



MTA Press Releases

[Select Language](#) | ▼

Press Release

March 22, 2017

LIRR

IMMEDIATE

OFFICIALS: Proposed 3rd Track Project Would Reduce Delays for Commuters Throughout Long Island

'LIRR Expansion Project' Eliminates Congested Systemwide Bottleneck; Trains Serving Branches Throughout Long Island Are Impacted by Delays in Proposed Project Corridor; New Video Shows Customers Describing Their LIRR Experiences and How 3rd Track Can Help

The proposed Long Island Rail Road Expansion Project, which adds a third track to the congested two-track Main Line in Nassau County and eliminates seven street-level train crossings in the project area, would reduce delays and improve reliability for hundreds of thousands of commuters due to the interconnected nature of the LIRR's 10 branches, officials said. The project would also add peak-hour passenger service.

"Because of the central position of this corridor and the interconnected nature of the system, having just two tracks on the Main Line causes delays throughout the entire LIRR system," said MTA Interim Executive Director Veronique Hakim. "The region will never reach its full potential with a transit bottleneck like this in place – it's just not sustainable and it must be fixed."

"Imagine trying to drink through a straw while pinching the middle of it with your fingers," said LIRR President Patrick Nowakowski. "That's what's happening with the severely bottlenecked Main Line, in which four tracks from one end and six tracks from the other all converge into one narrow two-track corridor."

Project officials also released a short video of LIRR customers describing their current travel experiences and how a third track would help their commutes. The video was released on Twitter via @aModernLI and is also viewable on the project website at www.aModernLI.com or directly on YouTube at https://youtu.be/W0-2_ipTKf4.

"Especially when there's a problem, it would just eliminate a lot of the large delays," says a commuter from Syosset in the video.

"It would be good for business on Long Island, so we get more people out there and make more people willing to do the commute," says an employer in Mineola.

"Just one extra train would change my life," says another Long Island commuter.

About the Project

The LIRR Expansion Project is a completely different proposal from prior attempts to add a third track to the bottlenecked Main Line – with the track built entirely within the existing LIRR right-of-way, not a single home will need to be relocated for the project. The project also includes numerous other elements that improve safety and quality of life for customers and neighbors in the project corridor, including:

- The elimination of all seven grade crossings in the project corridor, to improve safety, reduce traffic congestion and reduce noise from legally mandated train horns and gate bells
- Station upgrades including longer, full-length platforms that reduce boarding time at stations
- The installation of sound barrier walls to reduce noise for homes along the tracks
- The addition of more than 2,000 new parking spots in the project corridor

How the Project Reduces Delays on the Main Line

As noted in this animated video debuted at recent public hearings for the project, the current two-track section of Main Line between Floral Park and Hicksville acts as a severely congested bottleneck – with four tracks to the west and six tracks to the east – in the heart of the entire LIRR system. Approximately 40 percent of the LIRR's daily weekday customers travel through this corridor every day, and a greater percentage of customers can experience cascading delays – sometimes even systemwide delays – caused by incidents in this corridor.

An array of incidents can temporarily reduce track capacity, including: broken rail or track; disabled trains; signal or switch malfunctions; persons or objects blocking the tracks at crossings; persons or objects being struck by trains; and broken or malfunctioning crossing gates, which force trains to slow down as they pass through street-level crossings where cars or pedestrians may get in the way. The additional track capacity of the LIRR Expansion Project would reduce the delays caused by many of these incidents; the Project's elimination of seven grade crossings would negate the possibility of some of these incidents altogether.

The MTA is currently undertaking numerous infrastructure and capital improvement projects that will reduce common causes of delays. The projects include adding a second track to single-track territory between Farmingdale and Ronkonkoma; the Jamaica Capacity Improvements Project to add a

platform and upgrade switches and signals at the busy hub; signal and switch improvements to the busy Harold interlocking outside the East River Tunnels, and everywhere else in the system; and the acquisition of new, more reliable train cars.

Meanwhile, a delay-causing incident in the two-track Main Line corridor in Nassau County can affect not only the many LIRR customers who travel through that corridor, but it can often cause delays on branches of the LIRR that don't even touch the Main Line, such as the Port Washington, Babylon, Montauk, Long Beach and Far Rockaway Branches.

That's because many trains that start a morning rush hour on one branch often travel through the Main Line corridor before reaching Penn Station, and then turn around to return to Long Island and pick up passengers on another branch. If a train is delayed getting through the project corridor on its first run, then it will be delayed in starting its second run, and will arrive at Penn Station late a second time in one morning. Figure S-3 in the LIRR Expansion Project's Draft Environmental Impact Statement provides a graphical illustration of this sequence. The same scenario occurs during the evening rush hour as well.

For example, the 5:24 a.m. train from Ronkonkoma will travel through the Main Line to arrive at Penn Station by 7:08 a.m., only to turn around and quickly travel through the Babylon Branch to Wantagh, where it will pick up passengers at 7:48 a.m. for a second run to Penn Station. If an incident in the Main Line project corridor causes this train to be late on its first run, it will be late on its subsequent runs outside the project corridor as well.

Among major incidents (causing 10 or more late trains) that occurred along the Main Line project corridor between January and September 2016 (the most recent period for which this analysis is available), about 16 percent of the resultant delays happened to trains on non-Main-Line branches.

After one incident – an Aug. 15, 2016 passenger strike at Westbury Station – more than 35 percent of the resultant delays happened to trains on non-Main-Line branches. This includes 15 delays on the Babylon Branch, five delays on the Long Beach Branch, three delays on the Port Washington Branch, two delays on the Far Rockaway Branch and one delay on the West Hempstead Branch.

The LIRR Expansion Project, if approved, will reduce rail delays throughout all of Long Island in a number of ways. Primarily, the added track capacity will allow trains to get around unavoidable incidents. Today, two tracks are needed to accommodate full rush-hour service in the peak direction. A problem that takes one track out of service cuts the railroad's capacity by half, causing severe congestion and delays that ripple throughout the system. With three tracks, if one is out of service, the railroad will still have full two-track capacity remaining to accommodate its full rush-hour schedule. This scenario is comparable to the difference between an incident happening on a two-lane highway versus an incident happening on a three-lane highway; traffic congestion is significantly reduced on the three-lane highway.

Furthermore, the grade crossing elimination component of the LIRR Expansion Project provides the opportunity to completely eliminate the source of many train delays. Train service can be delayed whenever a person or car breaks or goes around a crossing gate or enters the tracks at a crossing. In the worst case scenario, a train striking a person or car can reduce track capacity for hours. When gates are struck and broken, or malfunctioning, trains must drastically reduce speed as they pass through and personnel manually direct traffic away from the tracks. Eliminating grade crossings eliminates crossing gates that can be broken, and eliminates a large street-level opening where vehicles or pedestrians can enter track areas.

Eliminating grade crossings will have the additional quality of life and environmental benefits for local residents of ending the vehicular traffic congestion caused by gates, as well as ending the train horns and gate bells that are required by law to sound as trains approach street-level crossings. Federal law requires train horns to blow as far as a quarter of a mile away from an approaching grade crossing.

For more information about the LIRR Expansion Project, go to www.aModernLI.com or visit the Project Information Center at Mineola Station (schedule on project website).