

**May 24, 2016**

**Statement by Ann V. Corbett  
at Long Island Railroad Scoping Hearing  
regarding the Third Track Expansion.**

My name is Ann V. Corbett, I am a Former Mayor of the Inc. Village of Floral Park. I raised my family in Floral Park and have been active in the village for 52 years. I have an office building across from the LIRR tracks on South Tyson Avenue. I work in my family's businesses. We have six full time and four part time employees and three to four interns each year.

Before asking my questions and stating my concerns about the Third Track project, I just want to say that I am disappointed that I have not had more time to fully study the 82 page document that was made available to the public by the LIRR on May 5<sup>th</sup>. I do appreciate the opportunity to speak today and I understand I can also submit a document outlining my questions and concerns for the record.

**Background**

In 2005 as Mayor of Floral Park, I appointed the first Floral Park Third Track MTA Task Force after reading in *The New York Times* a one-sentence mention of a plan for a MTA LIRR Third Track project to extend from Queens Village to Hicksville. Soon afterwards the Citizens Against Rail Expansion (CARE) was formed. By 2008 and after much opposition from the public, the Third Track project did not move forward. Now in 2016, a second Floral Park Third Track Task Force has been formed and CARE members and others in communities along the Main Line are once again questioning the need for this costly and unnecessary project. Thousands of people have communicated to Governor Andrew Cuomo their opposition to this project, even though the original plan is to be modified.

The Third Track Expansion will cost an estimated \$2.2 billion. Segments of the Third Track Expansion have been built already. One segment already exists between Merillon Avenue and Mineola in the vicinity of Herricks Road. Another segment is expected to be part of the upcoming station renovation at Hicksville. Provisions for a Third Track have been made in Mineola. I believe the railroad bridge over Roslyn Road in Mineola, and the replacement Ellison Avenue Bridge over the Main Line in Westbury already have the Third Track built. I did not see any references to these segments of the Third Track that have been built in the scoping document. What was the cost involved?

**Right of Way/Project Corridor**

Can you tell me if there is a map that actually shows the borders of both the LIRR's right of way and the Third Track Project Corridor from Queens Village to Hicksville and specifically in the Village of Floral Park? Are there any future plans to add a Third Track between Queens Village and Floral Park? Can we be assured that the Bellerose Train Station will not be closed in the future?

The MTA LIRR has certain rights and exemptions within its right of way. What are these rights and exemptions? Do they also apply to the Project Corridor? Do any exemptions apply, for example, to the removal of contaminated soil or to the repair work on the tracks or the rail system? A few years ago when work was done on the tracks in Floral Park along Atlantic Avenue (West End/Bellerose Village), heavy railroad equipment stationed on the

tracks produced relentless noise and house shaking vibrations and there were bright lights shining all night. Residents who were disturbed by these things for days were informed that such activity was permitted because the track work was being done within the LIRR's right of way. A similar situation was experienced by homeowners in another Long Island community recently; the story was on *News 12 Long Island* on May 18, 2016.

If the Third Track construction contracts include incentives (monetary or otherwise) to have this project expedited for completion within the LIRR's estimated timeframe of 3 or 4 years, should the families and business owners in communities along the Main Line expect long hours of construction work and even 24/7 construction work that will disturb the peace and their quality of life? Will residents and businesspeople in or near the Project Corridor and beyond these ¼ mile or ½ mile "buffer" zones, be expected to tolerate these types of disruptions both day and night?

Will the project construction workers be asked to put in long hours of overtime at construction sites and end up suffering from fatigue that could lead to safety issues?

### **Floral Park Station**

Reference is made to the Project Corridor (Study Area) which includes the right of way, station areas and at grade crossings from Floral Park to Hicksville and approximately ¼ mile buffer along the right of way and ½ mile buffer area around the stations and the at grade crossings. How does the LIRR define the Floral Park Station? Note that near the station there are two segments to South Tyson Avenue, each going in different directions. Can it be concluded that the ½ mile buffer area extends north, south, east and west of what we think is the construction site? If so, does this mean that the Floral Park Station's ground floor waiting room and above ground platforms west of South Tyson Avenue are included in the Third Track Expansion's Project Corridor? The ¼ and ½ mile buffers or zones west of South Tyson Avenue will definitely be impacted by this project. A number of thriving businesses are west of South Tyson Avenue (north and south). On page 6 of the scoping document it states "The Proposed Project would include various station improvements and modifications in order to accommodate the Third Track; enhance ADA accessibility; enhance pedestrian access; and improved platforms and passenger waiting areas. No major station modifications would be made at Floral Park or Hicksville stations as part of the proposed Project..." The Floral Park LIRR Station's waiting room and rest rooms need upgrading. The platforms are elevated and there are commuter/passenger shelters that are so dingy that people are reluctant to go into them.

