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IMMEDIATE

Ridership Rises Again on MTA's Railroads in 2014

Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad Stay Busiest in Nation

The Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad both welcomed rising numbers of customers in 2014, new Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) ridership figures show, making them respectively the busiest and second-busiest passenger railroads in the country.

Both railroads saw their strongest growth during non-rush hours, on non-Manhattan commutes and for non-work trips, as customers increasingly rely on the railroads for transportation outside of traditional Manhattan commutes. This increased non-peak ridership, which mirrors trends seen on the MTA New York City Subway, occurs as more jobs in the region are created outside the Manhattan core and in industries without traditional 9-to-5 workdays, such as healthcare, hospitality and arts and entertainment.

Through the 2015-2019 Capital Program, both railroads hope to continue pursuing major projects to expand capacity and improve connections, which will spur economic growth, reduce traffic congestion and make the region more sustainable.

The LIRR reported a year-end total of 85.86 million passengers in 2014, a 3% increase over the prior year. It is the third highest ridership since 1949 and highest since the modern record in 2008.

Metro-North carried 84.66 million passengers in 2014, a 1.5% increase over the prior year and the highest ridership in Metro-North's history. Metro-North ridership has grown 77% over the past 30 years.

"In another era, young people would buy a car with their first paycheck. Now, with access to the nation's most vibrant public transit system, more of them are buying train passes and MetroCards. Across our region, New Yorkers are developing a mindset that riding the railroad isn't just about going to work anymore. It's becoming more and more integrated into the fabric of daily life," said MTA Chairman and CEO Thomas F. Prendergast. "That's why we're pleased to be continuing projects in our Capital Program that will improve rail travel in the years to come, including East Side Access for the LIRR, Penn Station Access for Metro-North, and the LIRR's Ronkonkoma Branch Double Track Project."

On Metro-North, trips that do not involve Grand Central or Harlem-125th Street have increased 273% since 1984 and non-commutation ridership to Manhattan has increased by 133%, while commutes to Manhattan have increased by 31%.

Traditional commutes to Manhattan now constitute less than half of total Metro-North rail ridership. They account for 49% of trips taken in 2014, compared with 67% in 1984. Bronx residents commuting to Westchester County, and Westchester residents commuting to Connecticut, so-called reverse commuters, as well as Connecticut residents commuting from the east end of the New Haven Line to major employment centers in Connecticut, are some of the fastest growing types of travel on Metro-North.

On the Long Island Rail Road, which does not have the same track capacity to support reverse-direction commutes to suburban destinations, non-commutation ridership has nevertheless increased by 66% since 1984; while commutes to Manhattan have essentially held steady, notching a slight 30-year decline of 7% while growing 2.6% in 2014. In total, LIRR ridership has grown 14% since 1984. Traditional commutes now constitute 57% of all LIRR travel, compared to 71% in 1984.

The ridership increases mirror increases in the frequency of trains. Metro-North ridership has been building in part because of 66 weekly trains the railroad added in October 2012, and another 187 weekly trains added in October 2013. Half-hourly weekend service was added to the eastern New Haven Line in November 2014.

The LIRR recently restored weekend and holiday service on the West Hempstead Branch, and has restored several trains that had been eliminated in 2010, including two evening rush-hour trains on the Babylon Branch, two summer-only trains to/from Long Beach, and extension of seasonal weekend service on the Montauk Branch. In total, the LIRR operated 5,000 more trains in 2014 than in 2013.

Increasing use of the railroads for large-scale sports events has also contributed to the non-commutation ridership growth. Metro-North's Yankees-E. 153rd Street Station opened in May 2009; Barclays Center, home of the New York Nets and the future home to the New York Islanders, opened adjacent to the LIRR's Atlantic Terminal in September 2012. Both railroads began providing trips to Jets and Giants games in 2009 with the opening of NJ Transit's train station at the Meadowlands.

The high ridership in 2014 took place in spite of harsh winter storms that reduced travel volumes on both railroads in January and February of 2014.

