

## Ambitious Rail Expansion Planned to Ease Long Island Rail Road Congestion

By Paul Becht, CPA



Easing Long Island Rail Road congestion via an ambitious rail expansion plan was the hot topic at a recent Long Island Real Estate Group (LIREG) meeting.

The panel discussion at last month's meeting focused on the planned addition of a third track to the nearly 10-mile stretch of track along the main line of the LIRR between Hicksville and Floral Park. The project would also improve safety by removing all street-level grade crossings within the project's corridor.

These proposals encompass the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's planned "Rail Expansion Project."

Construction is expected to begin later this year, although the LIRR has not yet awarded the project or approved the funding, which will come out of the state-funded MTA capital program.

The panel, moderated by Gary Lewi of Rubenstein Associates, included David Kapell, Executive Director of Right Track for Long Island Coalition, Elisa Picca, Executive Vice President of the MTA, Michael Balboni, a consultant and former New York State Senator and Kyle Strober, Executive Director of Association for a Better Long Island (ABLI).

The LIREG panel discussed recent developments for the project, and how it will benefit commuters, the real estate community as well as all of Long Island.

The discussion began with the acknowledgment of the recent completion and approval of the final environmental impact study for the proposed LIRR expansion project. The

study points to improved LIRR service and safety for the more than 3 million daily riders of the railroad. One panelist noted that 40 percent of LIRR riders go through the Hicksville to Floral Park line. By adding a third track, the LIRR hopes to reduce congestion and provide a more reliable system. The panelists noted that when a train breaks

down on the main line it has a ripple effect on other trains and often results in delays to and from Penn Station.

Penn Station is currently the only origin for the LIRR out of Manhattan. It is therefore essential, the panelists noted, that the station operates reliably. The panelists told the audience that 40 percent of LIRR customers are headed to the east side after departing at Penn Station. Therefore, in addition to the need for a third track on the main line, there is also a need for east side access.

Support has grown for upgrading a commuter railroad system which was developed in the mid-19th century and this is evidenced by the Right Track Coalition's membership growth to 5,000 members. Upgrades include redeveloped stations with holistic, distinct designs. There will be heated platforms, internet connectivity, better signage, and some extension of platforms.

The Coalition believes the addition of a third track will unlock the Long Island economy in the 21st century. For instance, with the recent addition of research facilities at NYU Winthrop, there is greater need for more reliable and periodic running of trains to the Mineola station to allow physicians who live in the city to commute to Long Island. The lack of a third track negatively impacts the ability of others who head east each day for work on Long Island.

Safety and quality of life were other concerns mentioned by panelists. They noted the tragic grade crossing accidents that have occurred over the years. In addition, when the gates are down it has an adverse impact on the quality of life of commuters at those crossings as commutes become lengthened. With an improved rail system, more commuters would likely use the transit system and thereby ease congestion on local roads and highways.

The panelists also covered the political ramifications of the third track project. Many citizens who live along the main line are concerned about the effect on their communities during construction. That concern has now somewhat been resolved as the revised plan will not require the demolition of any homes, instead staying within the existing railroad's right of way. Panelists said they are confident the state government and LIRR can reach a consensus with the local communities. They noted seven of the 10 Suffolk towns have joined the Right Track Coalition as have many of the Nassau townships.

Just as Long Island towns have begun to welcome real estate development, which brings with it the benefits of an expanded tax base and more vibrant downtowns that are attractive to young people, communities are also increasingly embracing the benefits that this modern transit system can bring.

Earlier in the year, the MTA announced the list of private construction industry consortia qualified to bid on the design of the main line expansion. The MTA is targeting a four year active construction phase. During that time, the public can view the MTA's progress on the LIRR's website, [www.amodernli.com](http://www.amodernli.com).

For more information about this topic, or to learn how Margolin, Winer & Evens LLP real estate group can help, contact us at 516-747-2000.

#### ***About Paul Becht, CPA***

Paul's practice is focused on overseeing audits and reviews of companies in a variety of industries, including real estate, manufacturing and distribution, the service industry and debt collection. He is also skilled at auditing employee benefit plans. Paul also assists clients in performing due diligence for mergers and acquisitions and collateral reviews for financial institutions. He offers guidance on accounting policies and procedures to improve operations and strengthen internal controls and has also done work advising clients on the accounting and reporting aspects of stock-based compensation plans.

Paul is a frequent speaker at industry conferences and is

regularly quoted as an expert source for leading business and trade publications. Throughout his career he has also been active in staff training and mentoring.

Paul earned his Bachelor of Science in Accounting from Oswego State University where he graduated Summa Cum Laude. He is an active member of the New York State Society of CPAs, for which he has been the Director-Suffolk Chapter Liaison since June 2014, the Risk Management Association, for which he has been Director-Long Island Chapter since November 2015, and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. Over the years, he has actively participated in and held leadership positions with several charitable organizations. Paul lives in Glen Cove, New York with his wife Kelly and their two children. Paul can be reached at [pbecht@mwellp.com](mailto:pbecht@mwellp.com).