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Penn Station Improvement Plan Encouraging, But Many Questions Remain

The Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council (LIRRCC) recognizes the need for Amtrak, as the owner and operator of New York Penn Station, to take decisive action to address deferred maintenance and improvement needs in the station. Unfortunately, however, the effects of deferred maintenance and infrastructure needs have once again fallen on the backs of riders. The LIRRCC calls upon Amtrak to put riders first in its plans to complete this work. Our members recognize that the renewal work that must be completed, based on years of neglect, will result in service changes. Amtrak and its partner railroads in Penn Station must work to minimize rider inconvenience produced by these changes. The LIRRCC looks forward to receiving additional detail on this reconstruction plan prior to its implementation.

The LIRRCC believes that a review of coordination between the railroads operating out of Penn Station is long overdue and agrees with the decision to bring in an outside expert to carry out this review and make recommendations for change. The Council further backs Amtrak's efforts to make use of the results of this review to establish a joint Penn Station Concourse Operations Center. LIRRCC also supports Amtrak's proposals to improve coordination on safety and security measures and its approach of setting up a task force of stakeholders to review protocols, procedures and resources related to management of disabled trains. We believe that Long Island Rail Road riders should be represented among the stakeholders on Amtrak's disabled train task force.

"Amtrak is acting responsibly in addressing deferred maintenance and operational problems in Penn Station. We are heartened that Amtrak is taking action, albeit long overdue, to attend to these deferred maintenance and operational problems. The conditions that riders have endured for years and that have been highlighted in past weeks are intolerable and cannot be allowed to continue" said LIRRCC Chair Mark Epstein. "We know that infrastructure renewal will impact Penn Station riders, but the size and nature of that impact will depend on the specific plan that is developed to complete this work. It is encouraging that Amtrak has committed to focus on the 'customer experience' during this period, and this focus must include a commitment to improved communication with LIRR riders. We believe that improvements can best be accomplished by involving riders' representatives in planning necessary work. The LIRRCC calls on Amtrak to make every effort to minimize disruption to riders as a result of necessary infrastructure renewal, to work to coordinate passenger services throughout Penn Station, and to publicly release detailed plans well in advance of their implementation."