



**Testimony of Reinvent Albany
To LIRR Committee of the MTA
Regarding Belmont and AirTrain Projects**

July 22, 2019

Good morning, I am Rachael Fauss, Senior Research Analyst for Reinvent Albany. We advocate for more transparent and accountable state government, including for state authorities like the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).

We are here to express concern about the lack of transparency and clarity about the board approval process, and the all-in, ongoing costs to the MTA for two Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) expansion projects: (1) the proposed Elmont LIRR Station, and (2) the LaGuardia AirTrain link at Willets Point.

Neither of these projects were a part of the 2015-2019 MTA Capital Plan, and neither were they identified as long-term priorities for system expansion. Both projects are advancing because Governor Cuomo asked authorities other than the MTA to take the lead on their implementation: Empire State Development Corporation for the Belmont station, and the Port Authority of NY/NJ for AirTrain. While these projects are being managed by other authorities, they require MTA staff time and new, ongoing, annual LIRR operating expenditures for Elmont, and expanded service to connect to AirTrain. To date, the MTA Board has not voted to back or facilitate either of these projects.

Reinvent Albany has a number of questions which should be answered to address public concerns about the Belmont and Airtrain projects.

1. When will the MTA release the study it conducted of the Belmont station? It was expected to be completed in September of 2018 and has not been made public. Has it conducted a similar study about what it would take to link to the AirTrain?

2. What are the operating costs for the new Elmont station? In a December 2018 letter to ESD¹, LIRR President Phil Eng said it will require a “sustained source of funding in LIRR’s operational budget.” President Eng said in Governor Cuomo’s July 8th release that there will be no capital cost to LIRR, but there will be new operating costs as the station will provide full-time, year-round service.
3. What are the operating costs for expanded service for the AirTrain? The Port Authority has said it wouldn’t subsidize expanded service, only capital improvements.²
4. Who will pay for any potential cost overruns for both capital projects?
5. What is the total cost of improvements that the MTA has already made to the Belmont spur, and what are the operating costs for expanded service?
6. If the Elmont station is proposed as an amendment to the Third Track project, how will it meet environmental impact statement requirements under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA)?
7. How will the Third Track project contractors fit this in to an already large contract which includes 50 major activities and already costs \$2.6 billion³?
8. If the MTA Board approves the Belmont project, will Board members with conflicts of interest recuse themselves? Board Members Kevin Law and Haeda Mihaltses currently work for organizations that either support the project, or have been involved in the redevelopment project.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

¹ Empire State Development. Final Environmental Impact Statement, Appendix M. Belmont Redevelopment Project. July 8, 2019 <https://esd.ny.gov/sites/default/files/Appendix%20M.pdf>

² Bredderman, Will. “Port Authority to subsidize MTA for LaGuardia AirTrain connection.” Crains. May 20, 2019. <https://www.crainsnewyork.com/transportation/port-authority-subsidize-mta-laguardia-airtrain-connection>

³ MTA Press Release. “Governor Cuomo Announces Groundbreaking of LIRR Third Track.” September 6, 2019. <http://www.mta.info/news/2018/09/06/governor-cuomo-announces-groundbreaking-lirr-third-track>