

LONG ISLAND **BUSINESS NEWS**



LIRR's Third Track is completed

By: Adina Genn - October 3, 2022

The Long Island Rail Road's 10-mile Third Track from Floral Park to Hicksville has been completed.

New York State Gov. Kathy Hochul was at the LIRR's Westbury station Monday to say that the Third Track – part of the \$2.5 billion LIRR Main Line Expansion Project – was completed nearly four years after breaking ground, on schedule and \$100 million below budget.

“The completion of the historic Third Track project connects commuters with a more resilient and flexible railroad with frequent service, modern stations, ADA accessibility and more travel opportunities for Long Islanders and visitors,” Hochul said.

The LIRR Expansion Projects includes refurbished stations in New Hyde Park, Merillon Avenue, Mineola, Carle Place and Westbury. It also includes the elimination of eight at-grade railroad crossings, upgrades at seven railroad bridges, parking expansions, installation of new sound attenuation barriers, and landscaping improvements.

Hochul said that “when we have the East Side Access Project complete in Grand Central Madison ... later this year, we're going to see a 40 percent increase in LIRR service.”

The project opened in three sections, with the first leg on Aug. 15 through New Hyde Park and Merillon Avenue and the second stretch to Mineola on Aug. 30.

There is still minor station work let to complete for the project, officials said.

MTA Chair and CEO Janno Lieber credited the project's on-time and under-budget completion to “design-build contracting and many other new and innovative project management strategies.”

Lieber said in a statement that the project was “accomplished during a global pandemic and with no residential property takings. It shows that the MTA can deliver on its promise to bring megaprojects faster, better and cheaper.

Lieber went on to say that the “expansion will be a huge boon for Long Island businesses, since it will increase access to the region's talent pool by enabling not only a 40% overall increase in LIRR service, but a huge uptick in reverse peak train frequency. It's a win-win-win.”

The project's completion "gives the LIRR more flexibility to serve customers on the Ronkonkoma, Port Jefferson/Huntington and Oyster Bay branches," LIRR Interim President and Metro-North Railroad President Catherine Rinaldi said in a statement. "When combined with the new terminal at Grand Central Madison and the newly renovated LIRR concourse at Penn Station, LIRR customers will have more frequent service, upgraded stations with a host of modern amenities, and easier reverse peak trips."

The project, tens of years in the making, had experienced opposition from nearby residents. But interest was renewed under then Gov. Andrew Cuomo in 2016, who announced its renewal at Long Island Association headquarters, rallying supporters.

Now, LIA President and CEO Matt Cohen said in a statement that "the LIRR Third Track is a landmark infrastructure project that has already resulted in significant economic benefits through its construction and will now accelerate economic growth and transform how Long Islanders and reverse commuters live and work."

"As an early supporter of the project, it is gratifying to see the significant improvements that were promised coming to fruition," Village of Westbury Mayor Peter Cavallaro said in a statement.

"The impact on the commuting public should be meaningful and the project, when completed, will enhance and modernize the rail service to what our region deserves," he added. "The elimination of the at-grade crossings, as well as the other local improvements, will have a tremendous impact on the local communities along the mainline and in the region. These are the kinds of transformative infrastructure improvements that our residents expect from government and our tax dollars." Others shared that sentiment.

"One cannot overstate the transformative impact this milestone will have on every facet of our vital mass transit connection to New York City," Association for a Better Long Island Executive Director Kyle Strober said in a statement. "One hopes that future generations of LIRR riders will appreciate that their commute was made that much faster, easier, and efficient because of the men and women who worked on this project and the efforts of visionary public servants who saw it through to completion."

The project's completion, said Long Island Federation of Labor AFL-CIO President John Durso, "has long been key to unlocking the economic potential of our region. It will yield a brighter future for generations to come, as well as increased and more reliable service for the workers of today. This is a big deal for businesses and workers alike."