

Opening / Acknowledgements

Good morning. My name is Janno Lieber, and I am the President of MTA Construction & Development, the group within the agency responsible for all capital construction work. I want to thank Chair Comrie and Chair Kennedy for the invitation to speak with you all about some of our key MTA infrastructure projects, especially those where we overlap with Amtrak.

Mass transit is the lifeblood of New York, and we need a strong system to power our recovery from this unprecedented crisis. Under the leadership of Governor Cuomo, New York has demonstrated national leadership by investing in transformational mega-projects like Moynihan Station, Second Avenue Subway, East Side Access, Third Track, and most recently, Metro-North Penn Station Access, which we want to begin building this year. But there is much more to be done, and more investment is needed.

We have a once-in-a-generation infrastructure opportunity with the new administration in Washington – and we thank President Biden, Secretary Buttigieg and Senate Majority Leader, Chuck Schumer, for their support. It's a new day to advance transit projects that will turbo-charge the post-COVID economy and address overdue challenges of social equity and climate change.

East Side Access

Today we are on the cusp of a transformational upgrade to our commuter railroads due to several key projects. Top of the list is East Side Access. I'm pleased to report that it is on target for completion by the end of 2022 as planned. This project will allow Long Island Rail Road customers to travel directly to Grand Central Terminal, reducing commuting time by up to 40 minutes per day. The new ESA facility below Grand Central will actually be the first 8-track railroad terminal opened in the U.S. since the early 1950s – and by itself LIRR Grand Central service is expected to constitute one of the biggest commuter railroads in the country.

When some of LIRR's service moves to Grand Central with the opening of ESA, it will create room in Penn Station for Metro-North service running to Penn via the Hell Gate Line -- our Penn Station Access project. In 2022 we also expect to complete the LIRR Mainline Expansion – Third Track -- which will allow for an even greater increase in peak service between Manhattan and Long Island. The additional capacity provided by ESA and Third Track will allow LIRR to begin offering meaningful peak-time reverse commuting service for the first time ever.

When I came to the MTA in 2017, East Side Access was facing deep problems. At that time, it seemed like the default solution to any project issue was to delay the delivery date by months or even years. But we made a decision to stop making excuses and pull out all the stops to get it done. New Yorkers have waited long enough for LIRR service to Grand Central, the heart of the Midtown CBD.

As part of my mission to change how the MTA implements its Capital Program, we are attacking the systemic problems that gave ESA a deservedly bad reputation-- by using Design-Build, by simplifying MTA design specs and by using updated and fairer contract terms. The results are starting to show. In 2020 – the year most of the economy ground to a halt due to the pandemic-- the MTA had one of its most productive years ever on a dollar basis.

I want to thank the Governor and all of you in the Legislature for allowing us to continue working on transportation infrastructure during COVID by classifying MTA projects as essential work. And huge thanks also to our partners in labor and the contracting community who worked quickly with us to establish and enforce vital safety protocols so all this construction- and the jobs it provides - could continue while effectively managing COVID risk.

But back to ESA. As I have said, the project will improve commutes, add a second way to get in and out of Manhattan, and allow for Penn Station Access to connect East Bronx communities to jobs and education throughout the region. Another overlooked benefit is that it gives us significant LIRR capacity outside Penn Station, facilitating the next urgently needed construction mega project-- the construction of Gateway Penn Expansion and the reconstruction of existing Penn. Together with Moynihan, these twin improvements to Penn Station are necessary to create the world-class Empire Station Complex envisioned by Governor Cuomo.

Penn Station Expansion is essential to the long-delayed Gateway Project because it will provide tracks and platforms to accommodate additional trains between New York and New Jersey once the Gateway Tunnels are complete. But Penn Expansion will primarily be used by Amtrak and NJ Transit and the new Moynihan Train only serves a portion of LIRR riders. So, existing Penn must be brought into the 21st Century for the 600,000 New Yorkers – LIRR, MNR and NYCT customers – who'll continue to use it. You all know that today's Penn Station is subpar, and that there are serious concerns about safety, crowding, and wayfinding – some of the many reasons it ranks high on the list of New Yorkers' most hated places.

