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Inside ExploreLI

TOP STORIES

UNION TO MTA: TAKE JOB CUTS OFF THE TABLE

Agency mulling plan to save \$500M

BY ALFONSO A. CASTILLO
alfonso.castillo@newsday.com

Long Island Rail Road union officials are speaking out against potential layoffs as the MTA looks to streamline its operation in order to save up to \$500 million annually.

Although the proposed job reductions — which Metropolitan Transportation Authority officials said could number up to 2,700 — are expected to largely target nonunion, administrative jobs, MTA officials have made it clear that labor positions also are on the table as the agency looks to become leaner.

Christopher Natale, general chairman of the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen Local 56, which represents hundreds of LIRR workers, said the talk of pink slips comes as LIRR laborers are already taking on unprecedented levels of infrastructure work. Those include construction of a third track on the railroad's Main Line, the East Side Access link to Grand Central Terminal, and federally mandated "positive train control" safety technology. It also comes as union workers continue to be "vilified," Natale said, for the LIRR's skyrocketing overtime costs, which he added could grow, if jobs are cut.

"If they even think of coming to us, represented employees, we're going to have problems. They should really take that off the table," said Natale, whose union, like most others at the MTA, is working under an expired contract. "We're not going to sit by as they lay people off."

The proposal to downsize the authority's 74,000 employees was revealed last week in

the MTA Transformation Plan, which the MTA paid management consulting firm AlixPartners \$3.75 million to prepare. The MTA Board is scheduled to vote on the plan Wednesday, but with Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo — who has demanded an overhaul of the MTA — controlling most of the votes on the board, there is little suspense over the proposal's fate.

If approved, the MTA plans to make much of the changes over six to nine months. The full plan could take up to two years to implement, according to the report from AlixPartners.

The plan calls for the MTA to centralize several functions across its operating agencies, including the LIRR, Metro-North, the New York City Transit subway and bus system, and MTA Bridges & Tunnels, to make the MTA "more effective and efficient," and allow agency heads to concentrate on delivering safe and reliable service to customers.

Although MTA officials have said they have not identified specific jobs that will be eliminated, the plan lists budget and accounting, construction and development, external communications, human resources, training, legal and procurement among the departments at various agencies that could be combined. To accomplish the reductions, the report said the agency will look to "third party implementation support" specialists and outside "experts that will provide higher service levels to agencies at lower total cost base."

In a statement Friday, MTA spokesman Tim Minton said the authority is in "dire financial condition" but noted that it plans to reduce its head count



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MTA TRANSFORMATION PLAN

- Consolidate 40 departments across the MTA's agencies into six, centralized groups to allow agencies to focus on their core mission of safety, day-to-day operations and maintenance.
- Centralize functions related to the MTA's Capital Program into one office responsible for planning, developing and delivering major infrastructure projects.
- Hire a chief engineering officer who would set uniform engineering and maintenance standards across all agencies.
- Create a centralized customer communication office to streamline various communication efforts across all agencies and manage the MTA's messaging.
- Centralize operating support functions across all agencies to allow the MTA to consider its entire transportation network when making decisions about service.
- Centralize human resources functions across all agencies to reduce redundancies.
- Hire a chief operating officer/managing director who would oversee all agencies and report directly to the MTA's CEO.
- Hire a chief transformation officer who would lead the reorganization plan, and other new initiatives.
- Appoint an accessibility officer who would lead efforts to make the MTA system accessible to people with disabilities.

SOURCE: Metropolitan Transportation Authority/AlixPartners report

through attrition "before turning to layoffs at the LIRR."

"Looking more broadly at the issue of cost reduction, we are certain that more efficient operation, and rationalization of onerous work rules in collective bargaining will result in better customer service and lower cost," Minton said. "This will be accomplished by in-

creasing employee availability, and thereby controlling overtime."

Part of the MTA's overhaul includes examining what the agency has called "excessive overtime" earned by some workers, including at the LIRR, and modernizing time and attendance procedures to ensure employees are working when



Hot day, but not a record

Up to 6,000 affected by scattered LI power outages

BY RACHELLE BLIDNER
AND RACHEL O'BRIEN
rachel.blidner@newsday.com
rachel.obrien@newsday.com

Sunday was hot. Really hot. But somehow not quite record-setting.

