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Press Release

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LIRR

IMMEDIATE

Governor Cuomo Announces Completion of Environmental Statement for LIRR Expansion Project

Study Confirms Project Will Improve Service, Reliability and Safety for LIRR Customers by Adding Track Capacity to Main Line; Project Will Eliminate All Street-Level Train Crossings in Project Corridor; Reducing Traffic Jams, Improving Safety

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the completion of the environmental impact study for the proposed LIRR expansion project – one of New York's greatest efforts to increase capacity of the commuter railroad since it was first built in the mid-19th century. The Final Environmental Impact Statement confirms the expansion project will improve LIRR service, reliability, and safety, for both residents and commuters on Long Island.

"Expanding the Main Line is crucial to the future success of Long Island businesses and its residents, and this environmental study brings us one step closer to fulfilling New York's goal of providing reliable, safe travel for all," Governor Cuomo said. "By increasing rail capacity and eliminating street-level grade crossings, this project will reduce congestion and help build a transit system that meets the demands of 21st century travelers, marking another major step forward in our efforts to build a brighter future for Long Island."

The project's comprehensive Final Environmental Impact Statement is the result of more than a year of data collection, analysis, and continuous public outreach. A total of 12 public hearings were conducted, in addition to a walk-in project office at Mineola Station, and hundreds of meetings with elected officials, community groups, transit and engineering advocates and experts, and other critical stakeholders such as individual homeowners, business owners and commuters. The study is available on the LIRR project website at www.aModernLI.com.

Required by New York State environmental laws, this study aimed to identify any potential significant adverse impacts, and ensure the project is implemented safely, responsibly, and with public input. The study's findings confirm that the LIRR expansion project will improve service and reduce delays for customers throughout the system by adding a third track to the bottlenecked, two-track section of the Main Line in Nassau County. The elimination of street-level train crossings, or "grade crossings," in the project area will also reduce delays and improve safety. The study demonstrates that by constructing sound barriers and retaining walls, the project will significantly reduce noise in local communities by blocking sound from trains. Removing street level grade crossings in the project corridor will eliminate the loud train horns and crossing bells required at these crossings, and end the extensive idling of automobiles at grade crossings which will reduce air pollution. Eliminating street-level crossings will reduce traffic jams and improve safety.

MTA Interim Executive Director Veronique "Ronnie" Hakim said, "This comprehensive study is the result of exhaustive research, data collection, analysis and public consultation, using some of the strictest environmental standards in the nation. It confirms not just vast benefits for commuters throughout the entire LIRR system, but for our neighbors in the project corridor as well, with significant reductions in noise, and the safety and convenience benefits that come from eliminating grade crossings, building sound barrier walls and parking garages, and updating stations."

LIRR President Patrick Nowakowski said, "This completely new effort to fix the two-track bottleneck on the LIRR's Main Line between Floral Park and Hicksville is like none that ever came before it – with exhaustive community participation, no residential relocations and significant reductions in noise and improvements in safety for local residents."

The proposed project is completely different from prior proposals to expand track capacity on the LIRR's Main Line. The Final EIS released today confirms that this project will include:

- No residential relocations;
- Elimination of all street-level grade crossings within the 9.8-mile project corridor;
- Construction of sound barrier walls to reduce noise;
- Station upgrades;
- Additional parking;
- Increased reliance on private construction industry expertise to minimize construction duration, impacts and cost; and
- An unprecedented level of public outreach to engage local officials, homeowners and other stakeholders and incorporate their input while the project is being planned and constructed.

A draft of the EIS was released in November 2016, and was followed by a public comment period that was extended in response to public request. Six public hearings at three locations, with shuttle buses available from nearby rail stations, were held in January and approximately 1,000 people attended. More than 700 formal comments were also submitted and responded to, which are included in the Final EIS under "Response to Comments." The full text of comments as written, as well as full transcripts of all six Draft EIS hearings, are available in an appendix of the Final EIS. All sections of the Final EIS are available on the project website.

As part of new information included the Final EIS published today, a number of proposed project elements and their descriptions were further developed.

New and modified elements of the EIS include descriptions and renderings of:

- The architectural design of proposed station improvements;
- The location and type of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant access or emergency access to station platforms, including at Floral Park station;
- The location, length, and height of various sound barrier walls; and
- The size and design of proposed parking garages at Mineola, Westbury, and Hicksville.

The Final EIS also contains additional or revised analyses of environmental and other conditions that fall within the scope of the study. The Final EIS:

- Confirms significant noise reductions for communities near the LIRR right-of-way, due to the use of sound barrier walls and retaining walls, and the elimination of street-level train crossings that cause train horns and crossing bells to sound throughout the day;
- Confirms vibration impact reductions for communities near the LIRR right-of-way, due to the use of special vibration-absorbing fasteners, rail pads and ties;
- Updates the land use, community character and visual impacts analyses to account for adjustments made to the location, length, and height of proposed retaining walls and sound barrier walls and provides additional renderings at locations in the project corridor;
- Contains updated archaeological assessment confirming no impacts at the proposed parking garage locations;
- Incorporates the results of soil analysis conducted within the LIRR right-of-way and at parking garage locations, as well as results of asbestos and lead sampling at station buildings, substations, bridges, signal huts, and other affected structures within the LIRR right-of-way;
- Revises traffic analysis to incorporate additional intersections and to consider modified access to the proposed parking garages;
- Updates air quality analysis; and
- Expands the construction noise analysis to include more detail on specific pieces of equipment likely to be used at various locations throughout the project corridor and the efficacy of noise control measures that would be required.

The LIRR Expansion Project will add a third track to 9.8 miles along the congested Main Line of the LIRR between Floral Park and Hicksville, and eliminate all seven street-level grade crossings within the project corridor.

