

# Taking reins at LIRR

## ONLY IN NEWSDAY

### Interim boss has 'learning curve' with her new role

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Catherine Rinaldi reported to her new job as LIRR interim president on Monday feeling “very excited and a little nervous” as she takes on the task of running the nation’s two largest commuter railroads at the same time.

There’s no telling how long Rinaldi, 58, will hold that role, as the head of the MTA said last week he’s in no rush to appoint a permanent Long Island Rail Road president, even as some Long Island leaders express concern about having to share a president with Metro-North.

Although she officially stepped into the LIRR interim role on Saturday, Rinaldi — Metro-North’s president since 2018 — reported to her new Jamaica office for the first time Monday, determined to “show people how committed I am to having safe and reliable service here.”

“Of course there’s a learning curve,” said Rinaldi, moments after stepping off an LIRR train. “But I think I’m probably better positioned than anyone from the outside to be able to navigate that learning curve.”

Rinaldi, a Long Island native who previously held several key roles at the LIRR, is uniquely suited to step in for the retiring Phillip Eng, with whom she worked closely on the MTA Board’s joint railroad committee, said Janno Lieber, chairman and CEO of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Rinaldi will oversee a combined workforce of more than 13,000.

While announcing the leadership change on Feb. 10, Lieber said the plan was for Rinaldi to see through the completion of the LIRR’s two megaprojects — the \$2.6 billion 10-mile Third Track project between Floral Park and Hicksville, and the \$11.2 billion East Side Access effort to link the LIRR to Grand Central Terminal. Both projects are



HOWARD SCHNAPP

Catherine Rinaldi, interim president of the Long Island Rail Road. ■ Video: [newsday.com/longisland](https://newsday.com/longisland)

scheduled for completion in December.

But Lieber said he will “not set a timeline” for appointing a successor to Eng, or even beginning the search for one.

“There’s a reason for that . . . I want the world to understand that Cathy Rinaldi is the president of the Long Island Rail Road, and they shouldn’t be planning for anybody else,” Lieber said. “I’m not going to be undermining the president of the Long Island Rail Road as she takes on these responsibilities by saying, ‘In so much time, I’m going to be starting to look for your replacement.’”

Lieber reiterated his confidence in Rinaldi’s ability to run both railroads, noting that the president of MTA New York City Transit historically has overseen the agency’s subway and bus divisions simultaneously.

MTA officials have said Rinaldi’s compensation for running both railroads has not yet been determined. Rinaldi made \$290,700 as Metro-North president last year, according to the MTA.

#### Liers: Other LIRR issues

Mitchell Pally, CEO of the Long Island Builders Institute

and a former MTA Board member, said having Rinaldi see through the completion of East Side Access makes sense, but noted there are other pressing transportation priorities on Long Island that require the full attention, and availability, of the LIRR’s president “as quickly as possible.” They include relocating Yaphank Station closer to Brookhaven National Laboratory, and further electrification of the LIRR’s tracks in Suffolk.

“The president of the Long Island Rail Road needs to be somebody who can go to the 8 o’clock breakfast business meetings, the 9 o’clock meetings with the county executives, the 10 o’clock meetings with the labor unions . . . They need to show a presence,” said Pally, who added that he’s worked with Rinaldi in various roles for nearly two decades. “She is a professional, a tremendous person. And I have no doubt that she will do a tremendous job in the short term. But, in the long term, the railroad needs its own president.”

Asked about concerns over her ability to run both railroads, Rinaldi acknowledged “it’s a big job,” but said she be-

lieves the lessons she’s learned during her four years running Metro-North — the second-biggest commuter railroad in the United States behind the LIRR — “will be carried over.”

Chief among those lessons is the importance of providing riders safe and reliable service, quality communication, and clean trains, Rinaldi said. Among her key priorities will be providing an “integrated experience” between the two railroads once both are operating out of Grand Central Terminal, she said.

