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Press Release

June 8, 2015

LIRR

IMMEDIATE

LIRR Thanks Customers for a Successful Day at Belmont Stakes

Chairman Prendergast Says the Long Island Rail Road 'Made the MTA Proud'

MTA Long Island Rail Road President Patrick A. Nowakowski today thanked customers for returning to the Railroad to get to and from Belmont Park on Saturday to witness the historic Triple Crown victory of American Pharoah. Final ridership figures released today showed 25,583 racing fans took the train to the track and, in a surprising turn of events, 28,947 used the railroad to return home. The unexpected increased post-race ridership indicated customers believed LIRR could get them home efficiently even after last year's well-publicized difficulties. So the end, just like last year, one-third of all race fans on hand relied on LIRR for their return.

"Our customers were in good spirits all day, courteous and fully cooperative with our efforts to get them to and from Belmont Park safely and as soon as possible," Nowakowski said. "Once folks realized that we had our act together and they were not going to have to endure long waits they were all smiles at departure time. We are very grateful for their patronage."

MTA Chairman and CEO Thomas F. Prendergast congratulated Nowakowski and LIRR employees for providing "outstanding service" for Saturday's historic Belmont Stakes Day.

"I want to offer my congratulations to Pat and his team at the LIRR for the way in which you responded to the problems that occurred at last year's Belmont Stakes and the outstanding service you all provided at this year's history making race," said Prendergast, himself a former LIRR President. "Our customers have expressed their appreciation for their experience and for your hard work, which for an industry that considers no bad news to be the best it can achieve, is quite an accomplishment."

Prendergast said the LIRR took more than its fair share of criticism after last year's Belmont but noted that Nowakowski, then at the helm of the Railroad for just a few weeks, accepted responsibility and immediately set to work determined the Railroad would do better in 2015.

"Pat took charge and made a number of significant decisions that led to important infrastructure upgrades and came up with a transportation strategy that increased capacity and speeded up service," said Prendergast, referring to the LIRR's decision, in partnership with the New York Racing Association, to spend \$5 million to refurbish the station and implement a transit plan that for the first time allowed empty trains to enter the station as fully loaded trains were leaving. "These were game changers to say the least," he added. "The LIRR has made the MTA proud."

Nowakowski thanked the Chairman for his comments and added: "You cannot imagine how proud I am today of the efforts and professionalism of the LIRR team. They performed superbly! Thank you for giving me the opportunity to lead them."

Prendergast also thanked Christopher Kay, the President and CEO of the New York Racing Association for NYRA's for their assistance, and MTA Security Director Raymond Diaz and MTA Chief of Police Michael Coan and their partners from the New York State Police and Nassau County Police for their assistance in planning for the event, helping maintain order at Belmont Station as well as aiding LIRR customers in need.

Although overall attendance at Belmont Park was deliberately capped at 90,000, down from last's year's crowd of 112,000, the LIRR was still faced with the monumental task of transporting 20,000 fans who left the track almost immediately after American Pharoah became the first thoroughbred to win the Triple Crown since 1978.

Beginning with a 9:39 a.m. departure from Penn Station, the Railroad ran of 20 trains to Belmont Park over the next eight hours, carrying a total 25,583. As with the track attendance, that number was down from the record 36,000 transported to last year's race.

But unlike 2014, when the unprecedented ridership overwhelmed the LIRR's post-race operation and resulted in wait times that some say reached four hours, the multitude descending upon the newly refurbished Belmont Station on Saturday moved almost continually.

In fact, when the last train pulled out of Belmont Station, the LIRR found it had carried 28,947 home customers, 3,364 more than it had brought to the track and nearly as many as it transported home than last year. The vast majority were on their way home within two hours as Nowakowski had promised last week. In 2014, LIRR transported 30,000 at the end of the day, 6,000 fewer than had taken the train out to the track earlier that day.

"Historically, we carry more folks home than we bring," said Nowakowski. "I would venture to say that many found other ways to get home in the midst of last year's chaos and some of them wanted to stay clear of the train this year. But good news travels fast and I think those who made the trip out Saturday let others know that the LIRR had its act together. Now, we will review our performance and figure out how to make it even better next year."

Photos of the LIRR service to the Belmont Stakes are available at this link: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mtaphotos/sets/72157654255015875>

