

# LIRR hails 2 station upgrades

## Renovations in Farmingdale and Wantagh

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The LIRR is trumpeting station improvement projects in Farmingdale and Wantagh.

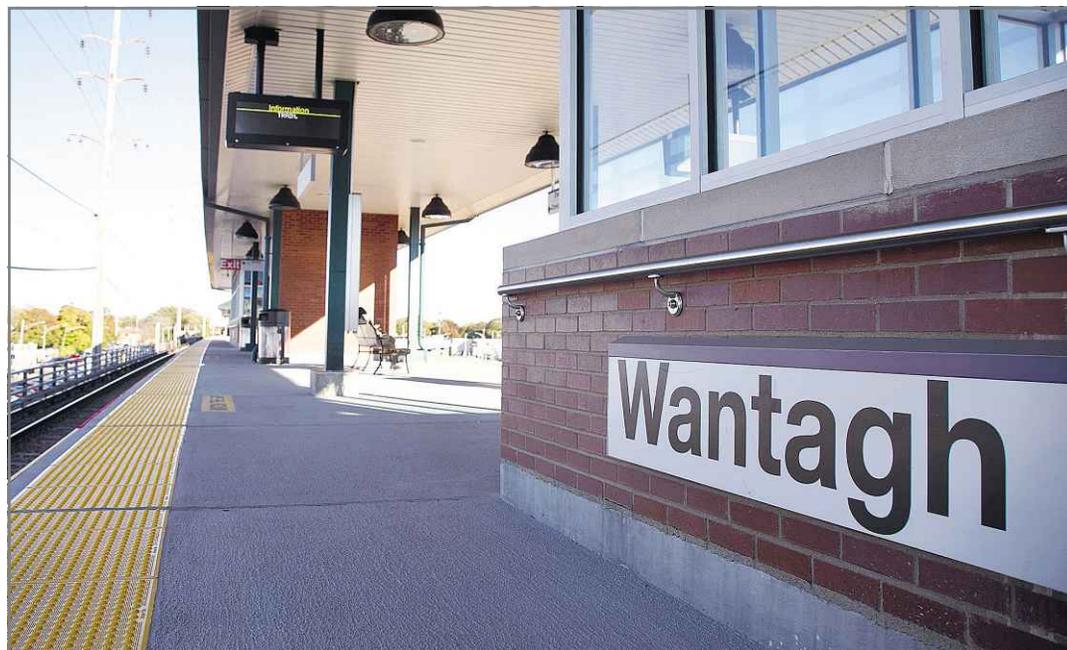
The Long Island Rail Road on Tuesday opened the doors of its newly upgraded Farmingdale station building, which includes new accessibility features in restrooms, a new waiting room with terrazzo flooring, tile and wood wall and ceiling finishes, new doors and windows, and upgraded electrical, plumbing and ventilation systems. Technological improvements included sur-

veillance cameras, LCD information displays, and USB charging stations.

The facade of the 128-year-old building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was restored to its original brick architecture. Other improvements at the station, which is used by 3,800 customers daily, are planned for next year.

The LIRR also recently completed a \$27 million renovation project at its Wantagh station that included new platforms, a new elevator and other changes. In a statement, LIRR president Phillip Eng said the two station improvements are an acknowledgment that train stations “are an ongoing part of the history and landscape of each community they serve.”

“The Long Island Rail Road’s focus continues to be on how we can improve on the many



The \$27 million renovation at Wantagh station included new platforms and a new elevator.

ways customers experience our system. Along with improving train service and reliability, we want to make sure when they’re at our stations, they have the comforts and amenities they’re used to having at other world-class transportation outlets,” Eng said. “The attention to detail in these station renovations recognizes the important relationship between LIRR stations and the communities that surround them.”

The projects are among 100 funded by the state as part of an

ongoing \$6.6 billion expansion and modernization of the railroad.

Meanwhile, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo on Monday touted a series of other previously approved transportation-improvement projects on Long Island totaling \$48.9 million.

