

Testimony of  
**Howard Permut, President**  
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Before the

Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
& Subcommittee on  
Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure,  
Safety, and Security

Hearing entitled:  
“Power Outage on Metro-North’s New Haven Line: How to  
Prevent Future Failures Along Passenger Rail’s Busiest Sector”

Monday, October 28, 2013

Good morning Senator Blumenthal, Senator Murphy and members of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. My name is Howard Permut, President of Metro-North Railroad and I thank you for holding this critically important hearing. I would also like to thank Congressman Himes and Congresswoman Esty for speaking here this morning. As the elected representatives of our customers who travel on the New Haven Line in the state of Connecticut, I value their input and perspective.

Between September 25 and October 6, service on Metro-North's New Haven Line was severely curtailed when the only in-service electric feeder cable that was providing power to a critical 8-mile section of the line failed. For those 11 days, the nation's busiest commuter railroad corridor was cut in two, crippling both the New Haven Line and Amtrak's Northeast Corridor service and resulting in very limited and, at times difficult, transportation options for these customers.

The electric feeder that failed is one of two feeder cables that connect to a Metro-North substation in Mount Vernon. That substation then converts the electricity it receives through Con Ed's system to a voltage that can be used for the railroad's traction power needs. On September 25th, one feeder was already off-line to advance work to modernize and expand the capability of that substation.

Prior to taking the feeder off-line, Metro-North and Con Ed had many discussions of how to best accomplish the work. We assessed the risk of only having one feeder in service. Part of that assessment included prior history of performance and preparation. In 2006, Metro-North reconfigured this same substation to enable one feeder to be taken out of service while continuing to provide sufficient traction power from the remaining single feeder so that Con Ed could do work elsewhere on its system. After Metro-North's reconfiguration was completed, we were able to operate without any problem on one feeder for a total of 38 days while Con Ed performed their work. We also operated on one feeder during this past summer – a good test of performance, giving us even more confidence in our ability to provide service.

Nevertheless, on September 25<sup>th</sup>, something went wrong in the "freeze pit" where work was being done by Con Ed and the railroad's service plan was insufficient to meet our customers' needs. Craig Ivey and I both agree that our companies will redouble efforts to ensure that we are better prepared in the future.

As soon as the power failure occurred, the employees of both companies sprang into action. At Metro-North, our goal was to provide as much service as possible as soon as possible. Con Ed began working on providing an alternate power source.

The truth is there is no alternative transportation service that can carry 132,000 daily customers. Initially, through a combination of diesel trains and buses, we could only provide 33% of a regular New Haven Line schedule. Con Ed was able to re-engineer, secure and install a temporary power source, allowing us to operate a limited number of electric trains. With that assistance, we were able to increase the number of trains to approximately 50 to 60% of a full schedule. In addition, our partners on the state and local level, as well as our colleagues at New York City Transit, helped us create a robust park-and-ride program – with a total of 8,600 free park-and-ride spaces at 4 sites in the Bronx and Westchester County. We also added rail cars on Hudson and Harlem Line trains during this disruption. Ultimately, all these options provided service alternatives for approximately 70% of our customers.

Throughout the service disruption, we worked constantly to communicate with our customers through the use of our website, email alerts, station and train announcements, social media, press releases and press conferences. Customer service representatives were on hand to provide assistance on the phone and in person at stations.

After Con Edison completed their work on the new feeder line, our service was finally restored on Monday, October 7. Restoring the service was nothing short of a herculean effort by everyone involved at both Metro-North and Con Ed. I want to personally thank these men and women, all of whom worked tirelessly in performing such a monumental task in trying to deliver service to our customers during this difficult period.

We recognize the hardship that this event caused our customers and, because of the unparalleled magnitude and duration of this disruption, the MTA Board authorized Metro-North to credit a future ticket purchase for New Haven Line customers holding monthly or weekly tickets valid for travel during this period. This credit can be applied between now and March 31. Mail&Ride customers will have the credit automatically deducted from the price of their December monthly ticket.

Con Edison is conducting an investigation into what caused the feeder to fail. In addition, the New York State Department of Public Service is conducting an independent analysis of what happened, what went into planning the work and both Metro-North's and Con Ed's response. Metro-North will participate fully in this analysis.

But the reality is that power supply is only one area of the New Haven Line infrastructure that requires attention. For example, there are four moveable bridges in the state of Connecticut – all of which are more than a century old – that need replacement. And while our maintenance forces work hard to keep them safe for train operation and functioning as a movable bridge, they must be replaced in the coming years. If not, we could be facing a disruption just as significant as the one we just experienced for a far longer period of time.

Governor Cuomo has recognized the need to invest in transportation. As a result, New York State has provided \$4.8 billion in direct funding to all public transportation in the state, with \$4.3 billion going to support the services provided by the MTA. This is more than 46 other states – combined.

In the last 10 years, the State of Connecticut has also invested \$3.2 billion in the New Haven Line infrastructure and rolling stock.

Yet despite this level of self-help, the fact is that federal investment in mass transit and Amtrak is simply insufficient to address our current state of good repair needs – let alone to build redundancy and contingency. This critical underfunding of our public works and infrastructure has to change. We look forward to working with you to increase the investment necessary for maintaining the rail infrastructure in a state of good repair.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and I welcome any questions you have.