

# News and Notes from The LIRR Today

February 22, 2015

## THE LIRR'S BROKEN RAIL PROBLEM

LIRR commuters so far this winter have had to deal with an unusual number of late and cancelled trains due to broken rails. A broken rail is a physical break or discontinuity in the steel running rail that causes a gap or misalignment in the rail. Broken rails commonly occur as a result of small defects that may be present in rails from manufacture or installation, or they may develop as trains pass over. Those small defects can grow as more trains pass over and can ultimately cause the rail to break. Broken rails are most common in winter, but can occur at any time of the year. Broken rails can be serious issues—while most are discovered and repaired before anything serious, the [NTSB concluded that a broken rail was the cause](#) of the May 17, 2013 collision of two New Haven Line trains outside of Bridgeport that injured 65.

This winter has been an exceptionally rough one for LIRR commuters in terms of delays due to broken rails. We're a hair over seven weeks into 2015, and so far there have been at least **14 broken rails**, an average of more than two per week. The headaches culminated last Friday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, when at least six rails broke at different locations across the system over the course of a few hours.

So far in 2015, the LIRR has had to deal with broken rails that caused train delays in the following places:

#	Date	Location	First Alert	On/Close	Time Start-End	Track	Late	Cancel	Partial Cancel
1	Sa Jan 10	Greenlawn	8:30 pm	12:27 am	3:57	P1	(2)	(4)	
2	Tu Jan 13	Central Islip	1:35 pm	2:58 pm	1:23	G1	(1)	(1)	(3)
3	We Jan 28	East New York	6:55 am	10:44 am	3:49	A2	(25)	(6)	(4)
4	Th Jan 29	Central Islip	11:08 am	1:25 pm	2:17	G1	9	3	4
5	We Feb 4	Merrick	6:15 am	10:08 am	3:53	S1	(34)	(3)	
6	Fr Feb 6	Islip	3:41 am	10:49 am	7:08	S1	(8)	(3)	(1)
7	Fr Feb 13	Westbury	4:42 am	4:04 pm	11:22	G1	(75)	(21)	(2)
8	Fr Feb 13	Babylon	6:35 am	12:56 pm	6:21	S2	(32)	(6)	
9	Fr Feb 13	Bay Shore	7:32 am	11:44 am	4:12	S1	(10)	(3)	(1)
10	Fr Feb 13	Great Neck	8:09 am	12:56 pm	4:47	N1	(14)	(14)	
11	Fr Feb 13	Westbury	9:15 am	4:04 pm	6:49	G1	Incl. in other WBY incident		
12	Fr Feb 13	Richmond Hill	10:38 am	6:12 pm	7:34	Yard			
13	Tu Feb 17	Jamaica	4:34 pm	5:10 pm	0:36	G1		(4)	
14	Tu Feb 20	St. Albans	8:29 am	9:53 am	1:24	S2	(1)		(1)

(note: number of late/cancelled/partially cancelled trains indicated in ( ) are approximate counts given in absence of official numbers from the LIRR).

Some observations from the above table: broken rails seem to be commonly start causing delays in the morning (the average time of the first alert is 8:59 am), and the repair and recovery process (time until trains are operating on or close to schedule) typically takes a little over four and a half hours. Broken rails also seem to be common on westbound tracks (the Freeport, Merrick, Islip, Westbury, Bay Shore, Great Neck, Westbury, and Jamaica broken rails were all on tracks that are typically used for westbound trains).

The table above reflect only broken rails that have impacted passenger operations and have been reported as such—it does not include broken rails that might have been discovered and repaired before impacting passenger operations (i.e. if a rail breaks on the Main Line near Hollis outside of the rush hour, the LIRR would still be able to operate trains on the remaining three tracks without notable delays, so it would not be communicated as such.)