They involve road resurfacing projects at eight locations, including along Route 101/Port Washington Boulevard in the Town of North Hempstead, and Route 105/Jerusalem Avenue in the Town of Hempstead; pedes-

trian safety improvements along Route 110 in Suffolk County; updates for electronic message boards on state roads throughout Long Island; and other improvement projects on Route 135/Seaford Oyster Bay Expressway, the Bethpage State Parkway, the Robert Moses Causeway.

“State roads throughout Long Island accommodate millions of travelers each year, and it is critical that our transportation infrastructure meets the highest safety standards,” Cuomo said in a statement.

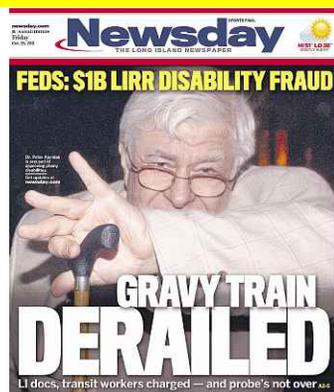
## Efforts to collect LIRR fraud restitution called ‘pathetic’

BY ALFONSO A. CASTILLO  
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The federal agency at the center of the LIRR disability scandal that surfaced 10 years ago has made little attempt to recover tens of millions of dollars it was owed from the conviction of dozens of defendants on fraud charges, according to the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board’s internal watchdog.

Martin Dickman, inspector general for the U.S. Railroad Retirement Board, or USRRB, said that of nearly \$155 million in court-ordered restitution related to dozens of convictions — five years ago on fraud charges stemming from the scam — the board has only collected about \$1.6 million.

The board also has not made an attempt to recover money from hundreds of Long Island Rail Road retirees who temporarily lost their disability benefits, which averaged \$33,000 a



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year, because they were examined by doctors convicted of fraud, the board confirmed.

“It all goes with the culture here. [The retirement board] is very aggressive with paying out to everybody, but they’re very passive as far as collecting money. It’s pathetic. They just don’t care,” said Dickman, who noted the unrecovered money

would go toward building the same trust funds that benefit railroaders. “Why wouldn’t they want to collect the money to protect their people?”

The FBI launched an investigation into the fraud scheme after news stories in 2008 documented the high rate of LIRR employees applying for and receiving occupational disability benefits upon retirement. Prosecutors alleged they were taking advantage of a loophole in their contract that created a financial incentive for them to retire at age 50 and subsequently claim a disability — allowing them to collect both an LIRR pension and federal disability benefits.

Ultimately, 33 defendants pleaded guilty or were convicted on fraud charges, including 29 former LIRR employees.

In a statement, USRRB spokesman Michael P. Freeman said the agency has worked with the U.S. Department of Justice Financial Litigation Unit and the

courts “with respect to receiving restitution payments made by the annuitant defendants in this matter,” as it is bound to do.

The agency said it is in the process of collecting payments but would not address how much it had collected or how much was left to collect. Freeman also acknowledged the board had not yet begun collecting debts from some convicted defendants, including two doctors whose appeals were still playing out in the courts until earlier this year.

Meanwhile, the board has said it has no plans to recover funds from 700 LIRR retirees whose disability benefits were terminated because they were based on the evaluations of physicians later convicted of fraud for falsifying medical evidence. In a December report, the board said “there is no evidence which would support the [US]RRB taking such action.”

“While the fraud conviction

of the physicians was deemed sufficient to call the applications into question, the convictions on their own are not sufficient evidence to establish that the original applications were awarded based upon false or misleading information,” the board wrote.

The majority of LIRR retirees who had their disability benefits terminated later won them back after being examined by different doctors, according to USRRB documents. Regardless, Dickman said, because their original disability claims were the product of fraud, the board should look to recoup payment.

“These people scammed the trust funds to begin with — taking hundreds of thousands, or millions, of dollars out. And then they’re not going to go after them to at least put in a portion of the amount that they’re owed?” Dickman said of the RRB. “I mean, it’s disgusting.”