



LIRR 3rd track backers happy

- Say project will bring billions of dollars to region
- Work could potentially start later this year

EDITORIAL

A huge moment for LI's future **A32**

BY ALFONSO A. CASTILLO
AND JOHN ASBURY
alfonso.castillo@newsday.com
john.asbury@newsday.com

Supporters of the Long Island Rail Road's plan to build a third track on its Main Line in Nassau County yesterday celebrated news that the final obstacle to its passage — Republican non-support — had been resolved, clearing the way for a project they say will transform Long Island as few others in recent history.

The \$2 billion project, which could begin this year after weathering a storm of public and political opposition, aims to improve the commutes of tens of thousands of LIRR riders by increasing capacity on a critical 9.8-mile stretch between Floral Park and Hicksville. The third track would also help the LIRR more quickly bounce back from service disruptions and facilitate reverse commuting, according to planners.

In addition to bringing billions of dollars to the region, the project will increase property values, including by reducing existing noise pollution and eliminating seven rail grade crossings, supporters say.

"One cannot overestimate the impact third track will have in attracting and keeping the millennial generation that will power the future Long Island," said Kyle Strober, executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island, a business and planning group. "Businesses will be more likely to call Long Island home with an educated workforce and a more reliable rail system."

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, who resurrected the plan amid local opposition in January 2016, finally won over Sen. John Flanagan (R-East Northport) and other political holdouts in recent weeks.

Flanagan, Senate majority

leader, pledged support for the project yesterday, removing the likelihood of a veto from the state Capital Program Review Board's Senate representative and clearing the way for the project to become official later this month.

Once it does, the MTA is expected to solicit bids from contractors to design and build the project on which construction is expected to begin, potentially, later this year. MTA officials have said the project will take three to four years to complete.

Despite the green light, residents along the project's corridor remained uneasy about its impending arrival and the accompanying disruption.

At the Floral Park Recreation Center — one of the epicenters for opposition to the third track, which will abut the village pool — residents' concerns remained plentiful, despite the village leaders recently withdrawing their



An LIRR train comes into Floral Park. ■ Video: newsday.com/nassau

opposition to the plan.

"I'd be curious why they changed their minds. They obviously got something for it," said Kevin Gormley, 44, of Floral Park, who lives near the tracks and worries about a potential increase in freight rail traffic.

MTA officials have promised the project will not result in changes to freight operations.

Dave Kapell, executive director of the Right Track for Long Island Coalition — a pro-third track advocacy group — said yesterday that while he understood the reservations still held by some residents, he was confident, in time, they would be won over. "With a decision like this, you can never satisfy everybody.

So it doesn't surprise me that there are some people who don't agree with the ultimate decision. But I think at this point they should start looking to the future," Kapell said.

Sen. Elaine Phillips (R-Manhasset) said yesterday that elected officials' acknowledgment that the project is inevitable should not be seen as an abandonment of their concerns over it.

Phillips said that with the project approved, her work "really begins," as she, and other community representatives, stay on top of the MTA to make sure the agency delivers on its promises to minimize the impact of construction.

FEDS: LI SOUND CROSSING NOT IN RAIL PROJECT

BY TAYLOR SWAAK
taylor.swaak@newsday.com

A long-sought but long-opposed bridge or tunnel across Long Island Sound is not in a multibillion dollar federal plan to bolster the Northeast Corri-

dor rail line, according to the latest project update released yesterday.

Instead, the Federal Railroad Administration's Northeast Corridor Future project will spend between \$120 billion and \$150 billion to improve rail service, mod-

ernize corridor infrastructure, and expand rail capacity, officials said. Building a bridge or tunnel across the Sound has been a dream of some Long Islanders and a nightmare for others for decades. At a cost of \$290 billion, the latest crossing pro-

posal would have given LIRR riders direct and quicker access to New England, with two new tracks extending north at Ronkonkoma to cross the Sound into New Haven, Connecticut.

The Sound crossing proposal didn't make the cut for "various reasons . . . including the high cost relative to the travel-time savings and other benefits," an FRA spokeswoman wrote in an

email yesterday. The less expensive project will focus on improving the Northeast Corridor line from Washington to Boston. While various projects in the Future plan are in the works, some in New York City are already in motion. Among them are the MTA's Harold Interlocking and East Side Access projects, which seek to ease rail buildup around Manhattan's Penn Station.