The number of broken rails that have disrupted train service so far in 2014 is pretty large, especially when it is compared to transit systems that operate in similar (or harsher) climates (Metro-North, New Jersey Transit, MBTA in Boston, and Metra in Chicago) that rarely ever have reports of broken rails. For example, on Friday 2/13, the day at least six rails broke on Long Island, there were zero reports of broken rails on Metro-North, NJT, MBTA, or Metra, and it was just as cold, if not colder, in the Hudson Valley, Connecticut, New Jersey, Boston, and Chicago.

The consideration that this many broken rails seems to be a thing that is unique to the LIRR has been a something that has perplexed many so far this winter, especially the day at least six broke, and there has not been any sort of explanation from the railroad on why this phenomenon might be occurring.

The LIRR has to be doing something differently for at least 14 rails to break in the first seven weeks of the year on their railroad when a much smaller number comparatively have broken on other railroads that have to operate through similar weather conditions, and hopefully this is something that they're actually looking at. The easy explanation would be to just say it's due to the weather (i.e. in the January operating report, the railroad just takes a broken rail at East New York and lumps it in with the overarching "Winter Storm Juno" significant incident), but things like this will only continue as long as broken rails are just chalked up to the weather or unforeseen circumstances. And while the railroad has been lucky and caught and repaired all of the broken rails that have occurred so far before something serious happened, it's only a matter of time before their luck runs out.

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## TSA COMMENDS LIRR FOR EARNING "GOLD STANDARD"

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA), the agency that has caused headaches for many at airports around the country, has commended the LIRR and four other transportation agencies for earning the agency's highest security rating, the "Gold Standard", on the TSA's Baseline Assessments for Security Enhancement (BASE). The TSA says that the "BASE program is designed to establish a security standard for individual system security programs and assess progress. This voluntary comprehensive review of transit agency security programs focuses on multiple categories identified by the transit community as fundamentals for a sound transit security program. They include a review of topics such as an agency's security plans, security training, drills/exercise programs, public outreach efforts and background check programs.

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## BUY AMERICA CAUSES ISSUES WITH JCI PROJECT PROCUREMENT

An issue with Buy America requirements—a 1933 act of Congress that requires procurements that utilize federal funding to prefer vendors who will make products in the United States has resulted in a year-long delay in part of the procurement process for the first phase [Jamaica Capacity Improvement \(JCI\) Project](#). While the MTA did not include specific information about the problem in the [meeting notes](#) for Monday's Capital Program Oversight Committee (CPOC) meeting, the issue appears to be involving finding compliant switches that are produced in the United States. The IEC reports that the issue is "closer to resolution, either through a waiver of by locating compliant switches in the U.S." The IEC also believes (somehow) that the overall construction completion date is not affected by this delay.

While the Buy America regulations were likely implemented with good intentions, they can often drive up costs by forcing agencies that want to utilize federal funding to select more expensive bidders on the sole basis of where they will be building the things the

procurement calls for, or, as shown in this case, cause unnecessary delays in procurement. While it's nice to want to stimulate business for American companies, it results in an unfair financial burden for transportation agencies looking to build as much as possible with their limited funding. Be it something as small as a railroad tie or as large as a locomotive, if it can be produced cheaper elsewhere at a comparable quality and then shipped to the place where it needs to be, then the agency comes out ahead. And if American companies start noticing that they are losing business to those who are located overseas, they might be inspired to find ways to reduce their costs to the point where they're the best option again, and then everyone's come out ahead.

Regulations like Buy America and lowest-bidder-wins procurements limit what agencies can consider when making decisions, and things like this could be very likely the reason why public agencies have difficulty completing project on-time and on-budget. "Made in America" and "cheapest" does not always mean "best."