#### ‘Building on the great work’

“I think I’ve learned the basics of good railroading from my time at Metro-North. I’ll be building on the great work that Phil has done,” said Rinaldi, who lives in the village of Irvington in Westchester County and plans to split her time between Metro-North’s headquarters at Grand Central and the LIRR’s in Jamaica. “I’m going to be visible at both places. I have to be.”

Rinaldi grew up in Massapequa and Huntington, and worked at the LIRR before heading Metro-North.

Former LIRR president Helena Williams, who recruited Rinaldi as the railroad’s general

## WHAT TO KNOW

■ **Catherine Rinaldi, 58, reported to her new office** as LIRR interim president for the first time Monday.

Rinaldi, who has served as president of Metro-North since February 2018, was tapped to lead the LIRR both because of her familiarity with Long Island, the LIRR and with the East Side Access project.

■ **Metropolitan Transportation Authority chairman and CEO Janno Lieber** said he has no timeline to replace Rinaldi, or to begin a search for her successor, despite some concerns about her ability to run the LIRR and Metro-North simultaneously.

■ **Even while praising Rinaldi, some Long Island** leaders said, in the long term, the LIRR needs a leader who is solely focused on the needs of Island commuters.

counsel in 2008, said Rinaldi was a key figure on several major initiatives, including helping craft a vision for a new Penn Station and navigating the controversy surrounding the unusually high rate of LIRR employees applying for and receiving federal disability retirement benefits.

“She is incredibly well-suited and qualified for this position. And it happens at a very important time, with the East Side Access opening,” said Williams, referencing the plan to link the LIRR to Metro-North’s Manhattan home. “She understands the customer experience currently at Grand Central, and she understands the Long Island Rail Road customer base, because she was there.”

Gerard Bringmann, chairman of the LIRR Commuter Council, has “mixed emotions” about the arrangement.

“If there’s anybody — with the possible exception of Phil — who could run both railroads at the same time, it would be Cathy. But, that being said, she doesn’t wear a cape,” Bringmann said. “Running one of those railroads is a major task.

See RINALDI on A10

# State GOP starts slate

## Candidates for AG, comptroller, U.S. Senate set

BY MICHAEL GORMLEY  
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New York Republicans on Monday designated candidates for state comptroller, U.S. Senate and attorney general in the opening day of their two-day convention in Garden City.

Republican delegates chose Paul Rodriguez, a former banker who was raised in Puerto Rico, for state comptroller; Joe Pinion, who they said is the first Black man to run for U.S. Senate in state history, and New York City lawyer Michael Henry for attorney general.

The candidates all presented platforms of combating crime, cutting taxes and reducing the cost of living that is driving residents to other states.

“Democrats have an insatiable appetite for taxpayers’ money,” said Rodriguez, who is taking on Democratic Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli. “Tom DiNapoli . . . is a career politician. We need an outsider.”

Rodriguez of Queens said he will use the comptroller’s role as sole trustee of the state pension system to invest in New York businesses and workers, to give them assistance.

DiNapoli campaign manager Ilana Maier said the comptroller has an “unmatched record of advocating for taxpayers; exposing waste, fraud and abuse; protecting New York’s pension



Comptroller nominee Paul Rodriguez speaks at the state GOP convention in Garden City on Monday.

fund; investing in the green economy and local businesses; and ensuring government transparency and accountability.”

Republicans also backed Pinion, a Yonkers native who left a job as a political commentator on the conservative website Newsmax to run against Democratic Sen. Charles Schumer. Pinion said progressives are trying to make the country socialist.

“I think in many ways the tide has turned,” Pinion said. He said Democrats have failed to lift children out of poverty and bad schools, have failed to combat climate change and have failed to create a serious, constructive discussion of rising crime.

Pinion also said Schumer also has drawn criticism for his role as majority leader for failing to

improve these long-standing problems after more than 24 years in office and for increasing partisanship in Washington.

“All of these issues are not partisan,” Pinion said, blaming “the divisiveness that has leached into everything we do.”

Henry will take on Democratic Attorney General Letitia James, whose cases including the continuing fraud investigation of former Republican President Donald Trump’s company, the Trump Organization.

