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[LIRR](#)

IMMEDIATE

### MTA LIRR Employee Wins APTA Call Center Challenge

#### *Gabrielle Rodriguez Shows 'Extraordinary Skill Handling Customer Service Inquiries'*

Gabrielle Rodriguez, Manager of Long Island Rail Road's Travel Information Center is winner of the national Call Center Challenge competition sponsored by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). The Wantagh, L.I. resident was crowned public transportation's best telephone customer information agent at APTA's 2012 Marketing and Communications Workshop in Miami on February 28.

"This makes it official. Gabrielle is the best customer call center professional in the industry and we couldn't be more proud of her accomplishment," said LIRR President Helena Williams. "She reflects the best tradition of customer service at the LIRR so I am delighted but not surprised that she has won this prestigious national award. Every day, she helps foster an atmosphere of putting customers first at the LIRR's Travel Information Center and she is a key part of our team that is looking at how we can improve customer service even more."

Following her triumph, Rodriguez said: "I was truly impressed by the communication talents displayed by other contestants who attended from across the country. I hope this can only lead to additional opportunities for the LIRR to showcase how we value our customers and strive for outstanding customer service each and every day."

At the LIRR's Travel Information Center (TIC), located at the Railroad's Hillside Facility in Queens, Rodriguez supervises a staff of 17 and an operation that handled 1.7 million calls in 2011, an average of about 5,000 a day.

Rodriguez joined the LIRR in 2006 and under her direction, the TIC's average customer call wait time dropped from 42 seconds that year to 25 seconds in 2011. The number of abandoned calls has dropped from 9.4% in 2006 to 4.9% in 2011 and the total number of calls answered rose from 97.4% in 2006 to 98.5% last year.

Further improvements are expected when the LIRR introduces its new Customer Service Center, still in the planning stages. The goal is to create a one-stop shopping call center for customer inquiries. These days, most LIRR customers are getting the answers to service questions on the internet at the Schedules & Fares section of the Railroad [website](#) which had 19 million unique visitors last year.

APTA's Call Center Challenge recognizes the outstanding efforts of APTA member transit system call center personnel. Each February at the APTA workshop, the best public transit call center personnel face off in a competition to crown the best in the industry. The competition is open to all public transportation call center personnel in North America.

Participants are challenged with real life call center scenarios and judged on their ability to resolve each scenario in a friendly and professional manner.

But to get into the final competition, APTA judges had to whittle down a field of 31 hopefuls to seven finalists during a pre-selection phone interview in which contestants were required to resolve two common customer call center inquiries. Rodriguez made the cut.

The finals took place at the Miami workshop in front of a live audience. Finalists were presented with three randomly selected customer service scenarios and judged on their ability to handle each inquiry. Rodriguez emerged with the highest score and was named public transportation's best telephone customer information agent.

"Americans take more than ten billion trips on public transportation each year and passengers depend on transit agency call center representatives to assist them professionally and efficiently," said APTA President & CEO Michael Melaniphy. "Gabrielle Rodriguez exemplified extraordinary skill in handling customer service inquiries. Congratulations to her and MTA Long Island Rail Road."