

**TRACKING THE
CORONAVIRUS**

Many Wear Masks Despite Mandate's End

Mixed LI reaction
on first day of
new reality

A4-5



NEWSDAY / STEVE PROST

Gas, Grocery Prices Keep Rising on LI

A6-7

LIRR CHIEF RESIGNS

Phillip Eng will be replaced by
Metro-North president
Catherine Rinaldi, an LI native
who will run both railroads

A2-3 | VIDEO AT NEWSDAY.COM



Phillip Eng has been president since April 2018.

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Catherine Rinaldi takes over Feb. 26.

CRAIG RUTTLE

NETS TRADE HARDEN TO 76ERS FOR SIMMONS **SPORTS**

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TOP STORIES

ENG STEPS DOWN AS

Metro-North head takes interim role through end of '22

BY ALFONSO A. CASTILLO
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Phillip Eng has resigned as president of the Long Island Rail Road and will be replaced by Metro-North president Catherine Rinaldi, who will lead the nation's two largest commuter railroads for the remainder of 2022, officials said Thursday.

At a Grand Central Terminal news conference, Metropolitan Transportation Authority chairman and CEO Janno Lieber said Eng gave his notice on Wednesday. Eng called it a "personal decision" that came after working for the state for nearly 40 years, including stints at the Department of Transportation and as the MTA's chief operating officer.

Lieber said Eng leaves the railroad in "really solid shape," with improved reliability and ridership rebounding two years after the COVID-19 outbreak began. Eng took over as president in April 2018.

"Phil has been a really strong leader at the Long Island Rail Road," Lieber said.

In a statement, Eng, 60, said he resigns "knowing that I leave the LIRR well-positioned for continued success with a dedicated management team and a tenacious workforce."

"I will always fondly look back on my time working with the MTA family as one of the highlights of my career," Eng said. "The MTA is the backbone of New York — and I will always cherish the opportunity I had working alongside our hardworking, dedicated workforce."

Experience cited

Rinaldi, 58, will assume the role of interim LIRR president on Feb. 26. Lieber said she was the obvious choice to replace Eng, because of her experience working closely with the agency at Metro-North, and her Long Island roots.

Rinaldi grew up in Massapequa and Huntington, graduated from Walt Whitman High School in Huntington Station, and has family in Suffolk



Catherine Rinaldi, Metro-North Railroad president, talks Thursday

County. She also previously worked as a vice president and general counsel for the LIRR.

In brief remarks during the announcement, Rinaldi, of upstate Irvington, said she was "very grateful" and "excited for the challenge ahead."

Rinaldi will lead the LIRR through the completion of two of the most ambitious infrastructure expansions in its 188-year history: the \$2.6 billion Third Track being constructed between Floral Park and Hicksville, and the \$11.2 billion East Side Access, which will bring the LIRR

into Metro-North's Manhattan home, Grand Central Terminal. Both projects are tagged for completion in December.

"We needed somebody who can seamlessly step in and focus on completing the incredible transition into this new East Side Access era," Lieber said. "I don't think there's anybody who can do this job on a dime like Cathy."

MTA officials did not disclose how Rinaldi will be compensated for leading both railroads. According to state records, she earned \$322,523 as

LIRR CHIEF, SUCCESSOR HAS LI TIES



as Janno Lieber, MTA chairman and CEO, looks on.

Metro-North president in 2020. Eng made \$323,153 the same year as LIRR president.

Began 'LIRR Forward'

Eng came to the LIRR in 2018 as the agency was struggling with historically low on-time performance and frequent infrastructure failures. Within weeks, he enacted the "LIRR Forward" initiative, which sought to improve the railroad's reliability by addressing the root causes of service disruptions, including aging and vulnerable infrastructure.

On-time performance grew every year beginning in 2019 and set all-time records in 2020 and 2021 — years during which the LIRR carried far fewer riders than usual because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Eng, of Smithtown, also dealt with various challenges throughout his tenure, including alarmingly high overtime rates among some LIRR workers, clashes with union leaders over morale issues, and growing safety concerns among riders traveling in and out of Penn Station.

Long Island leaders on Thurs-



LIRR president Phillip Eng speaks at a news conference regarding new LIRR technology in Oyster Bay on April 19, 2021.

WHAT TO KNOW

- **Phillip Eng resigned as president of the Long Island Rail Road**, and will be replaced by Metro-North president Catherine Rinaldi, who will take on the role of interim LIRR president on Feb. 26, and hold it at least through the end of 2022.
- **Following a lengthy career working for the state** in various transportation roles, Eng came to the LIRR in 2018, as the railroad was struggling with reliability issues.
- **Rinaldi, who grew up on Long Island, has served as Metro-North president since 2018.** She previously worked as a vice president and general counsel for the LIRR.

day expressed praise for Eng and confidence in his successor. Anthony Simon, general chairman of the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers — the LIRR's largest union — said he appreciated Eng "supporting front-line workers."

"He accomplished a great deal by hardening up our infrastructure and helping expand services to outside customers," said Simon, adding that he looks forward to working with Rinaldi, who "brings the experience of both railroads."

State Sen. James Gaughran (D-Northport) thanked Eng "for his years of service" and welcomed Rinaldi, who he said "commands deep respect across the industry and has the experience necessary to address the obvious issues facing commuters and LIRR workers."

Gerard Bringmann, chairman of the LIRR Commuter Council, a rider advocacy group, credited Eng with "significant accomplishments that have improved the lives of commuters and Long Islanders," including leading the LIRR through the COVID-19 pandemic and bringing "innovative approaches" to longtime problems.

MTA Board member Kevin Law, who has represented Suffolk County on the board for three years, called Eng a "terrific and dedicated public servant," and said Rinaldi is well-versed in Suffolk's LIRR priorities, including building a new Yaphank station near Brookhaven National Laboratory and electrifying the Port Jefferson line.

"I think she'll be terrific in that dual role, for now," Law said.

Kyle Strober, executive director for the Association for a Better Long Island, a business and planning group, said Eng leaves behind a legacy of vision, integrity and "professionalism in an era of unprecedented crisis."

"Eng never lost touch with the challenges of being an LIRR commuter, as he rode the train every day to work, from Smithtown to Jamaica," Strober said.

ENG TIMELINE

- **April 2018:** MTA Chief Operating Officer Phillip Eng is named the 40th president of the LIRR, replacing Patrick Nowakowski.
- **May 2018:** Following the railroad's worst annual on-time performance in 20 years, Eng announces his "LIRR Forward" initiative, aimed at addressing the root causes of service disruptions, including aging infrastructure and severe weather.
- **December 2018:** Following several weather events, the LIRR ends the year with its worst on-time performance since 1999, but Eng said there are signs of a turnaround.
- **August 2019:** After news surfaces of alarmingly high overtime rates among LIRR workers, Eng says he does not believe wage abuse is widespread among workers, but does support efforts to address the issue.
- **December 2019:** The LIRR ends the year with an on-time performance of 92.4%, its best since 2016. It also sets a modern ridership record of 91 million, the highest in 70 years.
- **April 2020:** Amid the COVID-19 outbreak, LIRR ridership plummets to 3% of 2019 levels. Eng reduces service levels and suspends peak pricing.
- **December 2020:** With fewer riders and fewer trains, the LIRR ends the year with an on-time performance rate of 95.9%, the best in recorded history.
- **December 2021:** With ridership rebounding to nearly 60% of pre-COVID levels, on-time performance sets another annual record: 96.3%.
- **February 2021:** Eng announces he is resigning. Metro-North president Catherine Rinaldi is named interim LIRR president.

SOURCE: Newsday archives

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