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Press Release

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LIRR

IMMEDIATE

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

LIRR President Phil Eng: "Since the storm hit, the workforce has been out around-the-clock but we have been able to restore on a number of branches, including Port Washington, Babylon, Far Rockaway, Long Beach, West Hempstead, Hempstead, and then this morning we restored service back on Huntington and Ronkonkoma for our Main Line, and it's some limited service because equipment needs to be positioned to run more robust westbound service. But we have service back on Huntington and Ronkonkoma. Now we're working on Port Jefferson Branch that has a number of locations that has significant downed trees and power issues. Oyster Bay Branch is getting cleaned up, we expect that back today and then we're continuing to work on Greenport and Montauk as we restore all our branches back to the service we've been running."

MTA Long Island Rail Road President Phil Eng appeared live on 103.9FM's LI News Radio with Jay Oliver to discuss the impact of Tropical Storm Isaias on the LIRR's service region.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Jay Oliver: Give us the latest, sir.

Phil Eng: Since the storm hit, the workforce has been out around the clock, but we have been able to restore on a number of branches, including Port Washington, Babylon, Far Rockaway, Long Beach, West Hempstead, Hempstead. And then this morning we restored service back on Huntington and Ronkonkoma for our Main Line, and it's some limited service because equipment needs to be positioned to run more robust westbound service. But we have service back on Huntington and Ronkonkoma. Now, we're working on the Port Jefferson Branch that has a number of locations that has significant downed trees and power issues. The Oyster Bay Branch is getting cleaned up. We expect that back today and then we're continuing to work on Greenport and Montauk as we restore all our branches back to the service we've been running.

Oliver: You said Ronkonkoma is up and running?

Eng: Ronkonkoma is running. We started that about 7:15 this morning, the first train out of Ronkonkoma. There will be more westbound trains right now as we get equipment positioned to run -- more eastbound trains as we get more equipment to run westbound.

Oliver: I'm just curious. When you have all this damage, trees and everything else, what happens? I know you guys have your own equipment, do you get help from PSEG? How's the involvement in unison happening there?

Eng: Well you know PSEG, we've been working very closely with them both before the storm and during the storm where the power issues are involved. We need them to come in and de-energize. That's obviously paramount to the workforce being able to remove debris. For example, along the New Cassel area we had adjoining building to the property, the roof blew off and it landed on our tracks, pulling down some wires. PSEG worked very closely with us, de-energized. We got the roofing removed and we repaired the track and repaired the third rail and service is now running through there. So it is a very close coordination. We know that they have been hit hard too as they look to restore power to the communities. But it's a great effort both on their forces and our forces and I'm really proud of the work that we've done given what we've been through this year.

Oliver: So many different angles, I can't even imagine on your end, you see a storm, Phillip, like this down in Florida. When this lands Saturday, it was a Cat 1, on its way, gets broken up, and then all of a sudden, it kind of makes its way along the coast into the Carolinas and that point you know that it was making its way to that northeast. At what point do the wheels start turning within as far as, you know, what preparation and everything else? Give me an idea of timeline. Last weekend we saw in the Bahamas and everything else. When do you become alarmed? I know you're checking with a lot of experts, computer models and everything else, but when do the wheels, no pun intended, start turning in the mindset of a Phillip Eng?

Eng: Our operations folks are watching those storms from when they develop, and they're tracking them the whole port. Obviously as this one approached, we had pre-positioned not only staff and equipment to better enable our response and we have regular routine calls with the weather forecasters to keep us updated not only on tracking and timing but yesterday's storm, the speed at which it was moving was fast-paced. The original conditions for the sustained winds on Long Island were 20-30 miles per hour and it ended up exceeding that. We're always prepared for what's in the forecast, we're always prepared for worse than the forecast because we've seen that happen before. And in this case, they did exceed the wind gusts, I believe they were in the 40-50 miles per hour range and the gusts in the 80 miles per hour range even in some places so it was one where it's continuously monitoring these things and the staff has to be prepared for that.

Oliver: You didn't lose power on the tracks though? That was pretty much in operation throughout, right? It's just a debris problem right now, correct?

Eng: Well, the debris problem -- but it did affect the power in some cases. The folks are out there working very hard to ensure we have a reliability of power. The actual feeds to the tracks, that was not the issue. It was the downed power lines and associated connections to some of our signal systems and 100 cycle wattage that we need through the third rail. It was a combination as I mentioned earlier. It's not just clearing the debris but obviously to

ensure there's no power issues for our workforce to get in there. Then once you clean the debris, it's assessing the damage that may have occurred. Again, those resources in place that, which they've done admirably on the branches that we've restored service, and we look forward to getting Port Jefferson back, Oyster Bay, Greenport and Montauk shortly.

Oliver: Last one. As far as the phases and operation and everything else ridership we know it's down, Phil, give me the latest numbers of people traveling in, commuters. I know you're off a lot, I know you're hemorrhaging money, the MTA, we get it. Just give me the latest, your take, as far as overall ridership with restoration of the phases in and around the city people taking their trips now. Not fully, we know that, but where are we at with the numbers?

Eng: As Long Island and New York City went through the various phases, we saw a slow, a gradual uptick in ridership data. At our worst point we were only carrying about 3% of the ridership. And week by week, 1%, 2%. Monday, we had reached 23% of our normal weekday ridership. We did see the weekend ridership increase a little bit quicker. And this past weekend, we were carrying probably carrying 35% of our normal weekend ridership. It's following the projections. The caution that we have, while we expect more uptick come September after Labor Day, we also know that there's a lot of uncertainty with regards to a possible second wave as we watch the rest of the nation battle an uptick. We're very cautiously continuing to do what we've done because to the point, keeping our workforce safe, hopefully keep the numbers on Long Island, in New York down where they are, it's a testament to people following the rules and following the advice of health experts and we're going to keep doing everything we can on the railroad to make sure that the riders that come back feel safe and get to their destinations and we'll just keep working through, continuing to restore service now and get back to fighting the pandemic.

Oliver: And that's all you can do. Keep up the great work. Hopefully we'll see restoration in full in the next couple hours. I know you are watching it very closely and we'll have you on soon for an update, how's that?

Eng: Jay, thank you for the opportunity to speak to your listeners.