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Press Release

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LIRR

IMMEDIATE

### Governor Cuomo Announces Milestone Reached in LIRR's Main Line Expansion Project

#### *Draft Environmental Study Released; Findings Demonstrate How Project Will Improve Service Reliability, Safety and Quality of Life*

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the MTA has reached a major milestone to improve transit service, safety and quality of life for hundreds of thousands of Long Island commuters and residents. The LIRR Expansion Project released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement which will take the project another step toward construction. The scientific, engineering and socioeconomic study is required to identify any potential impacts of public construction projects and help ensure that they are done safely, responsibly, and with public input. The study's findings demonstrate how the LIRR Expansion Project would improve service and reduce delays for Long Island Rail Road customers throughout the system, as well as improve safety and quality of life for local residents living in the project area in Nassau County.

"Expanding the Main Line is crucial to the future of Long Island and its residents," **Governor Cuomo said.** "By increasing capacity on one of the LIRR's busiest corridors and eliminating all street-level grade crossings, this project will result in less traffic, less congestion and a transportation network that meets the needs of current and future generations of Long Islanders. Today's action marks an important milestone in this project's completion and is another major step forward in our efforts to build a brighter future for Long Island."

"Governor Cuomo challenged us to undertake a project to transform the LIRR experience for both passengers and local communities, and to do so with an unprecedented level of community consultation and outreach – and that's exactly what we're doing now," **MTA Chairman Thomas Prendergast said.** "We have gone to extraordinary lengths to listen to what the public wants out of this project. We will continue to study the impacts of this proposal and take input from all stakeholders, including our neighbors along the tracks and Main Line customers from across Long Island and New York City."

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

- No residential property acquisitions
- Eliminating all grade crossings within the 9.8 mile project corridor
- Building sound walls to reduce noise
- Station upgrades
- Additional parking
- Increased reliance on private construction industry expertise to minimize construction duration, impacts and cost
- Unprecedented level of public outreach to engage local officials, homeowners and other stakeholders and use their input while the project is being planned

#### About the LIRR Expansion Project

The LIRR Expansion Project will add a third track to 9.8 miles along the congested Main Line of the LIRR between Floral Park and Hicksville, and eliminate all seven street-level train crossings, called "grade crossings," within the project corridor.

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 elimination and modification of all seven train crossings within the project area will reduce road traffic and pollution from automobiles idling at crossing gates; will eliminate noise from train horns, crossing bells and honking cars; and will greatly improve safety by removing areas where vehicles and pedestrians can collide with trains. Right now, 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 Department of Transportation will oversee the grade crossing component of the project.

"The 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," **said NYS Department of Transportation Commissioner Matthew Driscoll.** "It will lead to a significant improvement in quality of life for many people."

The project will also result in significant noise reduction throughout sections of the project corridor from proposed retaining walls and sound attenuation walls along the railroad's right-of-way. While these structures will reduce noise from existing train traffic, they will have an even greater impact after the significant service increases from the future East Side Access Project go into effect in a few years.

The project also includes major track infrastructure upgrades like new switches, signals and power equipment, as well as station upgrades like 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 Draft EIS available for download at the project's website at [www.aModernLI.com](http://www.aModernLI.com).

Renderings of the project are available [here](#).

### **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 this year. As shown by detailed figures in the Draft 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, 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. An outline of the Draft EIS, called a Draft Scoping Document, was published in May, and six public hearings were held that month to solicit comments from the public. A Final Scoping Document incorporating that public comment was published in August, and meetings with local communities and stakeholders continued into the fall. All of this input has helped shape the content of the Draft EIS, which addresses numerous concerns raised by communities and is subject to further public comment. Comments on the Draft EIS will be addressed in the Final EIS, which will also be published, all before any construction would begin.

### **Community-Focused Construction Mitigation**

Incorporating extensive input from local communities, the project team is exploring neighbor-friendly and innovative construction methods and practices to keep the impact of construction as minimal as possible. This community-focused approach to construction includes:

- Pre-construction home inspections
- Satellite parking to keep workers' personal vehicles out of residential streets
- Using existing track to transport materials to and from work sites
- Advance notification of any disruptive work or road closures to residents, municipalities, school districts and first-responders
- Scheduling construction deliveries outside of school and commuter traffic peak hours to the maximum extent practicable
- Creating and implementing a community noise and vibration monitoring program
- Implementing an air quality control plan to include dust control measures, ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel, the use of best available tailpipe technologies such as diesel particulate filters, and the utilization of newer equipment
- Environmental monitoring consistent with a Construction Health and Safety Plan
- Protecting access to existing businesses
- Street cleaning as needed
- Door-to-door outreach to residents
- Regular online updates to the public
- Staffing the Project Information Office with on-site supervision for rapid response to neighborhood concerns
- 24/7 hotline assigned to a community outreach representative

In addition, Governor Cuomo has directed that construction for this project use the "design-build" contracting technique, which 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.

Earlier this month, 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 LIRR Expansion Project and then, in the future, select one based on the best proposal to meet the project's objectives. The initial stages of the 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 early stages of the procurement process. No contract will be awarded until after the conclusion of the environmental review process.

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.

### **Public Hearings**

The public comment period for the Draft EIS is now underway and will continue through Jan. 31, 2017. Anyone may comment on the Draft EIS by writing via [www.aModernLI.com](http://www.aModernLI.com), to [info@aModernLI.com](mailto:info@aModernLI.com) or visiting the Project Information Office at Mineola Station, south platform. During this period, the project team will meet with residents in neighborhoods throughout the project corridor and beyond, to help the public understand the Draft EIS and how the project affects their respective communities.

Another six public hearings, focused on the Draft EIS, will be held in January 2017, and will be listed on the [www.aModernLI.com](http://www.aModernLI.com) website.

Input from the current public comment period will be incorporated into the publication of the Final EIS, expected in 2017.

**Recent LIRR Delays that Would Have Benefitted from a Third Track**

Examples of recent major incidents in which a third track would have helped service to resume with fewer delays and cancellations, or in which a proposed grade crossing elimination would have averted the incident entirely, include:

- On Oct. 8, a derailment just west of Merillon Avenue Station stopped service on both tracks. Repairs continued over the weekend, but only one-track service was available for the following Monday morning rush, causing delays and cancellations for westbound passengers and a complete shutdown for eastbound Main Line passengers.
- On Oct. 5, a broken rail just east of Mineola Station just before 6 a.m. stopped service in both directions during the AM rush, causing delays and cancellations for thousands of passengers.
- On Aug. 19, a person struck by a train at Mineola Station stopped service in both directions during the AM rush, causing delays and cancellations for thousands of passengers.
- Also on Aug. 19, a car struck a crossing gate in Westbury that's proposed to be eliminated in the project, causing further delays for passengers.
- On July 27, a person charged with drunk driving entered a grade crossing that's proposed to be eliminated in the project, and struck the third rail, putting the Main Line out of service during the AM rush and causing delays and cancellations for thousands of passengers.