

LONG ISLAND RAILROAD COMMUTERS COUNCIL
MINUTES OF JANUARY 10, 2008

A meeting of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council (LIRRCC) was convened at 12:15 p.m. on January 10, 2008, in the 10th floor conference room, MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Avenue, New York City. The following members were present:

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Gary Babyatzky	Ira Greenberg
Ronald Breuer	James L. McGovern
Gerard P. Bringmann	Maureen Michaels
Sandra Krebelj-Douglas	Jerome I. Shagam

The following members were absent:

Patricia S. McCauley (E)	Edward B. Rich (E)
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E = Excused

In addition, the following persons were present:

William Henderson	-PCAC Executive Director
Jan Wells	-PCAC Associate Director
Ellyn Shannon	-PCAC Transportation Planner
Karyl Berger	-PCAC Research Associate
Albert Cosenza	-MTA/LIRR
Richard Semenick	-MTA/LIRR
Nathan McNeil	-MTA/IG
Bob Jelley	-CT Rail Commuter Council

Approval of Agenda and Minutes

The agenda for the January 10, 2008 meeting was approved. The minutes of the November 1, 2007 meeting were approved.

Chair's Report

The Chair's Report is attached to these minutes.

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Mr. Bringmann said that he feels the honeymoon period is over with President Williams. He said that what he experiences as a daily commuter is not what is reported in the papers.

Ellyn Shannon noted that Susan McGowan has never responded to her whether NYC Transit was contacted during the two times in December that Penn Station was shut down. Ms. Shannon followed up to ask if there is a standard procedure for informing NYC Transit that the Station is closed and that they should make announcements to that effect on the subway system.

Ms. Michaels said the top priority for the Council is to continue to push for a communications audit of the Rail Road. She noted that Joe Calderone is not the right person for this job. She said that he is fine in dealing with the press, but the issues involved are much larger than press relations, and Mr. Calderone is not a good fit for managing the LIRR's overall communication program. She said that the scroll message at the bottom of the new message boards at Penn Station moves too slowly and that this shows a lack of sophistication with regard to communication and a lack of experience necessary for this job.

Board Report

Mr. McGovern reported that the 2008 budget was the main topic of discussion at the December MTA Long Island Committee meeting.

Old Business

Mr. Bringmann asked if the Council ever got an answer to the question about whether the LIRR has a process for determining the estimated duration of an operational problem. Staff responded that they had not yet received an answer to this question.

Gary Babyatzky noted that there has been an operational policy change at the LIRR that now allows trains to make reverse moves in certain circumstances.

Mr. McGovern noted that he received an email alert the other day that was not helpful at all because the information was late and incorrect.

New Business

The Council unanimously voted to recommend that Mr. McGovern be reappointed by the Governor as the LIRRCC's non-voting MTA Board member.

The proposed change to the LIRRCC By-Laws was moved and seconded and will be voted upon at the February 14 meeting.

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Introduction of Albert Cosenza, LIRR Executive Vice President

A copy of Mr. Cosenza's presentation is on file in the PCAC office.

Mr. Cosenza said the Federal Railway Administration centerline standard results in a platform gap of 5'7" and the LIRR currently uses a standard that results in a gap of 5'8".

Maureen Michaels noted that the celebrity announcements about the gap are much too loud throughout the station area. In response to her question whether there have been complaints about them, Mr. Cosenza said he did not know but would check and would get back to Bill Henderson on this issue.

In response to Ms. Michaels' question concerning the long term plan for communications in regard to the gap, Mr. Cosenza said that they continue to raise awareness and tailor the Rail Road's message to specific issues. For example, the issue at Shea Stadium is crowding, while the issue for those transferring from the AirTrain platform at Jamaica is difficulty managing luggage.

Mr. Henderson noted that in discussions with Metro-North Railroad, the issue of passengers failing to exercise care in their haste to get luggage or packages on or off the train was raised. Mr. Cosenza said that some problems may be avoided by making station announcements early, since when announcements are not made early enough, passengers who need to leave the train may panic. The need to limit dwell time must also be considered, as crews can't keep the train doors open indefinitely.

In response to Ellyn Shannon's question as to whether there are new trends toward people bringing more baggage onto the trains, Mr. Cosenza said the Rail Road has no specific statistics, but there are places where luggage is a more significant issue.

Mr. Cosenza said the LIRR has used its track geometry car to take measurements of the centerline distance on all platforms that are served by the LIRR. He detailed some of the operational issues the LIRR has addressed including platform surfacing, platform shifts, zoned off cars, and relocating car markers. He said the Syosset, Bridgehampton, and Flatbush Terminal stations have gap issues that remain unresolved.

Mr. Cosenza said that all LIRR cars are 10 feet wide and that this is the standard used by Amtrak. Amtrak said that they would consider allowing platforms in Penn Station to be configured to the smaller gap standard applicable to stub end terminals. Jerry Shagam asked when the LIRR expects an answer from Amtrak on this issue, and Mr. Cosenza noted that the LIRR is revising their plans based on a forthcoming agreement with Amtrak. He stated that MTA Executive Director

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Elliot Sander has said he would talk with Amtrak and ask that they expedite the decision.

Mr. Bringmann noted that Mr. Cosenza should call upon the Council if the members can be helpful in any way.

Mr. Cosenza stated that New Jersey Transit has not been involved in these discussions. Ms. Wells pointed out that there are times when New Jersey Transit utilizes some LIRR tracks in Penn Station.

Mr. Cosenza noted that the only places where gap fillers work in outdoor environments is where they are built into the system and linked directly to the signal system. He said that the FRA has established a subcommittee whose mission is to develop standards for gaps.

Mr. Cosenza said that the LIRR has defined two gap accident categories. Primary accidents include incidents when persons fall directly into the gap, while secondary accidents include incidents when persons first fall on the train or platform and end up in the gap as a consequence of the initial fall.

Mr. Cosenza said that there have not been any restrictions on funding the LIRR gap initiatives thus far, and he does not anticipate that the Rail Road would be prevented from doing all of the planned work because of funding constraints.

Mr. Cosenza said he would have to get back to Bill Henderson with information about how often conductors make announcements about zoned off cars.

In response to Bill Henderson's question about how the size of the gap would impact freight operations, Mr. Cosenza said that there might be some speed restrictions, but improved maintenance on the tracks would minimize impacts.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Karyl Berger
Research Associate