

CALL TO DELAY LIRR FARE HIKE

GOP legislators say railroad must first improve service

BY ALFONSO A. CASTILLO
alfonso.castillo@newsday.com

Republican elected officials are calling on the MTA to hold off on a planned fare increase next year for the LIRR until railroad service improves.

At a news conference at the Long Island Rail Road's Bethpage station, a group of GOP state lawmakers called for a stop to the planned 4 percent increase next year and proposed instead the creation of a "commuter fund" that the railroad could draw upon — but only if it achieved specific performance goals.

The proposal comes as commuters have endured a litany of delays, cancellations and other challenges that have contributed to the LIRR being on pace to having its worst annual on-time performance in 19 years.

Meanwhile, the Metropolitan

The cost of LIRR monthly tickets

Zone 4

(includes Mineola, Valley Stream, Great Neck)

2007: \$178
2017: \$261

Zone 7

(includes Long Beach, Massapequa, Hicksville)

2007: \$203
2017: \$297

Zone 9

(includes Babylon, Deer Park, Huntington)

2007: \$239
2017: \$350

Zone 10

(includes Islip, Ronkonkoma, Port Jefferson)

2007: \$267
2017: \$391

Zone 12

(includes Bellport, Speonk and Yaphank)

2007: \$315
2017: \$461

Zone 14

(includes Greenport, Southampton and Montauk)

2007: \$342
2017: \$500

Fare increases over the years

2008: 4 percent
2009: 10 percent
2011: 7.5 percent
2013: 7 percent
2015: 4 percent
2017: 4 percent

Planned increases:

2019: 4 percent
2021: 4 percent

Transportation Authority recently confirmed plans to increase fares and tolls by 4 percent early next year — the ninth fare increase since 2008.

"In no other business would

you continue to have to pay more as quality and service declines," said Sen. Elaine Phillips (R-Flower Hill), who authored the Senate version of the proposed bill. "The Long Island Rail

Road must be held accountable for poor service. And that's what this legislation does."

Under the proposal, the state would take \$60 million from litigation settlements with banks and use it to create a fund that the LIRR could access if it achieved its on-time performance goal of 94 percent. Through July, 90.4 of LIRR trains were on time, statistics show.

The bill would also require that the LIRR see a 5 percent increase in its annual customer service satisfaction rating to tap the fund. When the LIRR last released its customer satisfaction rating results in March, it scored 77 percent — its lowest grade since the railroad began using a percentage scoring system in 2009.

In a statement, MTA spokesman Jon Weinstein said the agency is investing \$6 billion to "completely modernize the Long Island Rail Road for riders," including through the construction of a second track on the LIRR's Main Line in Suffolk and a third track in Nassau.

"The MTA Board makes the final determination on fare pol-

icy, but to be clear, we are in a period of the greatest investment in the railroad and the Long Island economy that the MTA has ever made," Weinstein said.

MTA officials have said they need the money generated from regular fare increases to remain financially stable and avoid budget deficits. But Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan (R-East Northport) said that even without the fare increase or another funding source the MTA has "enough money right now" to reverse the LIRR's failing service.

"I don't think it's underfunding. I think it's where you put the resources," Flanagan said. "We're telling them, do not approve a fare hike under any circumstances."

Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach) called the Republican proposal, which he noted comes seven weeks before Election Day, "incredibly cynical and rich."

"During the Senate GOP's reign in Albany, they have barely lifted a finger to help LIRR riders," Kaminsky said. "Fixing the LIRR will take a lot more than politics as usual."

Gillen calls ethics reform 'desperately needed'

BY JESSE COBURN
jesse.coburn@newsday.com

Hempstead Town Supervisor Laura Gillen on Monday proposed a package of "desperately needed" ethics reforms to combat nepotism and ban political activity by town employees during work hours or on town property.

The reforms, if approved, would require town employees and job applicants to disclose relatives on the Hempstead payroll, prohibit officials from pressuring employees to make political contributions and increase the town ethics board from three members to five, among other changes, Gillen said.

"The town's current ethics code and rules are scattered, disjointed," she said in Town Hall on Monday, joined by Town Clerk Sylvia Cabana.

The new measures should provide residents "with the highest level of honesty, integrity, and professionalism," she said.

The proposal of Gillen, a Democrat, would require the approval of the Republican-controlled town board. Gillen said her staff had crafted the reform package without the input of town board members, but that she will now seek their feedback.

Erin King Sweeney, the board's Republican majority leader, said Monday that she could not comment on all of Gillen's ethics proposals, as the supervisor had not previously shared the plan with board members and King Sweeney had not yet reviewed it.

She expressed support for certain elements, such as the restrictions on political activities, although she questioned whether the measure might be redundant with existing statutes.

"Sincere and meaningful

ethics reform and transparency are priorities to which the town board has demonstrated a genuine commitment," King Sweeney said, noting other ethics measures passed earlier this year, such as a requirement that town contracts of \$10,000 or more be posted online.

King Sweeney also said that the town board has been working on its own ethics reform package for months.

The town board passed another set of ethics reforms last fall under previous Supervisor Anthony Santino. Gillen spokesman Mike Fricchione said the new measures go further.

The new anti-politicking proposal springs from complaints Gillen and Cabana said they have gotten from town employees that their superiors had pressured them to donate to campaigns and attend political fundraisers.

They declined to say which officials had allegedly pressured others, although Cabana said her



Hempstead Town Supervisor Laura Gillen announces ethics reforms Monday that will need GOP approval. ■ Video: newsday.com/nassau

employees had said "they had been forced in the past to donate to prior clerks."

Gillen's proposed ethics board reforms would also prohibit political party officers from sitting

on the board, and require both major political parties be represented on the board.

Gillen said she hopes the town board will vote on the package in the next two months.

MORE INSIDE Displaced, but in school A10