

**Long Island Railroad Commuter Council
President's Forum
May 14, 2008**

Summary of Proceedings

This was the first President's Forum for LIRR President, Helena Williams. Her opening remarks included several performance statistics: LIRR ridership is at its highest since 1949, with a simultaneous increase in AM Peak on-time performance. In addition, LIRR is very pleased with the performance of the M-7 cars.

President Williams' top priorities are safety, security and service reliability. Special emphasis is being placed on "customer communications". Her goal is to identify channels and how to better utilize them. One of her initiatives includes the creation of a Public Information Office (PIO). The PIO will utilize the following to improve communications with riders:

- Email notification
- Penn Station message boards (with expansion to Jamaica and Flatbush)
- Media
- MTA website
- Station announcements
- Crew cell phones (This would allow the Rail Control Center to send service updates to the crew's cell phones so they can pass on the announcements to passengers)

The improvement of the customer experience will encompass several initiatives. Gap safety is among them. This will entail platform shaving at Penn for wider threshold plates with a 1" edgeboard. Each platform gap will close 3", with the goal being gaps of 10" or less at all Level I platforms. Celebrity announcements will be recorded to remind riders to be mindful of remaining gaps.

Penn Station is scheduled for several improvements as its last renovation was completed in 1994. Starting this summer, renovations will get underway to make the women's bathroom larger by moving the customer service office. There will be an improved lost & found area, wi-fi will be installed throughout the station and additional waiting rooms will be provided.

Mainline improvement remains a top priority at LIRR. Mineola flooding problems will be addressed. The construction of a Third Rail will improve express service and provide a needed passing lane. The East End Shuttle (a pilot program) has provided opportunities for intra-Island travel as it currently runs from Speonk to Montauk.

Joining President Williams at the dais were Raymond Kenny, Senior Vice-President – Operations, Elisa Picca, Chief Planning Officer – Strategic Investments, and Kathleen Finneran, Assistant Deputy Chief – MTA Police.

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES EXPRESSED BY RIDERS

Customer Service Relations/Communication

1. There was a complaint about community outreach. It was stated that the Jamaica community did not know about the meeting.
2. It was remarked that holding the President's Forum at Jamaica instead of midtown Manhattan was an improvement.
3. It was requested that President Williams attend a meeting of the Downtown Jamaica Committee.

Response: Helena Williams expressed a desire to comply.

4. It was recommended that copies of the DEIS (draft environmental impact statement) be distributed to the libraries of the affected communities.

Response: A DEIS covering the Third Track should be ready by the end of 2008. The library distribution suggestion was noted.

5. A rider commented that a great improvement has been noticed concerning announcements from the crew.

Station/Facility Conditions/Improvements

1. Graffiti should be removed.
2. Laurelton station has ties tumbling down the hill. Rain could wash them onto the tracks.
3. The bathrooms on some trains are abysmal (Wantagh and Port Jefferson lines specifically mentioned) and it was wondered how trains are allowed to be put in service with the bathrooms in such horrible condition. The customer also wondered why the windows on the trains are always dirty.
4. Why is the Far Rockaway waiting room never open?

Response: Helena Williams replied that she will look into that.

5. The railing at the Nostrand Avenue stop is too low. The street is right on the other side of the concrete barrier.
6. The track bed around Jamaica is “out of hand” with “too much garbage”.

Response: Helena Williams conceded that the scrap situation at Jamaica is a problem. She is looking into ways to dispose of the scrap and perhaps sell it for profit.

7. Regarding the beautification of downtown Jamaica, it was requested that the MTA do more to remove graffiti and litter from the Jamaica track bed area. It was also noted that access to the tracks at Jamaica is too easy.

Service Issues

1. The Patchogue line — the earliest arrival into Penn Station is 6:44 which makes it hard for construction workers to get to work by 7am. Would it be possible to schedule a connection at Islip to one of the four trains prior to this one?

Response: Helena will look into the issue and work on a way to get people into Manhattan by 7 am.

2. Service on the Port Jefferson line is lacking. The LIRR has failed to recognize the size of the communities served by the line. There is a 4:19pm train from Penn Station which leaves empty but then the next train way after 5pm is completely packed. Trains are delayed because it takes 1–2 minutes for the doors to open. Also the engineers pick different spots to stop on the platform.
3. There should be an Island Hopper program for weekend travel intra-Island for those riders with monthly or weekly tickets. Trains are empty on the weekends. It would help raise revenue and cost very little.

Capital Planning

1. A rider attended the MAS program on the Farley Post Office proposal. Has the LIRR ever considered a Lower Manhattan connection?

Response: Helena responded that LIRR is waiting to see how the Farley proposal plays out before taking a direction.

2. Regarding the Volpe study of East End Shuttle, could LIRR be potentially driven to purchase Scoots (such as the Colorado Railcar self-propelled diesel trains) to cover short runs?

Response: Helena Williams replied that the LIRR is involved with the Volpe Center and looking forward to its recommendations concerning future purchasing initiatives.

3. Concerning electrification east of Ronkonkoma
 - Double-tracking to Ronkonkoma will cost \$ 10–14 million/mile
 - Second track is essential
 - Considering the cost, lighter diesel might be the way to go.
4. Ryan Lynch of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign read a statement that the TSTC is in favor of the Third Track.
5. The M3 cars should be overhauled and kept in service for when the East Side Access (ESA) project to Grand Central Station is completed.

Response: Helena Williams agreed that the M3 cars need to be considered in the ESA plan.

6. All platforms should be extended to 12 cars.

Response: We are trying to get 12-car platforms but sometimes we just can't get the real estate.

7. There is switch work being done between Bellerose and Hempstead. What is the benefit of this work?

Response: Helena Williams responded that switch work will allow LIRR to fix track alignment and straighten out the "bump", allowing for an increase in train speed. The new switches may result in a decrease in overnight track maintenance. Ray Kenny added that the new switches will allow trains to move to the main line quicker.

8. How many grade crossings will be removed in Garden City in the Third Track project?

Response: A DEIS with two options is being written. One option will be removing the grade crossing only at New Hyde Park Avenue.

9. Question was raised regarding the study of the old Rockaway Beach line: Is it being considered for re-activation?

Horn Blowing at Forest Hills Station

Multiple complaints were raised about the use of train horns near the Forest Hills station. A new horn blowing policy seemed to be implemented recently that has severely disrupted the quality of life around Forest Hills. Customer inquiries placed with the MTA revealed initial MTA confusion concerning horn-blowing regulations. The new horn-blowing practices were justified by the MTA as their attempt to meet Federal Railway Administration (FRA) requirements. However, further investigation by a customer revealed that this was incorrect. The FRA regulations do not call for the recent change in MTA horn-blowing practices. The customer addressing the panel stated that engineers are not following the rules.

Response: President Williams informed the customer that the M7's have horns that are placed on the sides of the car which causes the sound to travel in different directions compared to other trains. Sound is "bleeding" out the side. A noise reduction plan is in place. Directional mufflers are being installed on all M7's. This will take two years. Waivers have been filed with the FRA to decrease the number of required blasts and lower the required decibel level. A foreman has been placed at Forest Hills to log horn usage and the reasons.

This response from President Williams was rebutted later on by another Forest Hills resident. He complained that these were the "horns from hell" and that foremen oversight is not comprehensive enough. Engineers are blowing the horns when there are no workers on the tracks. It was hoped that the muffler installation will be completed "faster than two years".

Other/Suggestions

1. Lighting on LIRR cars is not sufficient.
2. There should be M1 and M3 nostalgia trips for the 175th anniversary.