

COMMUTES



after the evening rush hour commute on Wednesday.

media of unseemly train conditions during all times of the day.

"How is there so much garbage on the train and I'm only the 2nd stop?" Marianne Leslie tweeted Jan. 4.

Bill Gaitings tweeted last month about his Cold Spring Harbor morning train being "strewed with trash, beer cans and sticky spills in multiple cars."

"Oh, I do wear clean clothes, at least before getting onto this disaster. \$350 per month and you want more?" he wrote, referencing the MTA's proposed 4 percent fare increase. "Disgraceful!"

Anthony Simon, general chairman of the Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Union division 505, which represents LIRR car cleaners, said he agreed with riders who think the railroad's cleaning efforts have been insufficient, and attributed the shortfall to

inadequate staffing.

While the railroad has hired several dozen new car cleaners in recent months, Simon said they have largely been assigned to fill in existing shortages and that there has not been a meaningful change in the cleaning operation. Simon said it's not unusual to have just one person tasked with cleaning a 10-car train in the few minutes it sits at a terminal before being turned around for another run.

LIRR riders' distaste for filth long has been reflected in the railroad's annual customer satisfaction survey, where questions about train cleanliness tend to draw some of the lowest marks. In the last survey, released in March, 73 percent of riders said they were satisfied with "train interior cleanliness." Just 35 percent were satisfied with the cleanliness of train restrooms.

Gov seeks plastic bag ban across NY

BY DAVID M. SCHWARTZ
david.schwartz@newsday.com

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo proposed on Sunday a statewide ban on thin plastic bags at store checkouts but it would leave paper bags unregulated by the state, sparking concern from environmentalists and grocery stores that shoppers will simply switch their disposable bag habits.

Aimed at encouraging shoppers to bring reusable bags, Cuomo's plastic bag ban would replace 5-cent fees in Suffolk County, Long Beach and other areas where local governments have passed fees in recent years to reduce bag waste. Paper bags wouldn't be affected under Cuomo's proposal, although local governments could impose their own rules.

Cuomo also proposed Sunday that sports drinks, energy drinks and fruit and vegetable juices be included under the 5-cent deposit program. He said he also will direct the state Department of Environmental Conservation to study whether to add wine and liquor bottles to the deposit program.

Environmental advocates and grocery store lobbyists expressed concern that shoppers would start using free paper bags, which cost more to transport and store, or thicker plastic bags that are exempt from the ban.

Chicago instituted a plastic bag ban in 2015, but dropped it 16 months later in favor of a 7-cent fee after stores and shoppers simply used paper.

"This needs to be coupled with a fee on paper bags, so as not to trigger a shift from plastic to paper, which has its own environmental concerns," said Eric A. Goldstein, senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, based in Manhattan. He said the plastic ban "heads in the right direction. It can help reverse the ever-growing tide of plastic trash."

Adrienne Esposito, executive director of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment, said there should eventually be a fee on paper bags.



Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's plastic bag ban would replace the per-bag fees in Suffolk County, Long Beach and other areas.

"The goal here is to change public behavior, so they're not using paper or plastic. This is a good step. This is the beginning of the death of plastic bag pollution," she said.

Business groups and grocery stores said they opposed Cuomo's plastic bag ban.

"The Business Council is concerned that these proposals will come at considerable cost to consumers and businesses and will do little, if anything, to address the municipal solid waste issues of the State," Darren Suarez, director of government affairs for The Business Council of New York State, said in an email on Sunday.

Michael Durant, president and CEO of the Food Industry Alliance of New York State, said the group "will strongly oppose" Cuomo's bag proposal.

Cuomo said the proposal will be included in his executive budget.

Local governments on Long Island have implemented local fees to try to combat waste from plastic bags, which environmentalists say litter highways and waterways, are made with fossil fuels and jam recycling systems. While Suffolk has imposed a 5-cent fee on paper and plastic since 2018 — in which the money is kept by the stores — a similar proposal in Nassau has been

stalled by the Republican-controlled Legislature, which worried about cost to consumers.

State Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach), the new head of his chamber's Environmental Conservation Committee, has introduced a bill that would ban plastic carryout bags and put a 10-cent fee on paper bags and reusable bags sold at checkouts, with the money directed to a state environmental fund.

"To Governor Cuomo's credit, this budget should be a vehicle to advance innovative and bold ideas to protect our environment," Kaminsky said in a statement. "I am proud to carry plastic bag legislation in the Senate that also addresses paper bags, something I will continue to advocate for during this process."

Legis. William Spencer (D-Centerport), who had sponsored Suffolk County's bag fee, said he supported Cuomo's proposal. "The plan is that they're going to ban the plastic. So I'm excited," he said. "I think we had a good result here in Suffolk with a fee."

Sen. Phil Boyle (R-Bay Shore), the ranking Republican on the State Senate environment committee, said he supported Cuomo's proposal. "These plastic bags have been an environmental nightmare for far too long. It's the best way to clean up oceans and landscapes."

NEWSDAY / THOMAS A. FERRARA

NEWSDAY / J. CONRAD WILLIAMS JR.