

# INSTITUTE FOR RATIONAL URBAN MOBILITY, INC.

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Fernando Ferrer, Acting Chairman,  
cc: Scott Rechler, Lawrence S. Schwartz, Peter Ward, Patrick Foye, Veronique Hakim, Janno Lieber  
copies to other interested parties

Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
2 Broadway, New York, NY 10004-2207

February 8, 2019

Dear Acting Chairman Ferrer:

The Institute for Rational Urban Mobility (IRUM) is a NYC-based nonprofit concerned with reducing motor vehicular congestion and improving the livability of dense urban places. IRUM is particularly interested in advancing useful, cost-effective investments that will make public transit more attractive for the 23 million persons living or visiting the NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area, the nation's largest.

In light of Governor Andrew Cuomo's recent call for reexamination of the L train tunnel reconstruction, **IRUM urges the MTA to convene a similar panel of independent experts to consider the merits of changing course on the LIRR Deep Cavern project, and advancing a much safer, less costly, and more passenger-friendly alternative.** While Federal and local agencies have expended more than eight billion dollars since the project was initiated in 1996, as much as three billion dollars more must be spent before revenue service can be begun, now projected in December 2022.

Two main drivers for considering a change of direction are (1) the existence of a fully operational "Upper Level Loop Alternative" (ULLA) within the 46 platform track Grand Central Terminal complex – the world's largest railway station, and (2) the long-standing worry that as many as 8,000 LIRR commuters could be trapped in the deep cavern terminal with limited egress capacity in the event of a fire or an act of terrorism.

In an objective evaluation of future investment strategies it is important to note that money already spent is "sunk cost", and should not enter into decisions about future courses of action. Fortunately, this evaluation can be completed very quickly. Much information about the cost of connecting the existing tracks and platforms in the Upper Level at Grand Central Terminal to the existing 63<sup>rd</sup> Street LIRR tunnels, begun in 1968, was developed by the Delcan Corporation, Canada's largest transportation engineering firm in 2004. Delcan found that because of Manhattan's stable rock conditions, two 3,000-foot long tunnels, and another two 1,000 foot long ramps under Park Avenue, could be constructed in two years for about eight hundred million dollars, compared to the \$2.0 billion estimated by Delcan for the comparable segment in Manhattan. The overall price tag for completing the LIRR East Side Access Project has now ballooned from \$6.3 billion to eleven billion dollars. IRUM was a participant in the Delcan study and the full report can be found on IRUM's website: ([https://www.irum.org/delcan\\_r.pdf](https://www.irum.org/delcan_r.pdf))

A few years later Dr. John J. Fruin who literally "wrote the book" on passenger egress from rail stations, together with three other passenger safety experts called attention to the worrisome safety issues inherent with the MTA deep cavern plan: <https://www.irum.org/pr091222.pdf> Privately, many retired MTA executives have conveyed to IRUM their continuing concern about the of the Deep Cavern.

The original proposal to use the Upper Level Loop tracks for the LIRR East Side Access was submitted to the MTA in 1996 during the scoping process, by the Committee for Better Transit (CBT):  
[https://www.irum.org/19960604\\_apple\\_cr.pdf](https://www.irum.org/19960604_apple_cr.pdf)

A panel of independent experts engaged by MTA should review the Delcan study and estimate the likely cost of moving forward on the ULLA compared with completing MTA's Deep Cavern plan. The review will assume that other elements of the two plans would be identical.

The Delcan study found that LIRR passengers would save three to four minutes of travel time in each direction using the Upper Level Loop platforms, which are just below the sidewalk, and connected by ramps to the main Concourse, and are an attractive feature of the landmarked Grand Central Terminal. The study also estimated the increased operating cost for ventilation requirements and the 17 long escalators needed for the deep cavern.

In comparing the two plans, the independent panel should compare the present worth of the recurring travel time lost by the deep cavern option, based on current accepted values of travel time, real and perceived, used in evaluating other transit projects. The higher operating cost avoided should likewise be factored to reflect current experience.

Given the substantial amount of information already available, an independent, well-qualified panel assembled by of the MTA Board could complete a preliminary review in as few as 30 days, without delaying the existing program.

Governor Andrew Cuomo recently criticized the current tight-knit web of revolving door consulting firms and retired MTA executives, the equivalent of Eisenhower's worries about a "military-industrial complex", that are thought to drive the excessive cost of MTA capital projects.

IRUM urges the MTA Board to immediately convene a panel of independent experts to review the Delcan study and chart the financial consequences of changing course.

The MTA could then seek to engage a public/ private partnership similar to the one that successfully advanced the "design/build" replacement of the Tappan Bridge.

The Delcan Report provides the key parameters for such an initiative.

Sincerely,



George Haikalis, President, IRUM