



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Todd Kaminsky

Sen. Kaminsky Demands Answers for LIRR Riders at Legislative Budget Hearing

TODD KAMINSKY January 26, 2021

(Albany, New York) — Senator Todd Kaminsky questioned MTA officials at today’s Transportation Legislative Budget Hearing and demanded accountability for Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) commuters. Kaminsky pressed MTA Chairman & CEO Patrick Foye and Chief Development Officer Janno Lieber on the agency’s plans for stemming overtime fraud, rehabilitating the East River Tunnels, and completing construction of the new Elmont LIRR station.

“The MTA’s success is New York’s success, and a strong LIRR makes for a strong Long Island,” **said Senator Todd Kaminsky, a member of the Senate Transportation Committee.** “Critical planning is needed for the year ahead to stamp out fraud and abuse, smartly rehabilitate the East River Tunnels and get Elmont’s new train station up and running. Long Islanders depend on the MTA to provide an affordable, dependable and hassle-free commute — and the LIRR must live up to that obligation, especially as riders return back to work in the City. The MTA has its work cut out in 2021, and I will continue to hold them to account — our region’s future depends on it.”

Senator Kaminsky pressed the agency on the steps it is taking to clamp down on fraud and waste, and urged MTA leadership to finish installing biometric clocks for employees to log

hours in the coming year. Indeed, fraud has been a perennial problem for the MTA, yet the agency has yet to adequately abide by its Inspector General's recommendations to stamp out overtime abuse. Last month, five MTA employees were arrested on fraud charges for having logged "almost physically impossible amounts of overtime," according to federal prosecutors. According to state payroll records, overtime hours logged by MTA employees soared 46 percent between 2014 and 2019. Senator Kaminsky urged MTA officials to focus on reigning in overtime and restoring riders' trust in 2021.

The Senator inquired regarding plans for repairs to the East River Tunnels in the new year. Hundreds of millions of gallons of water inundated the tubes during superstorm Sandy and left them in disrepair. A report by the State Comptroller found 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. Earlier this month, Kaminsky led his Senate colleagues as well as the Nassau and Suffolk County Executives in writing to Amtrak, which controls the tunnels, urging them to fast-track repairs using in-service refurbishment — similar to what was used on the MTA's "L" subway line — to minimize cost, time and inconvenience to commuters. MTA officials and Senator Kaminsky will continue to push Amtrak to make the requisite progress riders depend on to do just that.

Senator Kaminsky also urged MTA officials to make the completion of the Elmont LIRR station a priority in the new year. Kaminsky has been a strong proponent of the new train station's development as an integral component of the Belmont Park Redevelopment Plan. In addition to providing a regular, full-time public transit option to and from the new arena, hotel and retail village, the LIRR hub will also serve as an additional commuting option for area residents — something the community has needed for years. Lieber told the Senator that the Belmont station will be ready to receive trains in the fall.

**You can watch Senator Kaminsky's exchange with MTA officials here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7qwKbucExY&feature=youtu.be>**

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