



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Todd Kaminsky

Senators, LI County Execs Urge Amtrak To Use “L Train” Rehab Method For East River Tunnels

TODD KAMINSKY January 4, 2021

(Rockville Centre, New York) — Today, Senator Todd Kaminsky, with County Executives Laura Curran and Steve Bellone, Senate Transportation Committee Chair Tim Kennedy and Senate Corporations, Authorities & Commissions Chair Leroy Comrie, along with the Long Island Senate Majority delegation, which includes Senators Anna Kaplan, John Brooks, Jim Gaughran and Kevin Thomas, sent a letter to Amtrak requesting they immediately consider implementing “in-service refurbishment” of the East River Tunnels, at a substantial savings to taxpayers, while causing minimal delays to commuters. The elected officials urged Amtrak’s CEO and Chairman to provide a timeline as to when the repair of the damaged tubes will begin and to explain whether they ever studied the effectiveness of “in-service refurbishment,” which only includes weeknight and weekend shutdowns and was used successfully on the L Subway line.

“The East River Tunnels are vital arteries for our region, and it is incumbent upon Amtrak to take a bold and proactive approach, rather than letting a bad problem get even worse,” **said Senator Todd Kaminsky.** “The evidence is clear and the experts concur: in-service repairs are the most efficient, cost-effective and expeditious way to fix the problem. It is long past time Amtrak got on board and treated this project with the urgency it demands — Long Islanders deserve nothing less.”

“Rehabilitation of the East Side Tunnels is needed immediately to keep commuters safe and improve railroad service still in decline since Sandy. While ridership is low due to the pandemic, Amtrak should repair the East Side Tunnels through in-service refurbishment, which would minimize disruption and spur our region’s economic recovery. I thank Senator Kaminsky for his continued fight on behalf of the many thousands of Nassau residents who depend on a safe and reliable commute,” **said Nassau County Executive Laura Curran.**

Suffolk County Executive Bellone said, “It is critical that Amtrak takes swift action to utilize the latest technologies available to enhance the services that so many Long Islanders rely on each day. I applaud Senator Kaminsky and all of my colleagues for their steadfast commitment to seeing this project through in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible.

The full letter to Amtrak officials can be read below:

We represent millions of Long Island Railroad riders and are gravely concerned with the lack of progress regarding the rehabilitation of the East River Tunnels. We request that you immediately provide a detailed plan and timeline for addressing this issue, and explain why “in-service refurbishment,” which can resolve it faster and cheaper, cannot be implemented and undertaken now.

The East River Tunnels are critical pieces of infrastructure through which hundreds of trains and thousands of commuters pass each day. Hundreds of millions of gallons of water inundated the tunnels during superstorm Sandy and left them in a precarious state of disrepair. A 2017 report by Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli said the number of trains delayed or canceled because of problems with the tubes and their switches increased 72 percent since Sandy, and accounted for a significant number of the LIRR’s overall on-time problems. Indeed, that report is now over three years old, and as the corrosion inside the tunnels has worsened, so has its impact on the quality of the railroad’s service. It also poses a major safety threat, and in 2017 Newsday wrote, “[l]et’s not wait until there is a terrible accident or a system failure that renders the tunnel unusable and requires another emergency response. We’re sounding the alarm now so there is urgency at Amtrak...to schedule the repairs and upgrades.” Astoundingly, however, as we enter 2021 there is no operational plan to fix the tunnels and it clearly does not seem to be a priority for Amtrak.

Amtrak has stated in the past that it must wait for the completion of East Side Access before it can turn to the East River Tunnels, since a total shutdown of a tube is required for its repair. This position deserves reconsideration. The recent successful usage of “in-service refurbishment” on the NYC Transit L subway line demonstrates that a complete shutdown of an entire tube is unnecessary. Further, a recent study commissioned by the Gateway Program Development Corporation and issued by London Bridge Associates recommended “in-service refurbishment” for the rehabilitation of the North River Tunnels in the Hudson River. These tubes, similarly-situated to the East River Tunnels, were also inundated during Sandy and the report found that only weeknight and weekend outages would be required. This method seems highly preferable to the danger attendant to waiting for the completion of East Side Access and the disruption that would result from congesting the East Side Access tubes. In fact, in 2019, Amtrak Chairman Coscia said that if Amtrak implemented this method, “it would be far less painful to our travelers.” Yet, inexplicably, it is unclear whether Amtrak ever studied this question or reached any conclusions. Considering the time and money that could be saved, and the convenience that could be gained, by getting to work on the tunnels immediately – especially now that ridership is low and any repairs would create less disruption – we think this question should take on the highest degree of urgency for Amtrak.

We stand ready to help in any way possible but are fearful that Amtrak is squandering a critical opportunity to use new technology to address a pressing problem that will only get more dire. We look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

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