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East Side Access project delayed again

By Philip Newman

TimesLedger Newspapers

The East Side Access to bring the Long Island Rail Road into Grand Central may not become a reality until 2019, largely because of excavation problems in Queens.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority Chairman Joseph Lhota, speaking in Melville, L.I., said the problem is not beneath Grand Central Terminal “but on the Queens side” of the project.

The MTA later released a statement saying the agency “is re-evaluating the risks in the construction schedule for the Eastside Access and plans to present its findings to the MTA Capital Program Oversight Committee later this month.”

The statement continued: “One preliminary analysis of risk factors has indicated the completion date may move to 2019 as East Side Access construction intensifies in the busiest passenger rail yard and the largest passenger rail interchange in the nation.”

Lhota told the Long Island Association that tunneling under the Sunnyside railyard, where trains from Amtrak and its Acela trains are stored, has become a problem.

“Contaminated soil languishes and must be disposed of properly and, unlike closer to the water, the ground is soft rather than rocky,” Lhota said.

Lhota said workers have also run into springs and brooks “that nobody knew existed below the surface.”

“The MTA has brought in experts from Europe to help with developing a plan going forward,” Lhota said.

The monumental project was supposed at latest estimates to cost \$7.3 billion, but it was not yet known whether the new hurdles would increase the tab.

The East Side Access project had previously been expected to be completed in late 2016, then 2018.

“We were looking at 2018, but the most recent analyses put the opening at 2019,” Lhota said. “I don’t want to see it go past 2019.”

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*Tunneling under the Sunnyside railyard has become a problem, according to the MTA chairman.
Photo by Christina Santucci*

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