### **Downtown is Near Construction**

Floral Park's downtown is in proximity to where construction is expected to take place. Will Floral Park be the first place for this project to start? Going even beyond the ¼ mile and ½ mile Project Corridor the everyday life and the character of the village will be impacted by the

construction – the commercial area; Rotary, Lions and the Floral Park Womans Club parks and public facilities along Tulip, Atlantic, South Tyson (east-west and north-south) and Verbena avenues and Caroline Pl., Woodbine Ct. and several more streets. The Third Track construction will impact: pedestrian safety (especially children walking to and from John Lewis Childs and Our Lady of Victory Eementary Schools and Floral Park Memorial High School, the Floral Park Public Library and downtown shops); the vitality of business operations; the number of parking spaces available for shoppers, employees, residents and others; traffic patterns (street closings, snarled traffic); fire and police emergency response time may be hindered; air quality; the integrity of underground utility systems and the structural integrity of office buildings, shops, restaurants and apartment dwellings. Will these concerns be studied and addressed?

### **Tyson Building**

The Tyson Building on South Tyson Avenue is historically important to Floral Park. It dates back to the 1800s and is the oldest commercial building in Floral Park. It is now an apartment house where many longtime residents of the village live. It is also the home of the Floral Park Historical Society Museum and Archives. The building is across from the LIRR tracks near where we think the construction site will be located. If this project moves forward the Tyson Building will be at risk of structural damage. Will a property such as this one be protected or would it be protected only if it has National Historic Landmark status?

### **Staging Areas**

Construction also brings up the question as to where staging areas will be located. What products, materials and equipment will be delivered and where will they be stored? Will, for instance, butane or other combustibles be stored? From recent events in the news; we know of the danger of storing volatile products. The New York City Fire Department penalized the Urban Garden Center that sparked a four-alarm fire Metro-North's Park Avenue viaduct, damaging the rails above and causing widespread delays for days. The garden center was charged with "unlawful storage, handling and use" of liquefied petroleum gas, unlawful use of liquefied petroleum gas for heating the greenhouse, unlawful storage of gasoline in quantities so large they require a city permit, and unlawful storage of "portable fueled equipment." What precautions against such a disaster will be implemented by the LIRR? Will the Floral Park Fire Department be made aware of any dangerous products and equipment stored in staging areas?

I assume there will be a number of truck deliveries of materials and equipment for construction. How will this be handled? Will our parking lots be taken over? Parking for commuters in Floral Park is already at a premium. Parking fields are saturated and businesses already suffer from the lack of parking spaces for employees and customers/patrons. Will our parking lots and commuter lots be used for staging, storage and deliveries of materials? Will construction workers park in our lots? Will trucks be parked in our lots?

### **Fire and Police Response**

Does the LIRR have a plan to contact the Chief of the Floral Park Fire Department and Floral Park Police Commissioner to alert them to the construction plans as they relate to Floral Park? This would enable the men and women in their departments to be prepared in the event of any accidents, fires, disasters or other emergencies that would require a quick response?

### **Number of Trains**

According to page 3 of the document there are 220 trains that travel the Main Line weekdays between Floral Park and Hicksville. I would like to have this number clarified. Does this include the number of passenger trains, deadhead trains and freight trains? Does this include the number of Hempstead line trains that go through Floral Park or just Main Line trains? How many more trains travel on the weekends through Floral Park? In the document it says there will be increases in passenger trains due to a "desire to increase reverse peak." How many more trains will go through and/or stop in Floral Park if the Third Track is constructed? There have been no studies to substantiate a need or demand for reverse commute; only a "desire." A desire by who? The high cost of LIRR ticket fares will turn off potential commuters who may consider a job out east. What added services or benefits will the Main Line communities and commuters actually get?

### **Elimination At-Grade Crossings**

The elimination of any at-grade crossing is a safety measure few can argue against. In fact, maybe the MTA LIRR should consider more at grade crossing eliminations within its system before constructing the Third Track. Recently in Bedford Hills, a northbound train caught the front of a stalled Toyota at the crossing just north of Mount Kisco. The front end of the car was completely destroyed and the crossing gate was lying across the roof of the car after the accident. The front of the vehicle was wedged under the fifth car of the Metro-North train. Passengers were escorted off to waiting paramedics; fortunately there were no medical emergencies.

On February 3, 2015, a commuter train on Metro-North Railroad's Harlem Line struck a passenger car at a grade crossing near Valhalla, between Valhalla and Mount Pleasant stations, killing six people and injuring 15 others. The crash was the deadliest in Metro-North's history. A young relative of mine was in the second car of the train that crashed and she helped to save passengers.

There are good reasons for the LIRR to consider eliminating more unsafe at grade crossings before undertaking other unnecessary and costly rail projects. At the very least will the MTA LIRR evaluate and update the signage and warning sound systems at the at-grade crossings on Long Island to make them safer for drivers and pedestrians?

