



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

August 7, 2019

Phillip Eng
President
Long Island Rail Road
93-02 Sutphin Boulevard
Jamaica, NY 11435

Re: LIRR Station Conditions

Dear President Eng:

I am writing to express concerns regarding conditions at several Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) stations in Queens and Brooklyn. The 25 LIRR stations in these boroughs play an integral role in the city's transportation network, particularly in neighborhoods sitting beyond the subway map. As such, it is important that these stations are fully accessible, well-maintained, and well-served by LIRR commuter rail lines.

However, several LIRR stations are currently in disrepair and far too many are inaccessible to seniors, young children, and people with disabilities. Currently, only five Queens and Brooklyn stations meet all ADA accessibility requirements and just 14 are accessible by wheelchair. Despite these troubling accessibility gaps, plans to install an elevator at the Hunterspoint Avenue Station were indefinitely postponed, the \$3 million "station renewal" at St. Albans Station will not include ADA upgrades, the installation of new elevators at the Murray Hill Station is years behind schedule and \$6 million over the original budget, and at Nostrand Avenue, accessibility improvements are \$7 million over budget.

In Hollis, Queens, meanwhile, no funding was dedicated for station renewal in the 2015-2019 capital budget despite obvious needs. The local train station has neither an elevator nor a ramp and my office has fielded complaints from local residents and passengers about deteriorating conditions. These grievances include sunken, uneven, and broken floorboards on the platform surface; old and faded signage; malfunctioning ticket machines; and excessive littering and dumping along Sagamore Avenue.

These conditions are entirely unacceptable, particularly considering the hefty fee that New York City pays to the MTA for station maintenance. In Fiscal Year 2019, the City of New York was required to allocate \$97.4 million for the maintenance, use, and operations of local commuter rail stations. This funding is mandated by state law, obligating New York City to cover 60 percent of the total LIRR and Metro-North "Station Maintenance Fee"—despite the fact that only 20 percent of the state's commuter rail stations are located within the five boroughs.

Moreover, with the introduction of the reduced-fare Atlantic Ticket in 2018, several LIRR stations in Queens and Brooklyn have experienced increased usage. As more passengers travel between Southeast Queens and the Atlantic Terminal in Brooklyn, it is critical that their local stations are well-maintained, fully accessible, and well-prepared for the influx of straphangers.

In light of these ridership, maintenance, accessibility, and funding issues, I respectfully ask that you provide my office with a comprehensive timeline for ADA accessibility upgrades at the 18 Queens and two Brooklyn stations that are not currently ADA accessible. Additionally, I would appreciate information about the following stations:

- Hunterspoint Avenue Station and Elmhurst Station: Please provide an explanation for why the Hunterspoint Avenue Station Renewal project, as well as the design of the new Elmhurst Station, were removed from the 2015-2019 capital budget. According to the MTA Capital Dashboard, allocations for these and other projects were “reduced to provide adequate funding for the completion of Main Line Double Track Phase 2.” If this is the case, were residents of Hunterspoint and Elmhurst consulted and were they aware that the Main Line project would impact their local stations?
- Murray Hill Station: The installation of new elevators at Murray Hill Station was originally budgeted for \$5.7 million. The budget was increased to \$14.5 million in July 2017 to “reflect costs based on contract award” and then reduced to \$11.5 million in April 2018 “to reflect favorable bids.” Please provide an explanation for these budget changes and delays.
- Nostrand Avenue Station: The budget for station rehabilitation work at Nostrand Avenue has jumped from \$21 million to \$28.1 million due to “additional improvements” and “refined estimates.” Please document these additions and whether they are related to elevator and wheelchair accessibility upgrades at the station.
- Hollis Station: Please provide a list of all capital investments made at Hollis Station in the last ten years as well as plans for future investment in the 2020-2024 capital plan.
- St. Albans Station: Please provide an explanation for why the \$3 million St. Albans Station Renewal will not include the installation of elevators and other ADA upgrades.
- Sunnyside Station: Please provide an explanation for why \$76.5 million in funding for the new Sunnyside Station was removed from the 2015-2019 capital budget. Is there an updated timeline for the completion of this project? When will design work commence? Will the station link with Amtrak and New Jersey Transit service, as originally proposed?
- LIRR stations and the Atlantic Ticket: Please provide my office with a full accounting of the Atlantic Ticket pilot, including its impact on ridership at the seven LIRR stations in Southeast Queens and three in Brooklyn. Has the LIRR increased its station maintenance budget to reflect greater usage at these stations? Does LIRR plan to extend this reduced fare program for trips to Penn Station as well? Will LIRR increase the number of local stops in Southeast Queens in order to better serve these riders?

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Improving service, maintenance, and access at Brooklyn and Queens LIRR stations is a pressing priority, and I request a written response to this letter by August 28, 2019. Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

I look forward to working with you to ensure these stations are serving their increasing ridership.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Stringer
New York City Comptroller