With up to 40 percent of the LIRR's 308,000 daily passengers going through the Main Line, which serves as the main corridor through which many branches of the LIRR travel, the proposed project will improve service for more than half a million passengers per week.

Currently, trains are required to blow their horns as they pass through grade crossings, and additional noise comes from bells that alert nearby drivers, who idle in long lines as they wait for trains to pass and honk their horns when gates open. The elimination and modification of all seven street-level grade crossings within the project area will be overseen by the Department of Transportation.

NYS Department of Transportation Commissioner Matthew Driscoll said, "The street-level grade crossing elimination options for this project were developed in close consultation with local communities and will end the noise, traffic and safety concerns that they have been living with for years. It will lead to a significant improvement in quality of life for many people."

Proposed retaining walls and sound barrier walls will have an even greater impact after the significant service increases from the East Side Access Project go into effect.

The project also includes major track infrastructure upgrades such as new switches, signals and power equipment, as well as station upgrades such as new, longer platforms to accommodate full-length trains, removing delays and safety issues associated with passengers needing to move between cars on shorter platforms. The project also proposes additional parking to address future ridership growth. These and other proposed components of the project are the result of months of direct consultation with local elected officials and community members, as well as analysis by experienced transportation engineers.

Other environmental benefits from the project, such as reduced greenhouse gas emissions, derive from reduced automobile trips as a result of additional and more reliable rail service.

All project benefits, as well as other detailed information like track and grade crossing changes, proposed service changes, current land use patterns and proposed construction staging, are outlined in the project's EIS.

No Residential Property Acquisitions

Unlike previous attempts to add a third track to the two-track Main Line, this project is designed without a single residential property being taken, as promised by Governor Cuomo soon after the proposal was announced last year. As shown by detailed figures in the EIS, this will be achieved by building the third track entirely within the LIRR's existing property lines.

Increased Transparency and Community Outreach

At Governor Cuomo's direction, the LIRR Expansion Project team has undertaken an unprecedented level of community outreach since the proposal was first announced last year, including hundreds of meetings to date with elected officials, community leaders, homeowners along the project corridor, LIRR customers, and stakeholders throughout the region. A staffed, walk-in information office with project documents and other materials has been open since May 2016. An outline of the Draft EIS, called a Draft Scoping Document, was published in May 2016, and six public hearings were held that month to solicit comments from the public. A Final Scoping Document incorporating that public comment was published in August 2016, and meetings with local communities and stakeholders continued into the fall. All of this input helped shape the content of the Draft EIS, which was published in November 2016 and was the subject of another lengthy public comment period as well as six public hearings earlier this year. The public input received during this comment period has been incorporated into the project and its Final EIS.

Community-Focused Construction Mitigation

Responding to extensive input from local communities, the project will require contractors to use neighbor-friendly and innovative construction practices to keep the impact of construction as minimal as possible. This community-focused approach to construction includes:

- Pre-construction home inspections;
- Satellite parking to keep workers' personal vehicles out of residential streets;
- Using existing track to transport materials to and from work sites;
- Advance notification of any disruptive work or road closures to residents, municipalities, school districts and first-responders;
- Scheduling construction deliveries outside of school and commuter traffic peak hours to the maximum extent practicable;
- Creating and implementing a community noise and vibration monitoring program;
- Implementing an air quality control plan to include dust control measures, ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel, the use of best available tailpipe technologies such as diesel particulate filters, and the utilization of newer equipment;
- Environmental monitoring consistent with a Construction Health and Safety Plan;
- Protecting access to existing businesses;
- Street cleaning as needed;
- Door-to-door outreach to residents;
- Regular online updates to the public;
- Staffing the Project Information Office with on-site supervision for rapid response to neighborhood concerns; and
- A 24/7 hotline assigned to a community outreach representative.

In addition, Governor Cuomo has directed that construction for this project use the "design-build" contracting technique, which places oversight of the construction in the hands of private construction firms, which are expert in the field. This means that construction oversight will be completely different from past LIRR projects, with goals to shorten the construction timeline, improve efficiency and minimize the impact of the project on surrounding communities and rail passengers.

The design-build method, used in other projects like the current building of a new Tappan Zee Bridge, puts the responsibility to both design and build a project on a single firm, capitalizing on private sector construction expertise and innovation and incentivizing a firm's success at reducing construction length, cost and impacts.

In November 2016, the MTA Board voted to use a two-step public process to identify the private construction firms that are best qualified to work on the LIRR Expansion Project and then, in the future, select one based on the best proposal to meet the project's objectives. The initial stages of the procurement process and the environmental study are happening in parallel so that agency decision making in areas that are important to the public – like construction time, cost and impacts – are informed by ideas that emerge during the early stages of the procurement process.

In a demonstration of the widespread interest in the project from the local business community, more than 700 local small businesses attended a forum in Queens Village last month to learn more about the project, find out how to get hired to work on it, and meet the various construction firms that have qualified to bid to design and build the project. The forum attracted participants from Long Island and across the New York metropolitan area and focused outreach on service-disabled veteran-, women- and minority-owned entrepreneurs to ensure that the widest possible array of local small businesses find the opportunity to work on the project.

The LIRR Expansion Project is part of a broader, ongoing effort by Governor Cuomo to transform the MTA and improve transit and transportation throughout New York State. On Long Island, projects like the Double Track Project between Farmingdale and Ronkonkoma, the Jamaica Capacity Improvements Project, and the East Side Access Project to bring LIRR to Grand Central Terminal, will all bring better service to LIRR customers and help ease congestion on clogged local streets and highways such as the Long Island Expressway, Northern and Southern State Parkways, and Grand Central and Belt Parkways.