In regard to the seven proposed Third Track at grade crossing projects, I believe the communities in which these are located will assess the information in the Draft SEQRA Scoping Document and will comment on their findings. Individual communities will want to protect the integrity of their culture and character of their community and protect the vitality of businesses and the quality of life of residents.

Traffic flow can be disrupted in any community on Long Island by neighboring communities. For example parades, street fairs, marathons, roadway repairs and accidents can cause the traffic patterns in neighboring communities to change. Floral Park will bear the burden of changing traffic patterns related to the at grade crossing projects in New Hyde Park. When major roadways in nearby communities have been altered, it has caused the normal flow of traffic within Floral Park to change. The at grade crossing projects in the seven Main Line communities have the potential to create all sorts of traffic problems for other communities. Residents and business owners in the vicinity of these projects will be adversely affected. Even distant communities along much traveled roadways involved in these projects will be affected.

Many drivers believe the Valhalla crash has led to the gates at street crossings here on Long Island to be down for longer periods of time. During the rush hours, when the crossing gates are down at the Floral Park/Stewart Manor- Covert Avenue at grade crossing, a long line of rush hour drivers wait patiently in their vehicles for the gates to lift so they can proceed north or south. In recent months these drivers believe there has been an increase in the waiting time at this street crossing since the Valhalla crash. As a result, Plainfield Avenue in Floral Park is now being used by drivers as an alternative route during rush hours. Closing the Covert Avenue at-grade crossing in New Hyde Park, north of the one in Floral Park/Stewart Manor, will likely shift south bound traffic to Floral Park's Plainfield, Tulip and South Tyson avenues, which will result in more traffic and snarled traffic in Floral Park. It appears that the impact on traffic flow related to the elimination of at-grade crossings has not been studied fully. Will more in-depth traffic studies be conducted? How will this and similar traffic issues related to the at grade crossing elimination proposals be addressed?

The water table on Long Island is relatively high. In the case of the Roslyn Road at-grade crossing elimination in Mineola, the water table became a huge problem and delayed the completion of the project for 7 years. What studies, (environmental or other) will be done to create better at-grade crossing engineering designs? How will they be better than the engineering design plans for Roslyn Road? History tends to repeat itself.

### **Freight**

The LIRR contract or franchise agreement with New York & Atlantic Railway as freight operator on the Main Line allows for three round-trip freight trains per day running at off-peak hours. On page 5 of the scoping document it states that if market conditions change, there could be an increase in freight trains. In the New York State Regional Freight Plan it appears that the market is going to change and perhaps has already changed. All possible means of moving freight is projected to increase through the use of barges, cargo planes, trucks and trains. Will there be provisions in the new 2017 contract with NY&A to allow for the expansion of their operation on the Main Line? Explain.

Running freight trains during off peak hours sounds good. But diesel driven NY & A freight trains rumble along, creating a lot of noise, pollution and vibration that disturb the quality of life of residents and businesses along the Main Line. For example, phone conversations in offices and residences near the tracks are impossible when a freight train goes by during off-peak hours – afternoon, evening and during the night. Some trains hauling garbage have been seen by third floor apartment dwellers across from the tracks in Floral Park to have freight cars hauling garbage and other content uncovered, which is against regulations. Freight trains have been known to carry very heavy loads of stone and gravel in their freight cars causing excessive vibrations as they rumble through Main Line communities causing damages to houses and buildings such as cracked walls and foundations. Can we be assured that double decker freight cars will never be used in the future? How many freight cars will one or more diesel engines be permitted to pull? In other regions freight trains haul product in well over 40 freight cars. Will sustained noise levels and vibrations caused by

freight trains be analyzed more closely? There is no mention of the materials or products to be transported – will there be categories of hazardous or radioactive materials, garbage? What exactly will be transported as freight? Does the NY & A Railway transport lumber, building products, scrap metal, construction and demolition debris, bio-diesel fuel, food, gravel, propane, chemicals, structural steel, plastics and recyclable cardboard/paper? At what speed will the freight trains be permitted to travel? What precautions will be taken to prevent a derailment such as the one in the 1970s in Floral Park in which material being hauled was scattered across a large area? What technology is being used or can possibly be used to make trains- passenger and freight- quieter?

### **Improvements to Floral Park Station**

Floral Park has strived to maintain the character of the village. In the 1960s the LIRR made a huge impact when it elevated the platform and built new station facilities. Now 60 or so years later, it is embarking on a project that will further impact the character of the village. Yet there is not one improvement planned for the station that has deteriorated and stands as a sad monument of broken promises – exactly what people can expect of the LIRR.

