

MTA budget approval faulted

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Transportation advocates and elected officials are objecting to what they say was a lack of transparency in the state's ratification earlier this week of a \$51.5 billion MTA infrastructure spending plan that includes funding for several Long Island Rail Road expansion projects.

The MTA Capital Program was automatically approved Jan. 1 when no member of the state's Capital Program Review Board cast a vote against the plan. But the panel, which was missing one of its four members, never met to discuss the proposal.

The anticlimactic passage of the five-year plan highlighted what critics have said was a flawed process since the program was released in September — just three months before the deadline for approval.

"With no public comment period, anyone interested in speaking on the issue was funneled into the public hearing portion of MTA Board meetings — neither a productive or meaningful way to get input," Lauren Bailey, of the nonprofit Tri-State Transportation Campaign, said Friday. "Essentially, this was an illusion of transparency without any of the risk."

The Capital Program earmarks about \$5.7 billion in spending for the LIRR, including \$910 million for station upgrades, such as new elevators and extended platforms at some stations; \$1.02 billion for track



The capital budget includes funding for the Third Track project between Floral Park and Hicksville.

work, including for capacity upgrades at Jamaica Station; and \$364 million for communications and signal improvements, including to advance a plan to centralize train traffic control operations under one roof.

The plan allocates funding for the LIRR's Third Track project between Floral Park and Hicksville, and the final dollars for the MTA's \$11.2 billion East Side Access megaproject, which aims to link the LIRR to a new station at Grand Central Terminal via new tunnels by 2022.

Kyle Strober, executive director of the Association for a Better Long Island, a development and advocacy group, said the newly approved Capital Plan "is vital to protecting and preserving Long Island's economic viability."

"The strength of our connectivity to the city directly impacts our region's property val-

ues. Harm that link and you harm our future," Strober said.

In a statement Wednesday, MTA chairman Patrick Foye called the plan "both historic and transformational for the largest transportation system in North America."

Foye added that the authority was pleased that the plan had been "deemed approved" by the Capital Program Review Board.

Vetos could be cast by any member of the little-known four-person panel, which includes representatives for the governor, Assembly, Senate and New York City Mayor's Office. In September, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said he would represent himself on the board, and called for the leaders of the Senate and Assembly, and Mayor Bill de Blasio, to do the same. Because de Blasio refused to do so, New York City had no representative on the board, which

never met.

"What's the good of that? Where's the oversight and responsibility, and most significantly, the all-important sign-off by the mayor?" Lisa Daglian, executive director of the MTA's Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee, said last month. "We do want to see the plan go through, but we also do believe... there should be more of an opportunity for public review and comment."

Sen. James Gaughran (D-Northport) said he, too, thought the process to approve the plan was "crazy," and would like more input on behalf of his constituents.

But, he noted, lawmakers will still have some say in how the plan is funded as part of the state budget process later this month. He said he'll push for the LIRR to prioritize adding service on the Oyster Bay line.

Cops: Gun cleaning led to Plainview shooting

BY ANTONIO PLANAS
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A 25-year-old man accidentally shot a 17-year-old boy in the neck Thursday night while cleaning a handgun inside a Plainview home and got into a four-vehicle crash as he drove the wounded teen to a hospital, Nassau police said.

The shooting victim was listed in serious but stable condition at a hospital and is expected to survive, police said.

Officer Eric Evensen, a Nassau police spokesman, said in a news release Friday that the man, Brian Gregg of Plainview, was not a legally licensed handgun owner and is being charged with criminal possession of a

weapon in the fourth degree. A prior news release sent Thursday night said the handgun was licensed.

An off-duty Nassau police officer whose shift had recently ended was driving one of the four vehicles involved in the crash, said Det. Lt. Richard LeBrun, a spokesman for the Nassau police department. The officer, who has been on the force for about 2½ years, provided medical aid despite a head injury, and she contained the scene until first responders arrived, LeBrun said.

At the time of the crash, Gregg was driving the wounded teen to a hospital, LeBrun said. The SUV was traveling north on Plainview Road

and attempting to make a left onto Old Country Road when it collided with another SUV going east, LeBrun said.

Two cars were struck and the officer, as well as three others, were hospitalized with injuries not considered life-threatening, he said. The shooting victim is a friend of Gregg's 17-year-old stepbrother, who was also in the SUV, police said.

The shooting, which police believe was accidental, occurred at 7 p.m. Thursday, police said.

At the scene late Thursday night, the four vehicles remained in the intersection and debris from the wreck littered nearby streets. Both roads remained partially closed in each direction just after 11 p.m.

The roads have since been reopened.

LeBrun praised the officer for helping others at the scene despite suffering a head injury when her vehicle's air bag deployed.

"It's pretty amazing," LeBrun said. "Her training just kicked in even though she was injured. She administered aid to the other people. She called 911. She secured the scene. She made sure that everybody was cared for and nobody left the scene until police officers arrived."

Gregg will be arraigned as soon as is "medically practical," Evensen said. It was not clear if he was represented by an attorney. *With Matthew Chayes*

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THIS DATE IN HISTORY

1809 Louis Braille, inventor of the Braille raised-dot reading system for the blind, was born in Coupvray, France.

1896 Utah was admitted as the 45th state.

1935 President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his State of the Union address, called for legislation to provide assistance for the jobless, elderly, impoverished children and the handicapped.

1964 Pope Paul VI began a visit to the Holy Land, the first papal pilgrimage of its kind.

1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson delivered his State of the Union address in which he outlined the goals of his "Great Society."

1974 President Richard Nixon refused to hand over tape recordings and documents subpoenaed by the Senate Watergate Committee.

1999 Europe's new currency, the euro, started strong on its first trading day, rising against the dollar on world currency markets.

2006 Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon suffered a significant stroke; he remained in a coma until his death in January 2014.