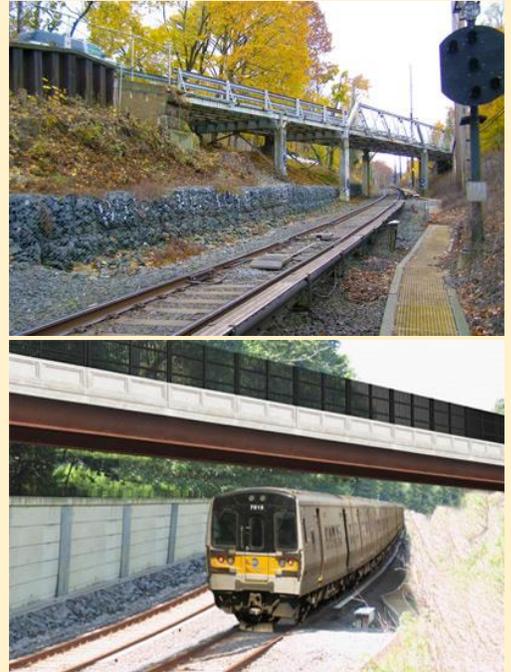
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## COLONIAL ROAD BRIDGE TO CLOSE IN MARCH

Notable work on the replacement of the Colonial Road Bridge is set to begin this spring with the closure of the 118-year old Colonial Road Bridge that crosses over the LIRR's Port Washington Branch east of Great Neck in Thomaston. The LIRR is demolishing and replacing this bridge as part of the railroad's [Colonial Road Improvement Project](#), which will involve extending the existing Great Neck Pocket Track east to accommodate an additional twelve-car train. The extended pocket track will afford the LIRR the ability to turn more trains at Great Neck and provide more train service west of Great Neck as part of the larger East Side Access project. Unlike most road bridges that span railroad tracks, the LIRR is responsible for the maintenance of the structure and they have found the bridge to be at the end of its useful life.

Village of Thomaston Mayor Steve Weinberg said last week that the railroad is slated to close the bridge on March 30<sup>th</sup>. The railroad told the village that the demolition of the bridge is scheduled for the weekend of June 19<sup>th</sup> through the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The replacement of the bridge is expected to cost \$24.9 million and be completed sometime in April 2016.

The LIRR has more information on the Colonial Road bridge replacement, and the Colonial Road Improvement project as a whole, [on its website](#).



Picture of the current Colonial Road Bridge (top) and a rendering of the proposed replacement (bottom) (Photo: MTA LIRR)

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## MOBILE TICKETING NOT COMING SYSTEMWIDE UNTIL 2016

At the January MTA Board Capital Program Oversight Committee (CPOC) meeting the MTA said that a systemwide rollout of the planned [mobile ticketing system](#), which will allow LIRR and Metro-North passengers to purchase and display tickets on their smartphones, will not be completed until 2016. The vendor currently working on developing the mobile ticketing system, Masabi, has developed and implemented mobile ticketing systems for a number of other transportation agencies, including MBTA commuter rail in Boston and NICE bus here on Long Island. Masabi has proven on several occasions the ability to develop and implement a mobile ticketing system with remarkable speed and effectiveness. Back in 2012 in Boston, Masabi signed the contract with the MBTA on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, and Masabi launched the mobile ticketing system for 30% of users on November 11<sup>th</sup> of that year—just 29 weeks after the contract had been signed. Mobile ticketing was then rolled out systemwide on November 28<sup>th</sup>.

The MTA awarded its contract for the commuter railroads on April 30, 2014. 29 weeks have come and

gone and there's still no sign of the mobile ticketing system being rolled out on even the smallest portion of either railroad, and if the CPOC presentation was any indication, it could be another 55 weeks (or more) past that before we see any sign of it here in the New York Metro—almost three times as long as it took for a similar system to be rolled out in Boston. The materials say that the MTA's goal is to initiate a pilot launch "in 2015", so we will see if we get any closer to an actual rollout of the program before this year is over.

The MTA does note that "the actual timing of these task completions is contingent upon... support from all stakeholders including... affected labor organizations," which might be a bigger issue than one might think. Rumors indicate that the UTU, the union for train conductors, assistant conductors, and collectors, has created some unnecessary hurdles for the On-Board TIMs program (Ticket Issuing Machines that support credit card payments onboard trains) after a pilot was [launched back in August 2011](#), and the program is still very limited to this day. Hopefully mobile ticketing on the LIRR does not suffer a similar fate.