



THE LEGISLATURE
STATE OF NEW YORK

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**SOUTH FORK COMMUTER CONNECTION SERVICE TO REMAIN TEMPORARILY
SUSPENDED**

Assemblyman Fred Thiele, State Senator Ken LaValle, LIRR President Phillip Eng, Southampton Town Supervisor Jay Schneiderman and East Hampton Town Supervisor Peter Van Scoyoc today announced that the South Fork Commuter Connection (SFCC) service will continue to be suspended into this Fall. SFCC service was initially suspended in March as a result of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

The MTA is experiencing drastic reductions in ridership due to COVID-19. Currently, the LIRR is operating at about 22-23% of normal ridership levels. It is estimated that as a result, the MTA is experiencing an agency-wide weekly revenue loss of \$200 million. In the absence of federal assistance and with increased expenses to comply with necessary cleaning and disinfecting protocols, the MTA is estimating an approximately \$12 billion budget shortfall between now and the end of 2021. As a result, there is no choice but to suspend many services including the SFCC.

SFCC ridership has been impressive since its inception. For the first six months of service, from March to August of 2019, LIRR ridership on the South Fork increased 126% over the same period the previous year before the institution of the SFCC (14,725 in 2018 compared to 33,284 in 2019). According to the LIRR, 72% of this was directly attributable to the new weekday trains. Additionally, in 2018, prior the start of the SFCC, ridership for the LIRR on the South Fork from September to November was 2,742. In 2019 with the addition of the SFCC, ridership spiked to a total of 10,060, or a 267% increase.

Assemblyman Thiele, Senator LaValle, Supervisor Schneiderman, Supervisor Van Scoyoc and LIRR President Eng remain committed to seeking opportunities to restore the tremendously successful SFCC service when circumstances permit. They will meet quarterly to reassess restarting the service. The group is slated to meet once again prior to the end of this year.

Assemblyman Fred Thiele stated, "Small businesses, local governments, and public authorities alike have been facing financial devastation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the LIRR is certainly no exception. The U.S. Congress must provide COVID 19 financial assistance to state and local governments to insure the provision of these essential services. It is disappointing that we will be unable to reinstate this service at this time. I thank my state and local partners, as well as President Eng, for their dedication and look forward to restoring this popular service as soon as possible."

Senator Ken LaValle stated, "These are challenging and uncertain times. I thank all of our partners and President Eng for their commitment to the SFCC and look forward to restoring service as soon as possible in an effort to provide important transportation alternatives to residents of the South Fork."

LIRR President Phillip Eng stated, "The SFCC is the culmination of years of collaboration with the communities and elected officials of the East End. We will continue to assess all service system-wide as we

fight our way out of the financial tsunami this pandemic has wrought as well as the resulting precipitous drop in ridership. It is our hope to be able to restore the SFCC trains sometime in the not-too-distant future.”

Southampton Town Supervisor Jay Schneiderman stated, “The South Fork Commuter Connection remains a critically needed service for our workforce. No one wants to see the SFCC suspended, but the truth is that the pandemic has changed everything, including the use of public transportation and the availability of revenue needed to support it. My hope is to see the trains get back on track in the early part of next year.”

East Hampton Town Supervisor Peter Van Scoyoc stated, “The South Fork Commuter Connection has been very well received, by all reports. The train service not only allows workers, including a number of our town employees, to avoid the traffic, enjoy shorter commute times, and make good use of their time on the train, but it takes a significant number of carbon emissions-producing vehicles off the road. I sincerely hope that the MTA will be able to restore the service as soon as possible.”