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Press Release

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LIRR

IMMEDIATE

MTA Board Members Vote to Accept and Conclude Year-Long Environmental Study for LIRR Expansion Project

Board Approval Advances Major Project to Expand and Improve LIRR; Project Will Add Third Track to Bottlenecked Main Line & Eliminate 7 Street-Level Train Crossings – Adding Trains, Reducing Delays & Crowding, Reducing Traffic Jams, Improving Safety

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board voted today to accept the findings of the year-long environmental study for the Long Island Rail Road Expansion Project, one of New York's most significant efforts to increase capacity of the commuter railroad since it was first built in the mid-19th century.

"Keeping our transportation infrastructure up to date is critical to our region's future," said MTA Interim Chair Fernando Ferrer. "Today the Board voted to advance the critical LIRR Expansion Project, which uses innovative approaches to keep construction cost and time to a minimum and incorporates extensive industry and public input."

"The success of our region depends upon modern, up-to-date transportation systems and this visionary project imagined and shepherded by Governor Cuomo represents the LIRR's transformation from a 19th-century rail system to a 21st-century one," said MTA Interim Director Veronique Hakim. "I'm grateful to the Board for its support, again, in advancing this proposal."

"The LIRR is the busiest commuter rail system in the country, and is experiencing record ridership numbers as well," said LIRR President Patrick Nowakowski. "While other improvements are underway systemwide, we simply cannot fully meet the need for more and better service without the additional capacity and flexibility of additional tracks on our Main Line. Construction of an additional track in Suffolk County is well underway, and today's vote brings us one step closer to starting an additional track in Nassau, too."

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 project and then, in the future, select one based on the best proposal to meet the project's objectives. These initial stages of this "Request for Proposals" 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 procurement process.

Construction on the project could begin after funding is approved and a contract is awarded to one of several internationally-experienced consortia who have expressed interest in bidding to design and build the project.

The "design-build" contracting technique 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 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 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 results of the project's environmental study may be read on the project website at www.aModernLI.com, under "Final Environmental Impact Statement" (FEIS).

The proposed project is completely different from prior proposals to expand track capacity on the LIRR's Main Line. The project includes:

- Building of a third track on the critical Main Line, to improve service options and reliability on branches throughout the entire LIRR system;
- No residential property acquisitions;
- Elimination of all street-level grade crossings within the 9.8-mile project corridor, which will reduce delays, improve safety, and reduce noise by eliminating gate bells and warning horns from trains;
- Construction of sound barrier walls to reduce noise;
- Station upgrades including longer platforms, ADA accessibility and energy-efficient LED lighting;
- More than 2,000 additional parking spaces;
- 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.

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. The central location of this critical artery of the LIRR means that improvements here will be experienced by passengers throughout the entire system.

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.

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, scheduling that takes school and commuter traffic schedules into account, an air quality control plan, a 24/7 hotline assigned to a community outreach representative, and more.

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.