Whoever heard of only installing one escalator to take commuters up to the train platform and no down escalator or elevator? Is this what ADA means to the LIRR? The Floral Park freight elevator was closed down years ago. The station has steep stairways that were replaced because of accidents. By the way, the original broken-down escalator took 13 months to replace. Commuters and businesses, e.g. owners of a nearby funeral parlor, had to put up with inconveniences and noise related to these projects. If it took the LIRR over a year to replace an escalator, how can the addition of the Third Track be said to only take 3 or 4 years? The LIRR's record for getting things done on time is the same as their "on time" arrival and departure reports for train lines- shameful, skewed and statistically impossible. Now the public will be forced to put up with a lot of inconveniences and we don't even get a decent commuter/passenger waiting room, restroom facilities, platform shelters and more accommodations for the disabled. The average commuter would be served better if they didn't have to walk down 50 steps. Pigeon droppings sit around and I still collect debris such as pretzels, rocks and pieces of equipment that fall from the tracks down into the parking lots below.

### **Acquisition of Commercial Properties**

The acquisition of commercial properties to make way for the Third Track will take years. It cannot be assumed that a commercial business owner will just pick up and move so a Third Track can be constructed. This seems a bit unrealistic since there is always the possibility of litigation and numerous factors when dealing with eminent domain and property acquisition. I know because my family's farm was taken through eminent domain. Maybe the U.S. Post Office will relish the move to another location in New Hyde Park? What of the commercial properties that are just outside of the Project Corridor? These property owners will be subject to the disruption of their businesses by the construction process.

## **Utilities**

Water supply, sanitary waste-sewer and storm water infrastructures and electricity and natural gas utilities serve three LIRR stations as well as the homes and businesses along the Main Line. The Floral Park LIRR Station is within the LIRR right of way and the Project Corridor and therefore potential impacts of proposed project as to utilities and other services mentioned should be included as part of a more comprehensive analysis.

In the past several years the Floral Park Fire Department has responded to numerous reports of gas leaks. Not long ago, an underground water service pipe was discovered to be an old "antique" wooden pipe. Natural gas companies and water companies have been replacing pipes in an effort to upgrade their underground delivery systems for years. Despite efforts to update these systems, there is no guarantee that a potential host of problems could result from Third Track construction in Floral Park. The pounding, vibrations and other activities related to construction work can disturb underground utility systems and the connections to buildings in proximity to the construction within the Project Corridor and even beyond.

How will the character of the Village of Floral Park be determined? What will be the criteria for defining it? How can it be defined if the Project Corridor is limited to ¼ mile to ½ mile?

## **Environment Impact**

Environment impact – the public wants to know the locations of hazardous or nonhazardous contaminated materials in the soil within the right of way and within the Project Corridor. The scoping document says contaminants are likely to be found. How exactly will these materials and possibly the discovery of even more contaminants be dealt with within the right of way and/or the Project Corridor - where construction will be taking place? How will air quality be monitored? What will be the process for dealing with this environmental/health issue?

## **Bus Service**

Bus Service during construction is of concern. It has been the practice of the LIRR to bus commuters when necessary from the one station to another when track work is going on. What is the projected need for bus transportation for commuters while construction is going on in the Village of Floral Park? How will buses be accommodated? Where will buses park and wait? It is anticipated there will be limited parking spaces available for commuters and limited areas for commuters from outside Floral Park to be dropped off or picked up. A string of buses lined up to carry hundreds of commuters to destinations east will create havoc. How long will commuters need to be transported and how often and for how long will they have this type of inconvenience?

## **Noise and Vibration**

Will noise and vibration related to trains now going through Main Line communities be initiated? There are many variables to be considered in determining the real impact of noise and vibrations caused by trains on the inhabitants living and working in Main Line communities. The Third Track will likely mean more trains going through our Main Line communities and how much more noise and vibration will result? How will you accurately monitor noise and vibration? Noise and vibration occurs at peak hours of operation, noise and vibration is sustained over periods of time, there is noise and vibration unique to freight trains and their diesel engines. The noise and vibrations at street level generated by passenger and freight trains and their diesel engines as opposed to noise and vibrations

produced by trains on elevated tracks or atop of retaining walls can vary. Each community has its own distinct experiences as to noise and vibrations caused by the LIRR trains and the system horns etc. Will sound levels be monitored, analyzed and mitigated? Will any sound barriers be constructed and exactly where will they be?

During the construction phase it can be anticipated that heavy duty and other equipment and a variety of tools will be used by construction workers. Driving pilings into the ground, for example, will certainly produce loud noise and vibrations in a relentless manner. We do not want to see construction work going on 24/7 or for extended periods of time. This would surely disturb the peace. How many hours a day do you anticipate that work will be done? Excessive loud noise isn't good for the construction workers either. Vibrations related to construction have the potential of causing structural damage to apartment houses, commercial buildings, offices, shops and homes, recreational areas, government and public facilities and schools.

Thank for giving me this opportunity to voice my concerns about this project.

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