



HOWARD SCHNAPP

MTA's Prendergast talks about LIRR's third-track plan yesterday. ■ Video: newsday.com/nassau

LIRR 3rd-track project favored at hearings

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The Long Island Rail Road's proposal to build a third track on its Main Line through Nassau County received overwhelming support during the first day of public hearings this week on the \$2 billion project.

The series of hearings, which kicked off yesterday in Westbury, represents among the last opportunities for the public to formally weigh in on the LIRR's plan to construct a 9.8-mile third track within the LIRR's existing property between Floral Park and Hicksville. The hearings continue today at Hofstra University and tomorrow in New Hyde Park. Comments can also be submitted through Feb. 15.

The majority of the public speakers during two separate hearings at the Yes We Can Community Center in Westbury represented businesses, unions, and other institutions pushing the project's promise to transform Long Island by providing more reliable LIRR service, creating jobs, growing the economy and keeping young people in Nassau and Suffolk.

Kevin Law, president of the Long Island Association, called it "the most important in-

frastructure project to happen on Long Island in decades."

"This is a project that should have happened decades ago," said Law, who also co-chairs the Right Track for Long Island Coalition, a consortium of project supporters.

Kyle Strober, executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island, a business group, said that by improving service reliability, investing in improvements to communities along the railroad's right of way, and helping bring workers to jobs on Long Island, "the third track has the means to exponentially increase the power of mass transit to benefit all of Long Island."

"We have an aging railroad system that was once constructed when Long Island's chief export was oysters," said Strober, who acknowledged that the project's construction could cause some pain in neighboring communities. "But how can we make anything better without improvements that require some sort of construction?"

Ann and William Corbett, members of Citizens Against Rail Expansion, said they feared the third track project would be a pretext to increasing freight rail on the LIRR's Main Line, unearth contaminated soil during construc-

tion, and last much longer and cost far more than the current estimates of three to four years and \$2 billion.

"That's going to cost the taxpayers. That's going to cost the commuters," said William Corbett of Floral Park.

The crowd yesterday was far more receptive to the third track than those at May public hearings on the project at the same site. In a statement, MTA chairman Thomas Prendergast said project officials heard the public's concerns at the previous hearings and addressed them in a recently released environmental review of the project.

"Governor Cuomo promised a completely new project where we listen to people's concerns and address them, and that's exactly what's happening," Prendergast said. "We encourage people to continue to comment to help us make this the best project it can be."

The outreach efforts won over Westbury Mayor Peter Cavallaro, who previously raised strong concerns about the project's impact on his village. At last night's hearing, Cavallaro commended project officials' "good faith job" in addressing his village's concerns, and said Westbury is "supportive" of the project.