



A Long Island Rail Road train pulled by diesel locomotives enters Jamaica Station in 2015.

NEWSDAY / J. CONRAD WILLIAMS JR.

LIRR gives up on battery trains to replace diesel

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The Long Island Rail Road will not go forward with plans to operate battery-powered trains where tracks are not electrified, even as the agency faces pressure to do away with its diesel fleet, officials said Tuesday.

Fifteen months after the LIRR unveiled plans for its “battery electric multiple unit,” which would allow electric trains to alternate between being powered by a third rail and by a built-in battery, railroad officials said tests showed that retrofitting existing trains with the technology was not feasible.

The railroad spent \$850,000 in a partnership with train manufacturer Alstom to test the technology, which railroad officials hoped would allow them to improve service in its “diesel territory” without having to electrify tracks.

News of the railroad giving up on the battery technology came as a coalition of Long Island business and conservation groups asked state climate leaders to force the LIRR to do away with its diesel locomotives.

In a letter sent Friday to the New York State Climate Action Council, representatives

from seven organizations, including the Association for a Better Long Island and the New York League of Conservation Voters, asked that the state’s plan to become carbon neutral by 2050 include a requirement that the Long Island Rail Road “eliminates the use of diesel locomotives through systemwide LIRR electrification.”

“The MTA has not yet shared its plan to meet the requirements set forth by the state. That silence comes at a time when, for far too long, various Long Island communities have been subjected to the negative environmental and economic effects of diesel-powered locomotives along the LIRR,” the letter said.

The 22-member Climate Action Council was formed as part of a broader state initiative adopted in 2019 to reduce carbon emissions over the next three decades.

Haley Viccaro, spokesperson for the Climate Action Council, said the council “is reviewing the letter,” and that the emissions reduction requirements to be part of the state’s final climate plan “will drive a significant decrease in fossil fuel use, including diesel fuel, across the state.”

MTA officials on Monday in-

cluded “rail line electrification” among a list of projects that were being evaluated before the agency’s “Twenty Year Needs Assessment,” which will guide future infrastructure spending. But MTA leaders have suggested that electrification — at up to \$18 million per mile — could be cost-prohibitive and would require building electrical substations on private property.

“The MTA welcomes the continued support of advocates and will look at additional investments in our railroads, including electrification opportunities on both our railroads, as part of our Twenty Year Needs planning process,” MTA spokesperson Aaron Donovan said.

Kyle Strober, executive director for the business group Association for a Better Long Island, said electrifying the entire LIRR system would benefit Long Island’s economy. Passengers traveling in “diesel territory” typically have to transfer to or from an electric train.

“Nonstop rides for our research institutions, like Brookhaven National Lab and Stony Brook, will help attract top talent and hopefully lead to more innovation companies on Long Island,” Strober said.

\$343M FOR

MTA hopes to net at least half of federal funds

BY LAURA FIGUEROA HERNANDEZ
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WASHINGTON — The Metropolitan Transportation Authority will soon be eligible for millions in federal funding aimed at making aging subway stations accessible to passengers with disabilities, the Biden administration announced on Tuesday.

The federal government is releasing \$343 million in grant funding aimed at helping transit systems in cities including

New York, Boston and Chicago comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, a 32-year-old law that in part requires transit agencies to provide equal access to transportation for people with disabilities.

MTA officials told Newsday on Tuesday the agency will be looking to apply for at least half of the money being made available, noting that New York City has the largest proportion of aging stations eligible for the program. Nearly one-third of the more than 900 aging stations nationwide identified by the Department of Transportation as not complying with the ADA law are from New York City, according to the National Transit Database.

As ADA turns

BY ROBERT BRODSKY
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The Americans with Disabilities Act, signed 32 years ago Tuesday, was a powerful milestone in the journey toward equal rights for people with disabilities.

But advocates for the community on Long Island agree the job is not nearly complete.

“Access and opportunity have certainly increased over the last three decades-plus, yet, there looms still this notion that ensuring accessibility and equity is somehow optional or just a nice thing to do,” said Therese Brzezinski, director of planning and public policy for the Long Island Center for Independent Living in Levittown.

That means some everyday basics remain neglected all these years later, she said. Among those: access to subway stations in New York City, where MTA figures show only 27% are accessible for people with disabilities.

“Despite many advances, the day-to-day for disabled people still means tough commutes to work or school and missed opportunities due to inaccessible train stations and taxis,” Brzezinski said. “And health care postponed because of inaccessible diagnostic equipment and the absence of qualified sign language

interpreters. We’ve come a long way, but not far enough and not fast enough.”

Emily Ladau of West Babylon, an author, activist and podcast host, pointed out that any piece of legislation can go only so far.

“We can create policies, but we can’t legislate attitude shifts,” said Ladau, who has Larsen Syndrome, an orthopedic disability that causes dislocated joints and bone abnormalities. “Moving toward an unquestioned understanding that people with disabilities are worthy of inclusion and accessibility will take continued advocacy, action and allyship.”

The landmark legislation, signed by former President George H.W. Bush, prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability; mandates equal access to health care, social services and transportation; and requires employers to provide reasonable accommodation to qualified individuals with disabilities.

Chris Rosa, president and chief executive of the Viscardi Center in Albertson, which provides programs and services for people with disabilities, said the legislation’s impact has been widespread.

Since its passage, he said, unemployment among job-seeking adults with disabilities has been cut in half, while students