

Environmental Statement Pumps Up ‘Third Track’

The Long Island Rail Road [third-track plan](#) will have “minimal” adverse effects, according to the project’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement – a report that marks a “major milestone” in the project’s evolution, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Monday.

Trumpeting the LIRR’s strategy to “improve transit service, safety and quality of life for hundreds of thousands of Long Island commuters and residents,” the governor’s office heralded the 21-chapter statement, which details plans for a 9.8-mile “third track” between Floral Park and Hicksville, a historically bottlenecked stretch where five major branches join the LIRR mainline. The DEIS – a state-required engineering and socioeconomic study measuring safety, public input and other factors of public construction projects – shows several public benefits in the proposed LIRR plan, including improved motor vehicle safety, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and an overall better ride for nearly 40 percent of the LIRR’s 308,000 daily commuters.

And the construction project – which is almost exclusively confined to existing LIRR property – does it all while lowering noise pollution for railroad neighbors, by constructing new sound walls at key junctures along the proposed third track.

Cuomo, who kept the long-debated LIRR expansion [on the front burner](#) throughout 2016, said Monday that expanding the Main Line “is crucial to the future of Long Island and its residents,” making the DEIS – required by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation – “an important milestone in this project’s completion.”

“By increasing capacity on one of the LIRR’s busiest corridors and eliminating all street-level grade crossings, this project will result in less traffic, less congestion and a transportation network that meets the needs of current and future generations of Long Islanders,” Cuomo said. In addition to eliminating seven existing street-level grade crossings along the 9.8-mile Nassau County corridor, the project – which has been heavily vetted at numerous public hearings and has [earned support](#) from various sectors – delivers other potential benefits highlighted in the DEIS, including additional parking and platform upgrades at existing stations, a focus on local construction industries and no need for any residential property acquisitions.

The project also includes numerous signal and switch upgrades. And while replacing those street-level crossings with overpasses and underpasses will improve motorist and

pedestrian safety, it will also have significant environmental impacts, with no more cars idling at crossings.

The state's Department of Transportation will "oversee the grade crossing component of the project," according to the governor's office.

"The grade crossing elimination options for this project were developed in close consultation with local communities and will end the noise, traffic and safety concerns that they have been living with for years," state DOT Commissioner Matthew Driscoll said in a statement. "It will lead to a significant improvement in quality of life for many people."

The DEIS is not all sunshine: It sets a preliminary budget of \$2 billion for a project originally estimated closer to \$1 billion. And the project does require four commercial property acquisitions, in addition to the "partial acquisition" of a fifth site, largely to accommodate removal of the grade crossings.

Despite those challenges, if things go according to plan, construction of the third track could begin in 2017 and be completed inside of four years, according to the DEIS, with some sections wrapped up much sooner.

DEIS Public Outreach

A robust public outreach and comment period will follow the release of the DEIS to provide the public opportunities to ask questions and make comments about the initial findings.

DEIS Public Comment Period: Comments can be submitted [online](#), by mail or in person until the close of the DEIS comment period. All comments received during this period will become part of the public record and will be considered as part of the project studies. We welcome your input throughout the project duration.

DEIS Public Meetings: Six public meetings will be held from January 17, 2017 to January 19, 2017 to provide opportunities for the public to comment on the Draft EIS. Please attend one of the sessions at your convenience.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2017, 11 A.M. TO 2 P.M.

Yes We Can Community Center, 141 Garden Street, Westbury

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2017, 6 P.M. TO 9 P.M.

Yes We Can Community Center, 141 Garden Street, Westbury

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2017, 11 A.M. TO 2 P.M.

David S. Mack Student Center at Hofstra University, Hempstead

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2017, 6 P.M. TO 9 P.M.

David S. Mack Student Center at Hofstra University, Hempstead

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2017, 11 A.M. TO 2 P.M.

The Inn at New Hyde Park, 214 Jericho Turnpike, New Hyde Park

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2017, 6 P.M. TO 9 P.M.

The Inn at New Hyde Park 214 Jericho Turnpike, New Hyde Park

November 28, 2016