

Newsday.com

LIRR wants trains to speed up at Jamaica

BY STEVE RITEA

7:37 PM EDT, October 16, 2007

They call it the "Jamaica Crawl" -- Long Island Rail Road trains slowing to snail's pace as they enter and exit the station, maneuvering over a tangle of switches and crossovers unchanged for nearly a century.

With nearly 90 percent of all LIRR trains moving through the Jamaica station, LIRR President Helena Williams said it's time to turn the crawl into a hustle.

"There's no doubt we can do something better than what was done in 1913," she said Tuesday after a presentation to the LIRR committee of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board in Manhattan.

Her plan calls for spending up to \$387 million on a plan to update and straighten out those tracks by 2013, when the LIRR plans to have long-awaited East Side access and bring trains into Grand Central Terminal at a rate of up to 24 trains an hour at peak periods.

The plan would expand Jamaica's current maximum capacity from 79 trains an hour to well over 100 an hour, Williams said. Currently, about 67 trains go through the station during a peak hour.

The track structure at Jamaica originally was designed to let trains easily shift among various tracks at a time when the railroad ran far fewer trains, Williams said. Today the system operates substantially more trains and needs new, updated track.

Williams said the plan also calls for adding a new sixth platform at Jamaica, a station seeing increased ridership since the addition of the AirTrain system four years ago. Jamaica is the LIRR's second-busiest station, after Penn Station.

Although all trains slow from speeds of up to 80 mph as they approach any LIRR station, trains approaching Jamaica must slow to 15 mph or less about two miles out from the station in either direction.

Williams said she regularly hears from customers irked by the crawl.

"There are times when they're not even moving through Jamaica at 15 mph," she said. "Our goal is to straighten out the track and try and reduce the number of crossovers and allow trains to move through there in a more efficient manner."

The railroad also will consider creating a track that allows express trains to bypass the station

entirely on their rush to or from Penn Station, Williams said.

The three-stage project would begin with a study estimated to cost \$7.2 million, to be completed by the end of 2009. The LIRR hopes to begin accepting bids soon.

After a design phase costing up to \$30 million, the actual work would begin around 2011. The price tag for that ranges from \$200 million to \$350 million, with completion by 2013.

The project also calls for improving a severely antiquated signal system at Jamaica, where in order to direct trains, workers in towers on either end of the station pull levers on a machine dating back to the 1930s.

Bringing Jamaica's signals into a centralized, high-tech system could enhance service through the station, Williams said.

Those improvements are but one component of an overall plan to increase future service, she said, along with adding trains into Grand Central and establishing a third track along the system's main line.

Copyright © 2007, [Newsday Inc.](#)