We're starting to turn that around. At the end of last year, we opened the East End Gateway, an iconic new entrance to Penn that gives us a presence on Seventh Avenue for the first time since the 1960s. We're expanding the LIRR's 33rd Street concourse that runs between the 7th and 8th Avenue subway lines – doubling width and raising the ceiling height to 18 feet. But this is just one area – the station needs a total overhaul to serve New Yorkers and to support the region's economic future. Advancing projects like Gateway Penn Expansion and Penn Reconstruction right now is vital given the level of support we have in Washington; we do not have time to wait as our next opportunity may be decades away.

East River Tunnels

That brings me to the East River Tunnels – a central focus of this hearing. The tunnels carry a huge proportion of LIRR trains. They are key to delivering the benefits I've discussed – increased service and reverse commuting. It's no secret that we have urged Amtrak to repair their Tunnels as soon and as quickly as possible, and with the lowest impact on customers possible. We believe the reasons for doing this became even stronger when COVID caused LIRR and Amtrak ridership to drop, opening up opportunities for extra work.

As everyone here well knows, Superstorm Sandy did tremendous damage to regional infrastructure, particularly under-river tunnels. And just like Amtrak's tunnels were damaged, the MTA's own 11 tunnels were flooded with millions of gallons of corrosive saltwater that seriously damaged their structural integrity and wiped out all kinds of systems. As of March, we've actually finished rehabilitation work on all 11 MTA tunnels. But Amtrak's remain a work in progress.

The last MTA tunnel finished was the Rutgers Tube, which carries the F train. This project was the first to fully utilize the Design-Build project delivery approach, and we applied the same strategies pioneered during the L Train Project to get it done on time and on budget – always working only on nights and weekends in order to with minimize impact to riders. Our project team used the same cable racking system and other state of the art technologies to finish the job in record time despite the challenges of a global pandemic. It paid dividends for our riders, who at the time were mostly essential workers commuting to their critical jobs on the frontlines.

We have tried to persuade Amtrak to take the same approach with its tunnels, which carry trains from the Long Island Rail Road and New Jersey Transit in addition to Amtrak trains. While Amtrak's engineers have adopted some of our recommendations, they still favor taking a more cautious approach that requires two complete tunnel closures for a year each.

We acknowledge that this is the way these kinds of projects have always been done. In fact, it's how the MTA used to do it, too. It took intervention and innovation from outside experts brought in by Governor Cuomo who said there's a better way to get us to change. Taking their advice resulted in a cost savings of \$100 million on the L Project alone.

It is our hope that the folks at Amtrak will reconsider their position and work with us and others so we can minimize the impact of tunnel work on customers. The best way to do that is to avoid full closures to the extent possible. When a tunnel is closed, fewer trains can get in and out of Manhattan and there's less flexibility to recover from delays, making service less reliable -- a result that is good for no one.

This is one of the challenges in operating service on the Northeast Corridor: Amtrak runs the smallest number of trains, but they control most of the assets and decision-making. The Long Island Rail Road is by far the biggest user of the East River tunnels— 127 trains in the peak period compared to Amtrak's 28 -- yet we have little decision-making power -- even though we pay millions for the privilege of running our trains. Even though Amtrak expects us to fund a big chunk of the tunnel maintenance. And even though the State of New York provided grants and loan guarantees totaling \$1.3 billion of the \$1.6 billion that it took to create Amtrak's new flagship station in Moynihan Train Hall.

This is one of the profound issues we hope to address at the federal level now that our hometown champion, Chuck Schumer, is Senate Majority Leader, and Secretary Buttigieg is leading USDOT alongside former MTA Board member Polly Trottenberg, now Deputy Secretary of Transportation. It's a matter of equity. Amtrak is hugely important to the economic dynamism of the entire East Coast megalopolis. But it's not fair that our much more numerous MTA customers-- who represent the tremendous economic and racial diversity of our region-- are being affected by decisions favoring a much smaller number of Amtrak users, who are mostly better-off business and leisure travelers. We hope the federal government will begin to rethink this model for the sake of our valued customers.

Conclusion

With that, I'm now happy to take your questions.