

Brookhaven Supervisor Ed Romaine and Councilman Dan Panico Demand Additional Rail Road Grade Crossings for Tri Hamlet Community

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Farmingville, NY – Brookhaven Supervisor Ed Romaine and Councilman Dan Panico were joined by New York State Assemblyman Fred Thiele and Suffolk County Legislator Rudy Sunderman today as they called upon the Long Island Railroad to install an additional at grade rail road crossing in the Tri-Hamlet community. During a press conference at the Shirley train station, they cited specific areas for the crossing at Hawthorne or Madison Avenues in Mastic.

The press conference, also attended by representatives from Congressman Lee Zeldin and NYS Senator Tom Croci's office and Mastic Shirley Chamber President Beth Wahl – was held in the wake of the fatal car accident that occurred on William Floyd Parkway in the early morning hours of Monday, January 29. As a result, William Floyd Parkway was closed for several hours, which caused a major traffic jam during the morning rush hour.

"Tens of thousands of residents in Mastic, Mastic Beach and Shirley woke up Monday morning expecting a daily routine to begin their week, getting their kids off to school, heading out to work and going about their day like any other," said Councilman Panico. "Instead, they were confronted with the misery and bedlam that ensued for hours until William Floyd Parkway was reopened at the LIRR tracks. This Town has repeatedly asked LIRR officials to, at the very least, evaluate the installation of an additional rail road crossing in the Tri hamlet community, because without it, the overall quality of life in these neighborhoods will continue to suffer."

Supervisor Ed Romaine said, "The LIRR has ignored this issue for too long and Monday's shutdown of William Floyd Parkway proves that another crossing is desperately needed. We can just imagine the chaos if ever there was a need to evacuate the peninsula in the event of natural disaster. I support Councilman Panico and his efforts to keep the pressure on the MTA and LIRR until they do the right thing for Tri-Hamlet residents."

Under the leadership of Councilman Panico, the Town has been successful in moving the initiative forward. Councilman Panico hosted a public hearing last summer where community leaders, activists and residents were given the opportunity to give public comment on the need for additional at grade railroad crossings. The testimonies given at the hearing showed overwhelming support for crossings and were subsequently submitted to the New York State Department of Transportation to determine if a hearing should be held on the matter and decided by an independent Administrative Judge. The Town also submitted a comprehensive traffic study of the Tri-Hamlet communities, that included ample data that supported the benefits of additional at grade rail road crossings. The Town was notified recently that the DOT approved the hearing. The Town Board is now expected to vote on a resolution to authorize the hearing at an upcoming Town Board meeting. This hearing will again give all interested parties the opportunity to state their support for or against additional railroad grade crossings.

"The Long Island Rail Road must add a new crossing over the tracks in Mastic to reduce traffic congestion and improve public safety and emergency response. The Tri-Hamlet Community has been clamoring for a solution to this problem for years, and the LIRR must take action now." stated Assemblyman Fred W. Thiele.

Suffolk County Legislator Rudy Sunderman, added "Every day, our residents cannot get to and from work without being inundated with extended traffic conditions during rush hours; this continues to show proof why we are in need of an additional grade crossing. It was evident based on the fatal accident that occurred early Monday morning and the traffic that resulted from this. For too long, the needs of our community have fallen on the deaf ears of the Long Island

Railroad. When you have 30,000 people living in a community with only 3 railroad crossings, not only is this a quality of life issue, this is a public safety issue."

Congressman Lee Zeldin said, "For the safety of our community, local economy and quality of life, it is imperative that an additional rail-grade crossing in the Shirley-Mastic area be constructed. Excuses from bureaucrats are not acceptable. That is why I strongly support the efforts of Supervisor Romaine, Councilman Panico and other leaders in the Town of Brookhaven to force the MTA and LIRR to the table by taking up this matter before an administrative law judge. Surrounded by the Forge River to the east, the Carmans River to the west and the Great South Bay to the south, having the entire Tri-Hamlet community pinned in by the tracks of the LIRR with limited crossings creates a traffic issue at best and a major safety issue at worst. In the 114th Congress, we passed the first fully-funded, long term highway and transit bill to become law in nearly a decade, which included \$245 million in funding for the Railway-Highway Crossings Program. New York State and the LIRR can tap into this funding to help this critical project move forward. This fact, coupled with the strong support from local leaders and residents, should help propel this important project forward. It is very unfortunate that the LIRR and MTA continue to block needed progress."

State Senator Tom Croci said, "I have been steadfast about Public Safety concerns for the Tri-Hamlet Community."

Assemblyman Dean Murray said, "I have advocated for additional railroad crossings since the first day this issue came to attention. The construction of additional crossings is paramount for the safety of commuters and workers alike, and we will continue to work with all levels of government to ensure their construction."

Division of Public Information * Office of the Supervisor

One Independence Hill • Farmingville • NY 11738 • Phone 631-451-6595