**MTA Joint LIRR/MNR Committee Meeting**

**“East Side Access Will Mean More Unity for Railroad Riders”**

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

**November 29, 2022**

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

With LIRR service to Grand Central on the horizon, a more unified future for the Railroads is near. We’re relieved that the Federal Railroad Administration granted the waiver that will allow East Side Access to open on schedule, with finishing touches still in progress for the next few months. After decades of planning, building, and testing, LIRR riders are more than ready to roll into Grand Central. We’re glad that with this waiver, one of the final hurdles needed to overcome before setting an opening date is out of the way. We hope to learn about that opening date soon—still counting on before the end of 2022—so riders can finally arrive at Grand Central on time. PCAC members and staff participated in the wayfinding exercise last month and were thankful for the opportunity to provide feedback on signage, accessibility, and more.

East Side Access will undoubtedly help riders from around the region, but its opening is also symbolic of a future of better connection and partnership between both Railroads. In Grand Central—and eventually Penn Station—Metro-North riders will be able to easily transfer by heading downstairs to get to JFK, reverse commute to Long Island, or vice versa. A natural extension of this growing unity should be the Railroads’ fare policy. That means ensuring that both Railroads have the same definitions of AM and PM peak hours; the times when senior and disability fares apply, which should be 24/7; and fare discount options to ensure that riders from within and beyond the city can afford to ride the trains that run through their backyards. Freedom Ticket, with its lower fares within the city both peak and off-peak, including transfers to the subway and bus, would be a step further towards a system where riders can seamlessly transfer between all of the MTA’s modes. With OMNY, fare discount options like this will one day be even easier to implement and use.

The Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North are stronger together—and that means continuing to learn from each other’s strengths, weaknesses, and technologies to improve both Railroads for riders around the region. Thank you.