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Press Release

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LIRR

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TRANSCRIPT: MTA Long Island Rail Road President Phil Eng Appears on LI News Radio

MTA Long Island Rail Road President Phil Eng appeared on 103.9FM's LI News Radio with Jay Oliver on Monday, June 22, to discuss the Phase 2 of New York City reopening and how it affects LIRR.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

JAY OLIVER: It's Phase Two in New York City. The reopening today and a big caveat of that is a taking to and from passengers and commuters and everything else. Long Island Rail Road, we're talking about the President of the Railroad, nice enough to give us a couple of minutes here on a Monday morning. You know him well. Phillip Eng, we welcome you back, Sir, how are you? Hope you're well.

PHIL ENG: I'm fine, Jay. Thank you very much for having me back. Hope you're well at this time too.

OLIVER: Lovely, doing okay, and I'm certainly jazzed, somewhat here, as far as New York City being up and around and in somewhat of a big way. At least it's a start as far as Phase Two is concerned. That means more commuters, hopefully more confidence. Give me your take on things as far as the Railroad is concerned. We talked to you last time, as far as you know, having the capacity and everything else for cars. What's the latest as far as the LIRR?

ENG: Well I give a lot of credit to the workforce, still. They've done tremendous efforts in ensuring that we can run the 90% of our regular train service everyday, right now, and it's been running very well. It's been able to accommodate the ridership that we saw from Phase One of New York City, Phase Two of Long Island. And this morning, everything is going smoothly. We're continuing to see people wear their face coverings, we're continuing to see people spread out throughout the trains and across the platforms to give them a little more space, and we even saw as people were preparing for this week, we saw a jump on Friday to 15% of our ridership, that was a 1% from earlier in the week and then this weekend we actually saw another surge to about 20% of our normal weekend riders. So, little by little, we're seeing people return. And I think they know the efforts that the workforce have been doing to keep the Railroad safe. It's making them feel more comfortable

OLIVER: What the Railroad did a couple of weeks ago with the TrainTime app, if you could talk about that a second. And we're talking about, listen, a lot of people want to know if a car is crowded and this will now provide this app real time information on how crowded each train car is before you board. So important, that I wish I had that when I was traveling way back but, in essence, talk a little bit about that.

ENG: Yes, you know, we're very proud of that. We did that completely in-house, it's the first in North America rail to have this ability for customers to actually see in real time. Just what loading is in the car, and every car in our train fleets of the electric fleet. And it also tells them where they're standing on the platform so they can walk up or down and find a car that has, perhaps, more seating, more space available for them. It has the ability to tell you which track your train is pulling into, it gives you push notifications in all of the stations, including Penn Station. With regards to that, and all of this is in real time. The minute it shows up on our board it shows up on your phone. And we, we decided to upgrade the TrainTime app because we know that 70,000 users daily before COVID were relying on this app and we didn't want to create a new app. So what we did is, we brought all the new metrics to them.

OLIVER: I think it's great. Is this something that we could possibly see maybe, I don't know, maybe on the buses, the subways, would be phenomenal if that would be applied to it, Metro-North. What about the other aspects of traveling fully?

ENG: We're working with MTA, we're working with Transit and we're working with Metro-North. In fact, not only were we working in-house with regards to how we develop this, and we've been fielding a lot of calls from across the country, from rail agencies seeking to see how we did this. So, it's you know, it's one of those things where we're proud that we were able to deliver this for the Long Island Rail Road, but we also want to be able to share how we did it to make sure that anyone that wants to do this, particularly during, now, when everyone is trying to find that little extra space as they're still battling the virus. It's vital information and information is power through our riders.

OLIVER: It's Phillip Eng, President of the Railroad with us, couple of minutes. You know, listen, it's just as natural I would imagine to a commuter with all that has happened during the pandemic they know about a rate hike that's coming next year, Phil, but it's just a way of life as far as thinking about it, you can't help with all that's been going on here. Ridership, we know, it hasn't been there in the last hundred days or so, and they kind of figured, okay let's let the other shoe drop, hit us now. You know, this is something you have very little control over, but it's a mindset of the commuter. You want to make sure things are kept up in a very up way, what about that aspect as far as the dollars and cents commuting to and from? Certainly that plays a role as far as maybe a changeover, there could be a way of change regarding how things have been going about during a pandemic, to what will the future hold now as far as those going into the city, maybe it's kind of a stay at home mode there. Give me that whole picture of what you're thinking right now as far as a possible change of life for the average worker into the big city.

ENG: Well no, you're absolutely right, it is going to be a change of whatever the new normal is. Right now with Phase Two of New York City, offices can reopen, but we also know that that's to a 50% capacity. And we've been doing that here on Long Island Rail Road, right, where we don't want everyone back, and we've learned that we can do things differently. People can work at home, people can work on different shifts, and we're seeing that in our ridership. We noticed how people, now, instead of buying a monthly are buying 10-trip tickets. We see a lot of daily trips because not everyone's going in five days a week or seven days a week anymore. And until the businesses that are restarting have figured out how they're going to restart all their work, and we're going to continue to monitor ridership, we're going to continue to ensure that we have sufficient service throughout the day. That's why we're running the 90% service that we have. We want to be there to support them, and we're going to continue to be nimble and we will adjust service as we see ridership patterns changing. A lot of this, as we've talked about Jay, is the mental stress that people are going through, whether it's the economic stress, the uncertainty with COVID and the fear of obviously contracting it, and spreading it among family members. So, the ability for the Railroad is to ensure that we have sanitized train cars, sanitized stations. We're running robust service, and to let people know how to use our system and find space within the system, that will aid in their ability to do their business and and get to their work and feel a little more comfortable if they're taking the Railroad.

OLIVER: We talk about consumer confidence, how important it is as far as businesses, well guess what, same thing here. People have to feel confident in riding in the cars and whatnot, they're going to keep an eye as far as the masks, who's wearing it, who's not, hopefully everyone is, the distancing could play a factor there. What about the sanitizing and everything else on the cars, is that going to still happen as we enter Phase Two? I know you were doing it nightly, service was not altered in any way which was a good thing. What about that?

ENG: Absolutely. You know, a lot of things that came out of this pandemic we've found ways to do things differently, and we've done some things that are unprecedented, and the level of disinfecting that we're doing is unprecedented. We intend to continue that right now. Every train car is disinfected daily, every station touch point is disinfected twice daily. And not only did we, are we doing that, but we're doing that more efficiently than when we first started. I talked about this before, how we went from using sanitizing wipes to using foggers and a train car typically took 30 minutes initially, and we've gotten that down to five minutes. It shows that we can reinvent ourselves, we're doing that, and particularly in periods like this, cleanliness is important. We're also still continuing to provide face masks if people need it; we're continuing to provide hand sanitizers across our system. All of these measures to help fight the virus, to give people peace of mind, and to help support them during those times where everyone is still getting their feet under them.

OLIVER: Well, more people in and around the big city, more people riding in, and certainly Phillip Eng has an eye on everything. Sir, can't thank you enough. You stay well, and we look forward to the next time, how's that?

ENG: Jay, I thank you very much. You stay well and we look forward to that next phase. The Long Island Phase Three is Wednesday, I believe, so we're set for that, too.

OLIVER: I can't wait for that. Thanks so much. Phillip Eng, the President of the Long Island Rail Road.