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Press Release

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LIRR

IMMEDIATE

LIRR Customer Service, Cleanliness Wins High Marks From Outside Consultant

Dual Mode Diesels May Be 'Lemons,' Nelson Finds

[Full Report: Assessment of the Condition of the MTA Long Island Rail Road](#)

The Long Island Rail Road received high marks for improved customer service, cleanliness of trains and stations, and timeliness of providing information to commuters but low scores on the performance of its diesel locomotive fleet, according to an analysis of the nation's busiest commuter rail line by a prominent outside consultant.

While praising the LIRR for being in "good to excellent" overall physical condition, the consultant said a number of major projects on the drawing board – including the East Side Access plan to connect the LIRR to the East Side of Manhattan by running trains into Grand Central Terminal – will "severely test" the Railroad's ability "to conceive, plan and execute a large array of operating and service changes and improvements."

"LIRR is in good to excellent physical condition and its customer service much improved from earlier experience," said Donald N. Nelson, the consultant who is a former president of Metro North. "The management team seems to be rejuvenated ... employees ... were motivated with generally very good morale..."

"The infrastructure of the railroad is probably in better condition now than ever in its history, except for the signal system, major structures, such as viaducts and tunnels, and many stations," stated Nelson in a 40-page report that LIRR President Helena Williams commissioned when she took charge of the railroad in June.

LIRR President Williams praised the thoroughness of Nelson's report and said she is moving on a number of fronts already to address some of the key issues he raised.

"The Nelson report will serve as an important blueprint for the Railroad's future both in the short and long terms," she said. "While we are very confident about the LIRR's management team, it's helpful to take a step back and have a fresh set of eyes conduct a review of our operations. Don Nelson has performed an important service for the LIRR and we will be looking very closely at his recommendations."

Nelson is one of the foremost experts on rail operations in the country. As part of his research, he traveled on more than 100 trains during a 10-week period, analyzed hundreds of documents, conducted scores of interviews with high level and front line LIRR employees and made his own inspections of stations, yards and maintenance facilities. His frank assessment of LIRR operations, which includes an examination of each of the LIRR's 11 branches, is being released to the public and posted on the LIRR website. During the remainder of the year, Nelson will continue to advise the LIRR on moving forward with a plan to implement many of the recommendations he made in his report.

Highlights of the Nelson report include:

- **M7 Fleet** – The LIRR's M7 Fleet of 836 cars – the new workhorse of the Railroad – has "exceeded most expectations, especially under severe winter conditions," contributing to overall improvements in on time performance for the Railroad. The LIRR's on time performance is the best it has been in five years while the number of trains the rail road is running has increased.
- **Station Maintenance** - The LIRR does not have an annual, progressive station maintenance program, Nelson found. LIRR employees only respond on an "as needed" basis or for emergency repairs. "...stations appear to be neglected in the operating budget." LIRR President Williams has proposed an increase in funding for an annual, progressive station maintenance program.
- **Diesels** – The entire diesel fleet of 45 locomotives is in "serious trouble" with too frequent breakdowns that neither the train's manufacturers nor in-house LIRR maintenance personnel have adequately addressed, Nelson stated. The 22 Dual Mode locomotives – which allow trains to be run on either electrified or non-electrified track - pose a "major concern." On average, Dual Modes are breaking down every 12,425 miles instead of the targeted 30,000 miles, a record that Nelson called "woeful...If the DM (Dual Mode) fleet can't be made more reliable soon, and its systemic failures identified and resolved, the LIRR will be forced to deal with the fact that these units are lemons and proceed with a replacement program," Nelson stated. The LIRR is hiring an outside expert to try and identify and fix the long-running problems with the Dual Mode fleet.
- **Jamaica Project** – A planned reconfiguration and signal upgrade at the Railroad's crucial Jamaica junction – perhaps the Railroad's single most important project – lacks a "single, guiding force at the moment" among LIRR executives. Nelson recommended that a senior executive be put in charge of this construction, which is designed to speed up the travel of trains through Jamaica. LIRR President Williams has appointed Executive Vice President Albert C. Cosenza to lead the Jamaica Project, which is key to success of East Side Access.
- **Central Train Control** – While noting a high level of "pride and enthusiasm" within the Railroad's key Transportation Department, which includes 1,045 conductors/trainmen and 379 locomotive engineers, Nelson recommended that the LIRR move forward with plans for a "modern centralized operations control center" to replace the current system of towers that manually control the movement of some trains. By next year, LIRR plans to begin preparing an area of the Jamaica Control Center (AirTrain) building to receive the Operations Control Center that is currently housed in the

LIRR headquarters building at Jamaica. Central Control of trains eventually will eliminate towers, allowing operators to move trains more efficiently from a central command center.

- Employee Safety – The Railroad's employee safety program "appears robust" with accident/injury numbers over the past few years "good with most trends favorable," Nelson stated. LIRR is committed to enhancing employee safety programs.
- Gap – While the number of gap-related customer accidents is on the rise, Nelson attributed the increase to "heightened awareness by the public in general and by employees..." LIRR President Williams has commissioned a hazards analysis that is being conducted by an outside consultant to help develop additional measures aimed at reducing the number of gap accidents as well as identifying other potential customer safety issues.
- East Side Access – With the Railroad set to embark on its largest expansion of service in 100 years when it begins running trains to Grand Central, the LIRR needs to consider allocating more resources to "marketing, advertising and public outreach," Nelson stated. LIRR President Williams has formed an East Side Access Working Group and appointed Vice President John Coulter to lead it to ensure this critical project remains on schedule and receives proper high-level attention from management.
- Vegetation Control – An aggressive brush cutting and vegetation control program is essential during the next two to three years just to "reverse the many years of neglect" that threatens the Railroad's communication and signal systems along the Right of Way, Nelson stated. For example, incidents of downed trees that obstruct passage of trains are up 25 percent during the last five years. This program is underway and the LIRR has requested additional funding to add two new tree-trimming crews.
- Drainage – Develop permanent drainage control projects for mainline stations, New Hyde Park to Westbury, and the Port Washington branch, Nelson stated. LIRR is working with local municipalities to improve drainage, including the Great Neck, Bayside and Mineola stations where flooding has been an issue.
- Right of Way Cleanliness – Clean up the Right of Way around Jamaica where general debris hurts the railroads image among its own customers. LIRR is developing a plan for a systematic clean up along all of its 11 branches.
- Bridges & Viaducts – Although functional and safe, 182 under grade bridges are "not in a state of good repair," Nelson found. An additional 30 positions should be funded to keep up with bridge maintenance requirements. LIRR President Williams has ordered accelerating renovation on the Atlantic Avenue Viaduct and additional maintenance to bring these bridges to a state of good repair.