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LIRR

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MTA LIRR Submits Main Line Corridor - Third Track Project Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement To Federal Transit Administration For Review

The MTA Long Island Rail Road's Main Line Corridor (MLC) project - which provides for a much-needed Third Track in a critical 10-mile stretch between Floral Park and Hicksville - has reached an important milestone as the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) submitted the Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement (PDEIS) to the Federal Transit Administration for review.

The MLC - Third Track project will improve service reliability for the LIRR systemwide by providing more capacity and flexibility to move trains. Five LIRR branches, carrying 41 percent of the Railroad's total ridership, converge on this busy stretch of the Railroad, known as the Main Line Corridor.

The Third Track also is a vital component of the LIRR's effort to get ready for the completion of the \$6.3 billion East Side Access project in 2014 when LIRR customers will - for the first time - be able to enjoy a direct ride to the East Side of Manhattan via Grand Central Terminal. East Side Access will allow the LIRR to operate up to 24 trains per hour in the peak of the rush hour to Grand Central. More than 100,000 LIRR customers currently travel to Penn Station and Brooklyn during the morning peak service. For about half of the customers traveling to Manhattan, Grand Central Terminal would provide easier access to their final destination. With East Side Access, customers will save up to 40 minutes of travel time daily - the equivalent of up to 20 vacation days annually.

The Third Track will add a "passing lane" to the MLC - separating express trains from local trains - and will offer greater capacity, operational flexibility and faster recovery time in the event of incidents or delays. The MLC plan is designed to also offer other community benefits, such as improvements at grade crossings and upgrades to key bridges throughout the corridor, such as Ellison Avenue in the Village of Westbury.

Through the planned elimination of grade crossings in the Third Track corridor, the project enhances safety and accident prevention, improves traffic flow in local communities while also reducing train horn warning noise. The draft plan the LIRR submitted to federal officials offers two grade crossing separation alternatives which address the five grade crossings under review in the MLC. They are: Covert Avenue, South 12th Street and New Hyde Park Road in the Village of New Hyde Park; School Street in the Village of Westbury and Urban Avenue in the New Cassel area.

There are two options, either A or B, proposed for grade crossing improvements with no priority assigned to one option over the other. Option A would address four grade crossings (three separations and one closure) while Option B would address two crossings (two separations).

Crossing Option A

Option A would separate the roadway from the tracks at New Hyde Park Road and Covert Avenue. The New Hyde Park Road crossing is a very busy North-South roadway with 19,500 vehicles per day that currently experiences extended traffic backups due to the gates being down. New Hyde Park Road and Covert Avenue traffic would cross underneath the tracks, similar to the Roslyn Road crossing elimination presently under construction in Mineola. South 12th Street crossing, which experiences considerably less traffic than either New Hyde Park Road or Covert Avenue, would be closed and a pedestrian crossing would be constructed over the tracks to enhance the safety of New Hyde Park Station customers.

Also under Option A, Urban Avenue would be closed to traffic with a pedestrian bridge constructed over the tracks. Urban Avenue traffic (about 7,500 vehicles per day) would be diverted to a new bridge over the tracks, connecting Bond Street with Railroad Avenue. School Street would remain open at-grade with protection enhancements for vehicular traffic.

Crossing Option B

Option B is intended to minimize community impacts even further, particularly in the Village of New Hyde Park, where Covert Avenue and South 12th Street would remain as grade crossings with protection enhancements for vehicle traffic. The other proposed improvements would be identical to Option A described above, with New Hyde Park Road separated, Urban Avenues traffic diverted to a new Bond Street bridge and School Street remaining at-grade.

The LIRR has listened to the public following input at the six scoping meetings held in mid-2005 and it has significantly altered its original plan for the Third Track. Public involvement proved to be invaluable during the development of the project's alignment and grade crossing proposals. In addition, over 40 meetings with federal, state and village officials, and community leaders helped refine the alignment and identified alternatives that have been incorporated into the new plan - significantly reducing potential property impacts.

Providing faster and more frequent access to the East Side of Manhattan will help ensure that Long Islanders can continue to quickly reach high paying, high skilled jobs and also will help keep the Long Island housing market competitive with Westchester and New Jersey.

"The LIRR is planning for the future and we need the support of Long Islanders for this important project," Williams said. "The Third Track will give the LIRR more capacity and flexibility to keep trains moving. East Side Access represents the biggest opportunity to improve LIRR's service in more than 100 years.

"We've worked hard to listen to the communities along the Main Line to reduce the property impacts of the Third Track project and we will continue to seek public input as the project moves forward," said Williams.

Future Project Milestones

Once the FTA reviews the plan, it will be made available for public review and additional public hearings will be scheduled. If final FTA reviews are complete in early 2009, engineering design on the project would take place during 2009, with an estimated construction start in the 1st Quarter of 2010.