

Statement by Phil Guarnieri
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At Long Island Rail Road Scoping Hearing
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My name is Phil Guarnieri and I was the Mayor of Floral Park when this proposal first publically materialized during the 2005 Scoping Hearing. Then as now the paucity of information was deeply troubling. We are still waiting, eleven years hence, for some of our questions from that hearing to be answered. A decade ago a grass roots campaign of virtually unprecedented dimensions arose to state clearly and unambiguously that our communities would not be suckered or dragooned into supporting just any project. We would not be casual observers or indifferent witnesses about the impacts that construction of the "Third Track" would have on our communities, local businesses or our quality of life; nor would we simply accept at face value the justifications given by the MTA for building it. That the powers that be did not anticipate that we would demand accountability and transparency was a galactic miscalculation and they paid a heavy price for that careless presumption.

A decade or more later the vaguest outline of another plan is rolled out that ostensibly amends the old plan by cutting the length of the corridor in question from 11.3 miles to 9.8 miles. We're assured that this time no residential property is anticipated to be taken and that the "Third Track" will be utilized as a passing lane to limit work on the existing LIRR right of way. More or less, that was basically what we were made to understand during the project's first baptism. The public, however, is still fishing in dark waters. The lack of specific detail is a narrative that has been percolating for more than a decade and is the reason the MTA-LIRR continues to display at these hearings all the grace and agility of an elephant cornered by a mouse --- in my community it's a mouse that roars.

It's unfortunate that the unfurling of this new proposal is characterized by the same insobriety that affords the residents of our community absolutely no confidence that things have been rationally discerned instead of recklessly surmised to obtain a costly and intrusive bureaucratic objective under the guise of serving the public interest and expanding the economy. The MTA catalogues the same ritualistic platitudes about avoiding disruption of service, providing more trains and the "Third Track" being a catalyst for an economic renaissance on Eastern Long Island --- an artful explanation which pirouettes upon the implausible supposition of more workers migrating to eastern suburbs as a way of legitimizing the price tag of this Olympian size project.

The people who reside in the mainline communities are not insensible to the blessing of upgrading infrastructure where it is necessary and would serve a useful purpose. There is no gainsaying that modern transportation created the modern world. Nor are we so inhospitable that we would not welcome suburban expansion on the Island and keep the supply of residential land ample, affordable and accessible to metropolitan job markets. But there is a critical difference between whether something can be built and whether it should be built. Ridership on the LIRR might be achieving new highs in recent years (though 1949 remains the peak year) but the fact remains that the train cars on the reverse commute are half empty. Moreover, stating that the Third Track will limit work and repairs on the current right of way also seems suspect in terms of need and practicality. Ninety five percent of the trains run on time and service is not interrupted. Of the five percent of trains that do experience breakdown and delays, only a small minority of that percentage occurs between Hicksville and New Hyde Park where the Third Track is contemplated to be built.

There may be some merit in the heterogeneous compound of proposals that was unveiled in the MTA's \$27 billion Five Year Capital Budget, specifically the grade crossings, but there is little or any advantage in building a Third Track. There are easier and more affordable ways to accomplish their objectives but unhappily these scoping hearings do not lend itself as an ideal setting where we can sit and reason together. The MTA's current proposal, like the last, is more about being ambitious than thoughtful, more about empowerment than purposefulness and more about

freight than increasing the reverse commute. Building a third track at the cost of one billion plus to increase ridership out east and to energize the local economy is like burning down a house to boil an egg. There are easier and more cost effective ways to accomplish these objectives.

The MTA is a government subsidized agency and the projects they undertake, often grand in scope, are fueled by taxpayer dollars, which more often than not serves not to expand the economy but retard it. In truth the one thing the MTA-LIRR has always done exceptionally well is manipulating the arithmetic to justify their self-serving projects. The MTA has often been wrong but somehow never in doubt. Its self-confidence andchutzpah must rate as one of the most extraordinary examples of bureaucratic infatuation and self-importance I've ever encountered. After all, approximately half of its operating costs continue to be subsidized. In addition, the inefficiencies and workplace abuses that are embedded in the work culture could have only flourished in a publically subsidized environment where a cozy relationship between management and unions remain unimpeded. The history of their capital projects has been one of depressing mediocrity at best and abject failure at its worst. It's why I said back in 2005 that the MTA must stand for "Money Thrown Away."

Finally the MTA must consider the disproportionate burden that building the Third Track places on the mainline communities. A forest takes a long time to grow --- so does a community. We are resolved not to surrender what we struggled so long to build; nor shall we forsake our highest values and ideals that made our village and which, in turn, made us. The most critical question to ask, George Orwell once said, is "Who owns the future." I like to think the Founders had it right when they proclaimed it was, "We the People." I ask then that this project not be all accelerator and no brakes. In fact, better yet, I hope you give it the burial it so richly deserves.

Phil Guarnieri