-up on my question about the discount tickets. It would be nice to be able to just get tickets from machines. Some people like me prefer paper tickets.

H. Garcia: I understand, but it's also a pilot program only available on the app. If it becomes a permanent program, then they would have to reprogram the machines so that the tickets can be purchased.

New Business:

None

Action items:

R. Troy: Can 20-trip tickets be purchased at machines? Instead of only being available on eTix.

Adjourned

Meeting recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0zAsbs0NMo>

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Daglian

Executive Director