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LIRR

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MTA LIRR'S Diesel Fleet Shows Improvements -- 32 Percent Decline in Repeat Maintenance Problems Means Fewer Delays For Commuters

The MTA Long Island Rail Road's diesel fleet has shown marked improvement in reliability as new maintenance procedures have reduced delays and down time for the engines.

"While we still have additional improvements to make, we are encouraged that our focus on this issue has produced tangible results for our customers in the form of fewer breakdowns and delays," said LIRR President Helena Williams.

Consultant Donald N. Nelson last October issued a report saying the LIRR's diesel fleet of 45 locomotives was in "serious trouble" with too frequent breakdowns. The 22 Dual Mode locomotives – which allow trains to be run on either electrified or non-electrified tracks – pose a "major concern." On average the Dual Modes were breaking down every 12,425 miles rather than the targeted 30,000 miles, said Nelson. Following Nelson's report, the LIRR hired an outside train maintenance expert to identify recurring problems and recommend solutions. That consultant, Booz Allen Transportation, issued one dozen recommendations to improve maintenance specific to the Dual Mode engines that were manufactured for the LIRR.

A special task force headed by LIRR Senior Vice President of Operations, Raymond P. Kenny, has overseen the reliability enhancement program and most of those recommendations were implemented in the past year with good results.

An update on the diesel fleet repairs was presented Wednesday to the Long Island Committee of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

The key solution was reorganization of the LIRR's diesel maintenance operation. All diesel fleet functions are now headed by a newly established position, the General Manager – Diesel Shops and Yards, reporting directly to the Chief Mechanical Officer.

In the last year – there have been 32 percent fewer repeat maintenance problems in 2008 compared with the same period of 2007. Previously, locomotives that had a problem in the field were brought into the shop, but were not held long enough for a proper diagnosis. The train was released back into service "with a trouble not found" ticket only to have the problem re-occur.

A major part of improving the diagnosis includes upgrading the LIRR's Morris Park facility, where locomotive maintenance is done. The Morris Park maintenance shop was built to repair steam locomotives of the late 19th Century and needed to be upgraded to maintain today's equipment. As part of the new procedures, better tracking of defective parts and computer software was implemented to create a case history of recurring maintenance problems and what solutions worked.

The LIRR is also improving training of its mechanics and is arranging classes with the equipment manufacturer to complement in-house trainers. Improved communication between engineers and crew members with maintenance personnel has helped to quicken the diagnosis after a debriefing of what mechanical problem happened in the field.

The new diagnostic repair procedures have worked as there have been, 119, or 30.2 percent fewer delays for diesel trains in the first seven months of 2008, compared to the same period in 2007.

In another area, there were zero incidents of Dual Mode locomotives being unable to switch from diesel to electric mode between January and June of this year. There were 16 such incidents for the same six-month period in 2007. There was a 55 percent reduction in the total number of Dual Mode failures resulting in a delay – with 30 in the first six months of 2008, compared to 66 for the same period of 2007.

The new maintenance program put the brakes on a trend of steady increases of diesel train delays from 2002 to 2007, averaging 9.5 percent increase each year – with more than 700 delays last year. However, there is a 31 percent decrease through July, 2008 as the new maintenance procedures were implemented.

The update provided to the Long Island Committee indicates that the diesel fleet shows a turn-around trend in terms of fewer delays and better performance.