

PCAC Quarterly Report

July - September 1996

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Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee (PCAC)

Staff Changes

In September Adrienne Taub left the PCAC staff after more than two years as our Transportation Planner to take a position with a consulting firm. We thank Adrienne for all her work and wish her well in her new job.

Jonathan Sigall, who was the PCAC Research Associate, was chosen to fill the Transportation Planner position. A new Research Associate will be hired soon.

PCAC Meets with Governor's Advisor

The guest at the September PCAC meeting was Louis R. Tomson, deputy secretary to Governor Pataki. Mr. Tomson advises the Governor on matters related to public authorities such as the MTA. The primary topic of discussion was the Governor's MasterLinks plan, which includes LIRR east side access, airport rail access, commuter rail access to lower Manhattan, a universal fare payment system, and conversion of the Farley Building into a new Amtrak station. The PCAC supports some of these projects, such as airport access and the unified fare card, but opposes others -- especially the Farley Building project, since it would not benefit LIRR or NYC Transit riders.

PCAC Online

PCAC now has a site on the World Wide Web. The site contains information about the PCAC, a calendar of our meetings, our agendas, our quarterly reports, and links to other websites. You can visit us at <http://users.aol.com/permcac>. Our site is just getting started, so look for more information to be added to it in the coming months.

63 Street Tunnel Tour

In July members of the LIRRCC and NYCTRC, as well as the PCAC staff, toured the 63 Street Tunnel and the Queens Connector project. The tour, which was given in conjunction with the LIRR East Side Access Study, gave participants a first-hand look at

the work underway to connect the 63 Street subway line with the Queens Boulevard Line, as well as the location of a possible connection to the LIRR which would allow the railroad access to the east side of Manhattan.

Long Island Rail Road Commuters Council (LIRRCC)

Air Conditioning

This summer, the Council turned its attention to air conditioning, in response to numerous complaints and observations of hot cars. The railroad's own statistics bore out the Council's perception that more cars had less than adequate air conditioning than in the past.

In July the Council met with railroad representatives on this issue. They acknowledged that air conditioning performance this year was the worst in two years, and they said that the poor performance was the result of deferring maintenance several years ago. LIRR President Thomas Prendergast promised to address the problem.

The Council's efforts regarding air conditioning received much attention in the press, with stories on News 12 and Good Day New York and in Newsday.

Bicycle Policy

This summer LIRRCC Vice Chair Barbara Josepher developed a proposed bicycle policy for the LIRR, which was endorsed by the Council. Metro-North recently adopted a more liberal policy toward bicycles, which permits more bikes per train than the previous policy and designates certain trains that will have entire cars set aside for bicycles. The Council's policy, based on Metro-North's policy as well as conversations with bicycle advocacy groups, is intended to encourage cyclists to use the railroad to get to and from Long Island.

New Seats Reviewed

In September LIRRCC members went to the Hillside Maintenance Facility to try out the new seat design proposed for the LIRR's bi-level coaches, which are currently on order. Members found the seats to be very comfortable. The new seats have full-sized headrests and are filled with a silicone insert that will not break down the way the existing foam seat cushions do.

Babylon to Get Sidewalk

LIRRCC member Cesar Malaga wrote to Babylon Village Mayor E. Donald Conroy regarding the need for a sidewalk between the Locust Avenue parking field and the

Babylon Station, noting the danger to LIRR customers due to heavy traffic on the avenue. The Village is now planning to construct the sidewalk.

Huntington Garage

In August the Council wrote to Huntington Town Supervisor Frank Petrone regarding conditions at the parking garage at the Huntington Station. Some improvements have been seen as a result: the weeds have been cut, flowers have been planted, and the windows have been cleaned. Mr. Petrone reports that the other problems, including rainwater leaks and litter, are being addressed.

Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council (MNRCC)

How Do You Get to Cortlandt?

In July the Council wrote to Westchester County Transportation Commissioner Joseph Petrocelli regarding bus service to the new Cortlandt Station. We requested that the County extend one of its bus routes to the new station, since people who live within walking distance of the recently closed Montrose and Crugers stations now have a long walk to the new station. Mr. Petrocelli replied that the County has considered extending Route 18 to the new station, but they will not do so unless Metro- North subsidizes the service.

Customer Survey Reviewed

In August Council members and staff reviewed a draft of Metro-North's 1996 Customer Satisfaction Survey and submitted comments. A number of our suggestions were incorporated into the final survey.

Tappan ZEEexpress

In June the Council wrote to Metro- North requesting that the railroad produce a schedule listing Hudson Line trains with the connecting Tappan ZEEexpress buses. In response, Metro- North sent a copy of just such a schedule. We asked the railroad to do a better job of publicizing this schedule. The schedules are now available at the information kiosk in Grand Central, and copies are taped to the windows so that riders are aware that they are available.

