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Press Release

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LIRR

IMMEDIATE

Hero LIRR Crew And MTA Police Foil Rape In Progress At Freeport Station After Hearing Victim's Screams

QUICK THINKING ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR CONFRONTS ATTACKER IN ARREST AIDED BY THE USE OF CELL PHONES RECENTLY ISSUED TO TRAIN CREWS

MTA Long Island Rail Road and MTA Police officials today commended the bravery of a LIRR train crew that came to the aid of a 28-year-old woman as she was apparently being sexually assaulted on the track bed just off the eastern end the Freeport train station.

Authorities said the crew's response led to an immediate arrest by MTA Police of an Island Park man who was later charged with the assault on Tuesday afternoon.

"The quick thinking actions of the LIRR crew members and the MTA Police resulted in the apprehension of a suspect and helped save the victim from further attack," said LIRR President Helena Williams. "We are very proud and grateful that the crew members came to the assistance of the victim without hesitation and the MTA police were able to make an arrest."

MTA Police Chief Michael Coan also commended the train crew and MTA Police Officers for their actions as well as the customers who helped.

"This is exactly the kind of teamwork we need everyday from our customers, crew and police," he said. "We're grateful that one of our customers heeded our security campaign advice. They saw something and they said something."

UTU General Chairman Anthony Simon, leader of the union representing the train crew, also offered praise.

"As the general chairman of the of the United Transportation Union, I could not be prouder of our members but their actions do not surprise me. LIRR crew members come in every day and do their job without much fanfare," he said. "The LIRR crew members at Freeport yesterday did not flinch when they heard a cry for help and were able to stop an attack in progress. The victim could have suffered even more traumatic injury if not for their quick action."

The 28-year-old victim was taken to Nassau University Medical Center where she was admitted for treatment.

The westbound Babylon train pulled into the Freeport Station at 4:11 p.m. when several customers on the platform alerted crew members that they heard what sounded like a child's screams coming from the east end of the platform.

Assistant Conductor Eugene Chino, who was in the eighth car, immediately ran in that direction while Collector Lorraine Martinez alerted engineer Brian Zaderecki to hold the train at the station.

"I could hear yelling and screaming, but I couldn't see anyone," said Chino, 42, who has worked for the Railroad for six years. He said he realized the call for help was coming from the track bed and climbed down to investigate. "She was screaming for help."

Meanwhile, MTA Police Officers Kevin Smith and Michelle Russo, who happened to be at the Freeport Station on an unrelated investigation, also responded to the scene of the attack.

"The timing of the police was just incredible," said train conductor James Gannon.

The suspect, identified as David Thornton, 48, of Island Park, surrendered immediately. He was charged with first-degree rape.

Chino said he used his LIRR cell phone to relay information to train engineer Zaderecki and to the Movement Bureau, the Railroad's nerve center at Jamaica Station where supervisors immediately issued a travel restriction to other trains along the route.

Earlier this year, the LIRR purchased more than 1,000 cell phones and issued them to train crews (conductors, assistant conductors, and collectors) as part of a multi-pronged effort to keep customers and crews updated on train delays or emergencies.

President Williams and Chief Coan thanked MTA Police Deputy Chief Kathleen Finneran, Captain Neil Boyle and MTA Police Detectives Brian Longaro, Philip Siconolfi and Haydee Urena for their efforts in the case. They also expressed their thanks to Nassau County Police Detectives Dunn and Ersell of the Special Victims Unit for their assistance.

