

messy mix

Despite slushy snow, a.m. travel 'was fine'

Long Islanders expressed relief Monday morning that Sunday night's would-be snowstorm, expected to dump up to 10 inches on the region, had turned out much milder and wetter than expected.

But the 1 to 6 inches that the storm did deposit on the Island still left residents contending with messy roads, slushy train station platforms and driveways in need of shoveling as they began their workweeks.

"Actually, it was fine. I know it's hard to believe," said Karen Williams, of Great River, after her early morning commute on the Long Island Rail Road into Penn Station.

"I had no problems, but the roads were just wet," she said.

Williams and other railroad passengers said they'd braced for worse, given the forecast and the LIRR's recent troubles.

"It was the best commute all week. Last week was hard because of the derailment," said Tom Pologruto, of Cold Spring Harbor.

Three people died last Tuesday when a vehicle drove onto the LIRR tracks in Westbury and was struck by two trains.

On Monday, Pologruto said the train was "right on time, perfect. No delays, no extra stops, no overcrowding."

Jonathan Hotetz, who works in construction management, took the 6:28 a.m. from Baldwin, where he lives.

"It was fine, on time, no issues," said Hotetz, 42.

With temperatures in the 30s, the chill still made for some unpleasant waits for trains and buses to arrive.

"It's cold out here," said Jesus Grados, 33, as he stood at a bus stop in Huntington.

After 10 minutes, Grados' cellphone app told him he still had another 29 minutes to go.

"Sometimes, it's wrong," he said. Five minutes later,



Huntington's Cristhian Ramos shovels his driveway Monday: "The weather feels good."

This story was reported by **Alison Fox**, **Deon J. Hampton** and **Rachel O'Brien**. It was written by **Jesse Coburn**.

the dry cleaner was boarding his bus.

Some Long Islanders said they didn't mind the inclement weather.

Cristhian Ramos, 30, shoveled his driveway in Huntington in a short-sleeved shirt and flip-flops.

"We've been waiting for the snow. We want the snow, I don't have a problem shoveling snow," he said. "The weather feels good."

John Glasgow was shoveling his driveway in Hicksville around 8:15 a.m.

"I have a snowblower, but with the snow so heavy, it looks like it's more of a struggle trying to push," Glasgow said.

At the Hicksville train station, John Hare, of Levittown, dismissed Sunday's forecasts predicting a stronger storm.

"I never listen to them," he said. "I get up and look out the door."

NEWSDAY / DEON J. HAMPTON

RENEWED PUSH FOR CROSSING SAFETY

Schumer plans to reintroduce bill on upgrades

BY ALFONSO A. CASTILLO
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Sen. Chuck Schumer said he plans to reintroduce federal legislation to fund safety improvements at Long Island Rail Road grade crossings that could prevent accidents like the one that killed three people in Westbury last week.

At a news conference by a Garden City grade crossing Monday, Schumer (D-N.Y.) outlined his plan to resuscitate the Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety Act, which would provide new grant funding for what Schumer and safety experts have called the "three E's" of grade crossing safety solutions: engineering, education and enforcement.

Schumer and Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) originally proposed the bill in February 2015, shortly after a Metro-North train struck a sport utility vehicle on the tracks in upstate Valhalla, killing its driver and five train passengers.

The plan was ultimately left out of a \$305 billion federal transportation bill passed in 2015. Schumer said the bill died in the Senate because of lack of support from the Republican-controlled House of Representatives.

Unlike then, Schumer said he believes "it can pass relatively easily" in the Democratic-controlled House, packaged in a larger federal transportation bill expected later this year. Schumer said that while a dollar amount has not been determined for the reintroduced measure, he expects it will be in the "low hundreds of millions."

Rep. Peter King (R-Seaford) said Monday he supports funding crossing safety improvement and that he "would expect to support the bill."

Concern over safety has increased since last Tuesday's accident at the School Street cross-



Sen. Chuck Schumer, in Garden City on Monday, said the measure would provide funding for grade crossing safety solutions.

ings in Westbury, where police said a sport utility vehicle, fleeing the scene of a minor auto accident, drove around downed gates and into the path of two oncoming trains. The vehicle's three occupants died, and eight people aboard the train were hurt.

The LIRR and state plan to eliminate that crossing and six others as part of its \$2.6 billion effort to construct a third track on the railroad's Main Line. They have no plans, however, to close any more of the LIRR's nearly 300 crossings — an expensive and complex undertaking that can involve building a bridge over a roadway, or sinking a road under tracks.

But Schumer said "98 percent of these crossings don't need that," and instead would benefit from simpler upgrades like improved lighting or road widening. "Engineering can save lives," said Schumer, who was joined by public officials, including the police commissioners of Nassau and Suffolk.

A Metropolitan Transportation Authority spokesman said Monday that the agency welcomed the possibility of federal funding for safety.

Kyle Strober, executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island, a nonprofit advocacy group, said the proposed upgrades could help "save lives."

"When we talk about railway infrastructure projects, it's al-

most always about improving the railway's efficiency and reliability," Strober said. "Last week reminded us that critical safety projects are just as important."

The original 2015 bill would have set aside \$50 million annually "to develop or continue enhanced public education and awareness activities, in combination with targeted law enforcement, to reduce traffic law violations at highway-rail grade crossings, as well as to prevent and reduce injuries and fatalities along railroad rights of way."

The original bill included funding for Operation Lifesaver, a nonprofit group that advocates for crossing safety, and for the Federal Railroad Administration to hire personnel to work with railroads on safety improvements.

It also would have set aside an unspecified sum of money to study "the feasibility of using new technology" to report problems. Schumer said that could help advance proposals to automatically issue summonses to motorists caught on camera driving around downed crossing gates.

Nassau Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder said he believes "red light cameras work," and also could be effective in curbing violations. "Putting a camera here, it's going to stop them," Ryder said. "It will just give them a penalty and remind them the second time. Let's just hope they get to live for a 'second time.'"

HOWARD SCHINAPP

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