

Queens fire snarls LIRR

Blaze at recycler suspends service on four branches

BY JOAN GRALLA
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It was another rough Friday evening commute on the Long Island Rail Road, this time due to a five-alarm fire by its tracks in Queens, officials said.

Delays, cancellations, congestion and crowding were rife as the railroad struggled to restore both east- and westbound service, according to its Twitter account.

All service on the Port Jefferson, Ronkonkoma, Oyster Bay and Hempstead branches was suspended earlier Friday afternoon as the FDNY battled a fire that broke out shortly before 1 p.m. at a “large area of outside rubbish” at a recycling plant at 187-40 Jamaica Ave.

The railroad’s parent agency, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, warned in a statement that service during the evening commute would be “severely impacted” after it been told by the FDNY to expect “a prolonged firefighting operation.”

On some branches, normal service did not resume until after 7 p.m., and around 9 p.m. there were still residual delays averag-

ing 15 minutes on some lines

New York City firefighters were still on the scene of the blaze Friday evening.

“The fire is not under control, we predict we will operate for the next 18 hours or so due to the size of the fire,” the FDNY said on Twitter at 6:18 p.m., calling it “a long, protracted operation through the night” and into Saturday.

The FDNY said 44 units — fire engines and ladder trucks, for example — were sent to the fire, along with about 200 firefighters at one point.

Pictures of the blaze, posted on the LIRR’s Twitter account, showed a row of firefighters turning hoses on a fire along the tracks; thick, black smoke billowed to the sky.

Firefighters found “large amounts of accumulated storage of newspapers, cardboard materials, some stacked 10-15 ft. high,” according to the FDNY’s evening Twitter posts.

Some of the burning rubbish was being carted out in heavy dumpsters, the FDNY said.

After the blaze is extinguished, LIRR noted its workers will have to wait until firefighters clear them to examine the tracks and other equipment for damage.

The MTA said they must carry out “safety and functionality inspections of rails, third rail, signals and communications equipment prior to restoring service.”



The fire broke out at a recycling plant east of Jamaica station. ■ Video: newsday.com/nyc

HOWARD SCHINAR

Home prices spike as LI inventory falls

BY MAURA MCDERMOTT
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Long Island home prices jumped by their widest margins in years last month, as the number of homes for sale dropped.

In Nassau County, homes sold for a median price of \$505,000 in February, up 12.5 percent from a year earlier, the Multiple Listing Service of Long Island reported Friday. Suffolk County home prices increased, year over year, by 9.4 percent, to \$360,000.

Those were the biggest increases since 2006 in Nassau and since 2015 in Suffolk.

Buyers had a scarce supply of homes to choose from, as

the number of listings fell by 14 percent in Suffolk and 2 percent in Nassau, compared with the previous February.

Competition is especially fierce among first-time buyers seeking homes in the \$300,000 to \$500,000 range, brokers said.

One recent open house for a home in Patchogue listed for \$300,000 attracted 35 potential buyers, nine of whom made offers, including some over the asking price, said Debbie Carpluk, a real estate agent with Keller Williams Elite in Massapequa Park and Islip.

Sellers “are getting their numbers,” Carpluk said. But, she said, “so many buyers are getting discouraged with the bidding wars.”

Closed sales dropped by 7.8 percent in Suffolk and 10 percent in Nassau from a year earlier, the listing service reported. At the current selling pace, it would take about six months to sell all listed homes in both counties, indicating the market is roughly balanced between buyers and sellers.

The number of new contract signings increased from a year earlier by about 4 percent in both counties.

Rising interest rates are prompting buyers to get “off the fence,” said Joseph Ricco, an associate broker with Century 21 American Homes in Westbury.

The average rate for a 30-year mortgage was 4.44 per-

cent this week, up 0.14 percentage points from a year earlier, mortgage giant Freddie Mac reported.

One real estate investor dragged out price negotiations until Ricco pointed out that while he might save \$5,000 on the purchase, he would lose \$10,000 if interest rates kept climbing. “He finally said ‘you’re right’ and gave them full price,” Ricco recalled.

Despite the increases, Suffolk’s real estate market has not gotten back to its peak median price of \$420,000, reached in June 2007.

In Nassau, it took until last June for the median price to climb back above its 2007 high point of \$502,500.



Year over year,
Feb. 2017-Feb. 2018
Source: Multiple Listing Service of Long Island