



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

Fire Sparks Senator Murphy's Bill making MTA more Accountable for Commuter Safety

TERRENCE MURPHY July 5, 2017

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Albany, NY - Commuters will not soon forget the large fire that erupted below the Metro-North Railroad tracks in East Harlem on May 17, 2016. The fire disrupted train service, leaving tens of thousands of passengers stranded during the evening rush.

The four-alarm fire was fueled in part by chemicals stored at The Urban Garden Center,

which operated underneath the tracks. An employee spilled gasoline on a hot generator while trying to refuel it. Heat from the generator ignited gasoline fumes, which set ablaze wooden pallets and other debris. In addition to storing flammable materials under the track, the business was also stockpiling firewood, soil and fertilizer products.

Thanks to the more than 160 firefighters who responded the fire was under control with two hours. The firefighters had to evacuate numerous buildings, and 10 cars were damaged by the blaze. There was so much heat that it bent the steel girders supporting the overpass and service was disrupted for several days.

The incident reverberated throughout the 40th Senate District, home to many of the commuters convinced that abandonment and frustration had become the rule, rather than exception. In response to commuter's concerns, Senator Terrence Murphy sponsored legislation to enhance passenger safety. The legislation (S303) requires the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to examine, and make recommendations regarding potential hazardous structures and storage areas under elevated train tracks throughout the entire MTA system. In addition, the bill will require the MTA study and improve their commuter notification system.

"I understand that Mayor de Blasio has taken action to review city owned and managed properties," said Senator Murphy. "However, it is important that the MTA be aware of any similar situations that could occur on properties outside of New York City as well as those not managed or owned by the City. As recent incidents have shown, the task of upgrading an aging subway system has proved to be a daunting challenge. This is an equally serious problem, but my legislation provides a logical, linear solution that will help ensure the train system remains safe for commuters."