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Press Release

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LIRR

IMMEDIATE

LIRR Announces Passing of Charles W. Hoppe, Railroad's 34th President

Oversaw Transformation of LIRR's Penn Station Concourse, Improvements to On-Time Performance, Ridership and Reliability

MTA Long Island Rail Road marks the passing on Dec. 22 of Charles W. Hoppe, who served as the LIRR's 34th President, from April 2, 1990, to August 31, 1994. A memorial mass will be held at St Agnes Catholic Church in Arlington Va. on Friday, January 15, at 11 a.m. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital or the John W. Barriger III National Railroad Library.

Under Hoppe, the railroad became infused with a renewed sense of energy and direction. "Hoppe initiated strategic rethinking in a number of areas, from developing new growth opportunities, to rethinking the role of freight, to identifying improved types of cars and locomotives, right down to the language used to run the railroad on a day-to-day basis," said MTA Chairman and CEO Thomas F. Prendergast, who in 1994 succeeded Hoppe as President of the LIRR. "The results of his efforts were both far-reaching and long term. He left the region with a railroad that was in far better shape than it had been."

The short-term results spoke for themselves. The LIRR's on-time performance increased four percentage points, to 93% as of 1994, from 89% in 1989, and ridership increased. Measures of train car reliability improved during his tenure. At the same time, the railroad gained a restored confidence from federal funding partners and embarked on a major rehabilitation of Harold Interlocking, the crucial complex of switches in Sunnyside, Queens, where the LIRR's tracks merge with Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, and it undertook significant upgrades to its portion of Penn Station. The work at Penn included improvements to the LIRR's passenger concourse on the lower level, modernizing the signal system in partnership with Amtrak and creating Penn Station Central Control, which directs the safe movements of more than 1,000 trains per day.



"Virtually every metric that we measure on a month-to-month basis improved under Chuck Hoppe," Chairman Prendergast said. "But the most tangible of his improvements was the complete transformation of Penn Station. Chuck led the railroad through the difficult process of overcoming decades of neglect to modernize the appearance and functionality of the station. Those improvements helped start a ridership increase that has continued through to the present day, so much so that Penn Station is ready to be updated again."

The LIRR also began working to stimulate freight traffic under Hoppe, a line of business that had been fairly dormant, but has proven popular under the auspices of an outside company, the New York & Atlantic Railway. Internally, Hoppe oversaw a reorganization of the management of the railroad that resulted in a reduction of overall headcount by 10% and the creation of individual Branch Line Managers responsible for each branch, a system that is still in use and was carried over through the MTA to New York City Transit.

"The Long Island has a lot of complexities to it, and probably is the most complex railroad in North America," he said shortly after being appointed as president. "One of my goals is to get people thinking positively about the LIRR. It is a good railroad that can be better."

With his belief that the railroad could build on its existing strengths, Hoppe launched customer service and market development initiatives, including an effort to encourage off-peak ridership that has been followed by a 52% increase in off-peak ridership.

In a similar vein, he also initiated a Network Strategy Study, a blueprint for the railroad's growth to the present day. That study evaluated many options for replacing the railroad's diesel fleet, eventually deciding on the combination of diesel and dual mode locomotives and today's two-level coaches with the more comfortable 2 x 2 seating arrangement.

"A direct ride between Penn Station and destinations further east, such as Port Jefferson, Speonk, and now even Montauk, without the need to transfer between trains, was a direct outgrowth of the Network Strategy Study that Hoppe led," said LIRR President Patrick Nowakowski. "We're now in the early phases of updating the Network Strategy Study to guide the railroad in its post-East Side Access future."

Hoppe, who was 80 at the time of his passing, insisted on high standards, and perhaps most emblematic of that was his belief that even the words used by staff were an important influence and reflection on the railroad's culture. With that in mind, he mandated that all railroad officials refer to its users as "customers" as opposed to "riders" or "passengers" in order to emphasize the railroad's responsibilities and duties to those it serves. That practice continues to this day at the LIRR and has become standard practice throughout the MTA family of agencies.

"He had a big heart and loved to 'meet-and-greet' with customers, both on the train and at Penn Station, and ask them how we could improve service,"

said John Bennett, who was LIRR Vice President of Infrastructure under Hoppe.

Originally from Rocky River, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, Hoppe had a quarter century of experience in domestic and international railroad management and consulting at the time he was selected to lead the LIRR by MTA Chairman Robert R. Kiley. His work included time with the Cleveland Union Terminal Company, Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, U.S. Army, Norfolk Southern Railway, and 14 years with Booz, Allen & Hamilton, Inc., where prior to joining the LIRR he directed a major investment strategy study for CityRail, a commuter railroad in Sydney, Australia.

Hoppe earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Purdue University in 1957 and an MBA from Harvard in 1961. In the mid-1970s, Hoppe worked for the United States Railway Association, developing a plan to reorganize various bankrupt northeast railroads into what became Conrail, the predecessor, among other things, to MTA Metro-North Railroad.