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Press Release

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LIRR

IMMEDIATE

LIRR Notches Dramatic Railroad Crossing Safety Improvements; Federal Regulators Recommend All U.S. Railroads Review LIRR Program and Consider Similar Steps

GPS Integration and Crossing Safety Markers Virtually Eliminate Motorists-Turning-Onto-Tracks Incidents in First Year After Implementation

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has recognized MTA Long Island Rail Road for a nation-leading program that has dramatically improved railroad safety through the use of flexible delineators at railroad crossings and enhanced GPS alerts. The delineators and a partnership with Google/Waze have in their first year virtually eliminated the problem of motorists inadvertently turning onto tracks, which until last year had been happening with increased frequency – 21 times a year. The FRA is recommending other railroads across the country review research on the LIRR program and consider making similar upgrades at problematic areas.

As part of the LIRR Forward initiative, the railroad in June 2018 installed flexible, four-feet high reflective delineators as well as extended roadway markings and additional reflective devices to better alert drivers, who may become confused by GPS directions while driving in darkness or inclement weather, that they should not make a turn onto the tracks. To further those safety efforts, the LIRR began a groundbreaking partnership with the GPS navigation app Waze, with a first-of-its-kind feature to debut on the app alerting motorists that they are approaching a grade crossing.

At the time the LIRR had 296 grade crossings throughout system where the safety markers were installed. Since that time, two grade crossings, one at Urban Ave. in New Cassel and one at Covert Ave. in New Hyde Park, have been removed as part of the LIRR Expansion Project which includes the elimination of six more Long Island Rail Road grade crossings.

"Unlike an underground subway system, commuter railroads have to contend with drivers at grade crossings, a common element of traffic safety that the MTA and the FRA are trying to mitigate with new strategies," said **MTA Managing Director Ronnie Hakim**. "Kudos to MTA Long Island Rail Road for their successful approach to this problem."

"I am pleased that our efforts to constantly implement and innovate our safety methods has had a dramatic effect on eliminating incidents at grade crossings," said **LIRR President Phil Eng**. "While we can't control driver behavior, we continue to be proactive and keep our trains moving safely. We have truly benefitted from our partnership with Waze and are proud to pave the way for railroads across the country in using this collaborative technology."

Last month, the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center included the Long Island Rail Road's implementation of delineators, road striping, and reflective markings at grade crossings as part of their published research for the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) into grade crossing right-of-way incursion treatments. See report here: <https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/system-wide-implementation-rail-right-way-incursion-treatments>

Volpe compared delays, reports of cars on tracks entering through the grade crossing due to mistakenly turning onto the tracks, and actual collisions with trains for a period one year before, June 2017 through May 2018 and one year after the installations, June 2018 through May 2019. The study concluded that there was an 85 percent reduction in vehicles mistakenly turning onto the track at LIRR grade crossings. The study also points to an 86 percent reduction in the number of trains delayed due to reports of vehicles on tracks.

Between June 2017 and May 2018, the year before the delineator program was introduced, there were 21 car-on-the-track incidents. The number of vehicles errantly turning on the tracks where delineators were installed dropped to zero for the same period post-installation.

Between June 2018 and May 2019, train delays due to reports of cars inadvertently turning on the tracks, dropped to 57 compared to the same period between June 2017 and May 2018 where there were 401 train delays due to cars inadvertently turning on tracks where delineators were in place. That amounts to a reduction of 344 trains delayed, almost 138 fewer delay hours, an 89 percent reduction.

Nassau County Executive Laura Curran said: "The Long Island Rail Road's delineator and Waze integration is a great example of how technology and innovation really work to make train travel safer for the people of Long Island. I have been a proponent of investing in modernization across LIRR in order to improve safety, alleviate congestion and strengthen the future of Long Island's economy."

Suffolk County Executive Bellone said: "Under the leadership of President Phil Eng, the Long Island Rail Road has set a national standard for safety. I commend the LIRR for their innovative leadership and new partnerships, which have dramatically improved safety and visibility for our motorists at historically dangerous railroad crossings."

State Sen. Kevin Thomas said: "Unauthorized rail crossings are a serious safety concern. With the rise of GPS, many drivers were inadvertently driving onto the railroad tracks after misunderstanding their GPS directions, causing delays and risking lives. I commend the MTA Long Island Rail Road for quickly identifying the issue and working to implement effective solutions. These cutting-edge safety methods have dramatically improved safety and reduced train delays across our communities."

Metro-North Railroad is also adopting the integration program along with their ongoing safety initiatives. The implementation of all technologies has significantly enhanced safety in the communities served by LIRR and Metro-North and improved the customer experience.

Key railroad safety reminders:

- Everyone, including pedestrians, must stop when a train approaches a grade crossing.
- Failing to stop a vehicle at a railroad grade crossing not less than 15 feet from the nearest rail, when an audible or clearly visible electric or mechanical signal device gives warning of the immediate approach of a train (e.g., bells and/or flashing red lights), or when a crossing gate is lowered, is illegal. If convicted of such an offense, the violator faces (for a first violation) a fine of not more than \$150 or imprisonment for not more than 15 days or both (with higher penalties for subsequent violations).
- Driving through, around or under any crossing gate or barrier at a railroad crossing while such gate or barrier is closed, or being opened or closed, is also illegal. If convicted of such an action, the violator faces a fine (for a first violation) of not less than \$250 nor more than \$400, or imprisonment for not more than 30 days, or both (with higher penalties for subsequent violations).
- Pay attention to the roadway and its surroundings at all times, while driving. Stay alert for warning bells, red flashing lights, train horns and lowering crossing gates.
- Never stop in the middle of a railroad crossing. Always finish crossing to the other side.