Even as it felt like 109 degrees outside, Sunday's high temperature was only 99 degrees, cooler than both the record for the same day and the hottest day ever recorded in Islip, according to the National Weather Service.

On July 21, 1991, the mercury hit 101 at Long Island MacArthur Airport. That was still below the record, set on July 3, 1966, for highest temperature ever recorded at the airport: 104.

Sunday was not even the most sweltering day of the weekend. While it beat Saturday's high temperature of 97 — which matched 1991's record for hottest July 20 — it still felt a smidge cooler than Saturday's heat index of 111.

The heat will break in a big way Monday with a 60 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms throughout the day and into the night.

The high Monday is expected to hit 82 with a low of 69, forecasters said, with less than an inch of rain possible.

Blackouts in Brooklyn, Queens

More than 30,000 Con Ed customers in Brooklyn were without power late Sunday as the utility cut electricity to make heat-related repairs, officials said.

Thousands of customers in Queens were also without power, according to Mayor Bill de Blasio and an outage map on Con Ed's website.

De Blasio sent numerous tweets Sunday night to provide updates and assure affected cus-



Axel Zelaya, 2, of Huntington, cools off at Elwood Park.

The coming cool down can't come fast enough for thousands who lost power Sunday on Long Island because of the heat. At the height of the outages, nearly 6,000 customers did not have electricity around 7:30 p.m. Sunday, according to PSEG Long Island. That figure dropped to about 3,500 customers around 8:15 p.m.

More than 600 crews were working to address the Sunday night outages, PSEG LI spokeswoman Elizabeth Flagler said.

The National Weather Service warned that the extreme

heat can quickly cause heat exhaustion or heat stroke among the at-risk population who can't stay cool.

Hospitals were seeing an increase in heat-related patients over the weekend, according to Catholic Health Services of Long Island.

"We treated an increased number of patients with heat-related complaints yesterday [syncope, fatigue, dehydration]," said Dr. Christopher Raio, the Rockville Centre-based agency's chairman of emergency medicine.

Stony Brook University Hospital had one heat-related emergency department visit Saturday, a spokeswoman said.

Northwell spokeswoman Diane O'Donnell said on Sunday, "So far we have had 30 patients come to our Long Island EDs yesterday from heat-related complaints with eight admitted."

While the temperature soared into the high-90s, even the lows were high.

According to the National Weather Service, Saturday night's low of 78 degrees was a record high temperature tied with the record for that date set on July 20, 2013. A weather service spokesman said that temperature has been tied a few times since 2013.

MTA officials said they first would look to achieve the job reductions by not filling vacant positions.

they are on the clock.

Supporters of the plan have said the MTA's proposed streamlining, while painful, is necessary. Kyle Strober, executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island, a leading regional advocacy group, said "an efficient, focused and competent management structure" is needed to make the most of the various modernization projects underway at the MTA, including \$6.6 billion in infrastructure projects on Long Island.

"It is sobering to consider the loss of hundreds, potentially thousands, of jobs, but consolidating duplicative services and eliminating needless administrative overhead within the MTA is way overdue," Strober said. "The commuter deserves these reforms, the region insists on these reforms, and the future will be defined by these reforms."

But Anthony Simon, head of the LIRR's largest union, said the proposed reorganization will only add to the MTA's bureaucracy by "just creating more layers of management to figure out ways to be more efficient." The plan calls for the

creation of several new executive positions, including a chief operating officer, chief engineering officer and a chief transformation officer.

"Make no mistake: Labor will not accept any mention of layoffs for an already overworked, represented workforce," Simon said. "Cutting fat does not mean compromising the meat of our workers who do the physical work. The last thing our members need during this heavy demand for delivering on projects is the distraction of the threat of trickle-down cuts or layoffs."

Simon and Natale would not specify what actions they could take to fight potential layoffs. The last major impasse between LIRR unions and MTA management, in 2014, brought the railroad to the brink of a shutdown, as unions vowed to go on strike — as they are legally allowed to do. Ultimately, Cuomo brokered a deal to keep the workers on the job.

MORE INSIDE  Subway glitch isn't new **A25**

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JEFF BACHNER