

LONG ISLAND / TRANSPORTATION**Patchogue's Bringmann steps in as chairman of LIRR Commuter Council**

Gerard Bringmann previously served as chairman of the LIRR Commuter Council, from 2006 to 2010. Credit: Allison Hartmann

By Alfonso A. Castillo

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A veteran LIRR commuter from Patchogue again is leading the railroad's watchdog group.

The Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council on Tuesday elected Gerard Bringmann as its new chairman, replacing Mark Epstein, who died last month. Epstein, a Melville attorney who was active in politics, the LIRR and several community organizations, died of a heart attack in June at the age of 55.

Bringmann, 65, has been with the council for 19 years, including most recently as its vice chairman. He also previously served as chairman, from 2006 to 2010.

"I think the commuters need to have a voice to give some input to the railroad about what we feel is important," said Bringmann, who works in commercial interior decorations and has commuted on the LIRR for nearly 40 years. "Sometimes there's things that they may not even be aware of that's happening on the trains... So we serve a function in that way."

The New York State Legislature established the LIRR Commuter Council in 1981 with the goal of offering riders a voice in policy decisions, giving management advice and holding the LIRR — the largest commuter railroad on the continent — accountable for its actions.

Members are made up of volunteers representing the railroad's various service areas, who are recommended by local-elected officials and confirmed by the state Senate.

Bringmann said he plans to meet with board members in the coming days to put together a list of priority issues. One issue he'd like the group to tackle involves federal regulations keeping many LIRR commuters, who have been staying home because of the COVID-19 pandemic, from getting back hundreds of dollars locked in pretaxed commuting accounts.

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