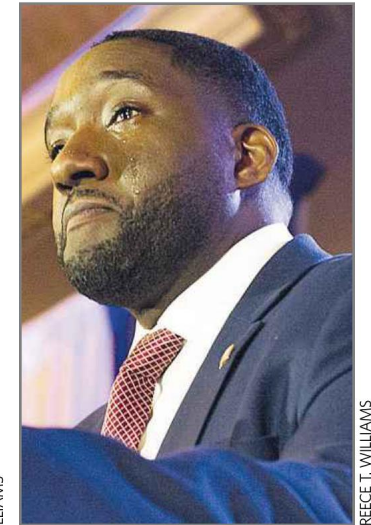
“My plan is to use the office . . . to change bad public policy, to put a stop to this crime crisis,” said Henry, who is a commercial law attorney.

Campaign officials for James and Schumer didn’t respond to requests for comment.

The convention also sought to recreate the historic upset of 1994, when little-known George Pataki, then a state senator, beat three-term Gov. Mario M. Cuomo, a national Democratic star.

Pataki, the convention’s keynote speaker, told delegates they “need to build on the victories” in Nassau and Suffolk. That “red wave” included an upset win by Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman, who opened Monday’s events.

Tuesday will include a vote by delegates statewide for candidates for governor and lieutenant governor. Rep. Lee Zeldin has collected the nonbinding endorsements of most county chairmen. But financier Harry Wilson entered the race last week and promises to spend \$12



Joe Pinion, of Yonkers, sheds a tear after receiving 82% of votes to claim the party’s nomination to run for U.S. Senate.

million of his money to catch up.

Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino is also seeking the party designation, arguing that he has a better chance to attract enough votes outside the party to win in November. Former Trump administration aide Andrew Giuliani is also running.

Candidates who lose Tuesday’s vote but gain at least 25% of the delegates’ weighted votes could also join the ballot for a June primary. If they don’t receive 25%, candidates could also collect petitions to get onto the primary ballot.

State Republican Chairman Nick Langworthy said he preferred that Republicans didn’t spend campaign money on primaries, but that a intraparty challenge may be unavoidable.

# Interim LIRR boss steps into ‘learning curve’

RINALDI from A8

To run both the No. 1 and No. 2 largest railroads in the country, that’s a herculean task.”

Bringmann said, with so many responsibilities, he doesn’t anticipate Rinaldi will introduce major new initiatives for the LIRR. She will be tasked with at least one major responsibility — figuring out the LIRR’s new East Side Access service plan.

That could entail reducing the number of LIRR trains

running in and out of Penn Station. MTA officials have said they expect nearly half of Penn’s commuters to travel in and out of the LIRR’s new terminal at Grand Central once it opens. The agency needs to free up capacity at Penn for a separate plan to one day run Metro-North trains through the station.

Kyle Strober, executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island, a business and planning group, previously has raised concerns about the po-

tential for Metro-North’s future in Penn Station to impact LIRR commuters. In her new role, it will be up to Rinaldi to “navigate two profoundly different service areas,” Strober said.

“As a Long Islander, she knows that our commuters are anything but shy about voicing their concerns about a railroad that is a crucial strategic connection to our regional economy,” Strober said. “She will come to work with hands on two different throttles, and how that is managed will de-

fine her tenure.”

MTA Board member Kevin Law, who is expected to soon leave the board to take a position heading Empire State Development, said that while the LIRR does “deserve its own leader,” he agreed with having Rinaldi oversee the agency temporarily. Law expects Rinaldi to lean on LIRR senior vice president of operations Robert Free as her “right-hand guy.”

“This arrangement would not be proper for the long term. But, for the short term, mean-

ing for the balance of 2022, I think Janno made a smart move,” Law said.

The LIRR’s top labor leader, Anthony Simon, expects a “seamless transition” from Eng to Rinaldi.

“We are confident she knows our system well enough, respects our skilled workforce and will adjust her to team to yield positive results,” said Simon, general chairman of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers.