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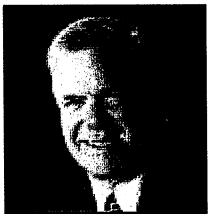
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Pally: Summer repairs mean a better LIRR is on its way

By: Commentary July 17, 2017 2 Comments



**Mitchell H.
PALLY**

As the Long Island Rail Road enters a summer of 2017 with significant challenges from a variety of issues, including the extensive repairs being undertaken by Amtrak at Penn Station, it may be difficult to envision a much more efficient and safer system, unimpeded by various infrastructure impediments. However, if we can all get through the current short-term frustrations, the longer term will provide such a system. There are significant

improvements on the way which will lead to a much more constructive relationship with our customers.

As many may be aware, but cannot see, the new east side access connection to allow the LIRR to move trains directly to Grand Central continues on its path to completion. Deep under the current Grand Central Terminal, the LIRR is building a brand new station which will increase the capacity by 40 percent and allow our customers to go directly into Midtown Manhattan rather than the current trip to Penn Station and then to Midtown. The new rail line is now being built through Sunnyside Yard in Queens to allow the current LIRR service to connect to the rail tunnel at 63rd St. and then travel underground to the new station.

In addition to this new station and service, two major track programs are either under construction or just about ready to go. First, for those of us who use the Ronkonkoma line, a new second track is being built between Farmingdale and Ronkonkoma to allow for increased and more flexible service on this branch. In addition to the tracks themselves, the entire signal system in this corridor is being upgraded and a new station is being developed at East Farmingdale to be incorporated into a new transit oriented development being designed by the Town of Babylon. When fully completed in 2019, the new second track will allow half hour off-peak service on the Ronkonkoma line, a service already provided by the LIRR on other lines in the system.

Second, the decision to build a third track between Floral Park and Hicksville, one of the most congested areas of the system where four lines congregate, is currently in the hands of the MTA capital program review board, having already been approved as part of the 2015-19 MTA capital plan by the MTA board. As a result of state funding and bonding requirements, the Capital Program Review Board was created to ensure that all MTA priorities were in line with the needs of the entire state.

Currently the review board has before it a comprehensive amendment to the 2015-19 plan which not only includes funds for the third track but also for significant rail and subway improvements throughout the region, improvements which will also be allowed to proceed or not to proceed by the vote of the review board.

The board can only vote up or down on the entire amendment, it cannot pick and choose individual projects to vote up or down on. Hopefully, the third track will be allowed to continue, for it includes not only the new track but a complete overhaul of the signal and track systems in the area.

From a safety perspective, numerous smaller track and signal projects are being undertaken by the LIRR to coincide with the major signal work being performed by Amtrak in and around Penn Station and Sunnyside Yards. In addition, the LIRR is well on its way to meeting the 2019 deadline for installation of positive train control on all of our lines to ensure that the most up-to-date safety features are incorporated in our entire system.

I have had the honor and privilege of being a member of the MTA board representing Suffolk County for the past 12 and have seen times of both great service to our riders as well impediments which have negatively impacted the LIRR's ability to provide safe and efficient service. I strongly believe that Long Islanders are both resilient and patient during these very frustrating times and will understand the long-term gains which will occur for the current short-term frustrations.

All of us want to provide the best and most efficient and safest system possible and I firmly believe that we are on our way to accomplishing these goals. We only ask for your understanding during these difficult times.