We also wrote to Metro-North requesting that the bus stop at the Tarrytown Station be moved to a location where customers could board the Tappan ZEEexpress away from the flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Charles Zabielski, Metro-North director of marketing, explained that the bus stop location was a joint decision by the Westchester Department of Transportation, Transport of Rockland, and the Village of Tarrytown, based on testing of various locations.

In order to address the problem, Metro- North will place additional signage that will direct customers not to block the platform stairway. In addition, Metro- North management will be on site to instruct customers when the new signs are put in place in October.

The Council also wrote to Rockland County Transportation Commissioner James Yarmus, requesting that Tappan ZEEExpress service be increased during off-peak hours and that weekend service be instituted. We have since learned that a survey of both users and non-users was recently completed. Metro-North will meet with Rockland County and New York State DOT officials to discuss an increase in service.

Council Meetings

The guest at the Council's July meeting was Nancy Marshall, director of Grand Central Terminal development. Ms. Marshall presented Metro-North's plans for the Terminal's retail space.

In September the Council's guest was George Walker, Metro-North vice president of operations. Mr. Walker responded to comments and questions regarding such topics as car equipment, short trains, and emergency procedures.

New York City Transit Riders Council (NYCTRC)

New Members Nominated

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Public Advocate Mark Green have finally recommended individuals to Governor Pataki for appointment to the TRC. Mr. Green's nominees are current TRC Chairman Andrew Albert, Mitzie Wilson, Shirley Genn of the Brooklyn-wide Interagency Council of the Aging, and Susan Scheer of Mr. Green's staff. Mr. Giuliani nominated longtime transit advocate William Guild.

Service Monitoring

In July the TRC released its 1996 Bus & Subway Service Evaluation. The report was the result of members' observations of service on 18 subway lines and 20 bus lines. The report shows that the regularity of subway service has not improved since 1992, and while bus service has improved, it is still poor. The report was covered in Newsday and on several radio and television stations. Copies of the report were sent to NYC Transit executives, as well as key elected officials.

TRC Meets with President

In September the Council met with New York City Transit President Lawrence Reuter. Topics of discussion included one-person train operation, the new subway car purchase,

student passes, and free bus-to-subway transfers. The Council also discussed how the role of token clerks will change once MetroCard is installed systemwide. We learned that there will be at least two MetroCard vending machines installed at each fare control area, and each full-time subway entrance will still be staffed. However, the clerks will no longer handle money, but will instead be available to assist passengers with the machines and answer questions.

Williamsburg Bridge Shutdown

In July the Council learned that New York City's current plan for the Williamsburg Bridge rehabilitation calls for a four-month shutdown of subway service over the bridge. We have spoken out at recent MTA Board meetings in opposition to the closure, which would be devastating to the communities served by the J, M, and Z lines.

President Reuter informed the TRC that he has asked to meet with City Transportation Commissioner Christopher Lynn to discuss the closure, and he assured us that NYC Transit will not sign off on the City's plan until he receives assurance from the commissioner that adequate transit service can be maintained during the project.

Loading Guidelines Reviewed

In September the MTA Board voted on proposed revisions to NYC Transit's bus loading guidelines. The Council submitted comments on the proposal, expressing concerns that the guidelines assume that service runs on schedule and that the standard of 3.4 square feet per standing passenger does not provide enough space.

Operations Planning Chief Kevin Desmond responded to our comments, saying that NYC Transit is focusing increasing attention on the reliability problem and that, in practice, they limit the scheduled load to less than the guideline on poorly performing routes. He also said that he did not disagree that 3.4 square feet per passenger is uncomfortable, but the agency must find a balance between comfort and economic reality.

Council Meetings

At the July meeting, Art Kelly of NYC Transit's Bus Customer Relations Center was the guest speaker. Mr. Kelly discussed the operations of the center, which was created last year, and answered questions regarding bus bunching and bus announcements.

At the September meeting, Robert Dorey, a member of the board of London Underground Limited, compared notes with us on automated fare collection. Mr. Dorey shared with us the details of London's fare collection system -- which includes several types of discount tickets -- and we told him what we like and dislike about the MetroCard system here.

At the September meeting we also learned about NYC Transit and NYCDOT's pilot project for improved bus stop signage. The new signs are larger than the current ones, list

route numbers and destinations, and are color-coded to distinguish between local, limited, and express buses.

Also at the meeting Ken Stuart, director of marketing research for NYC Transit, asked our opinions of one-person train operation. We told Mr. Stuart that we support OPTO as a way to run the system more efficiently, but we think riders should get more frequent service in return.