Senator Craig M. Johnson
Albany Office:
604-Legislative Office building
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Senator Johnson:

Garden City Residents Against Rail Expansion (R.A.R.E.)

In late January of 2008, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) submitted the Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement (PDEIS) for the Main Line Corridor-Third Track Project to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for review. The LIRR has stated that once the FTA reviews the plan, it will be made available for public review and additional public hearings will be scheduled between the second and third quarter of 2008 to unveil their plans for the third track on the main line of the LIRR extending from Floral Park to Hicksville.

On June 6, 2005 The MTA/LIRR justified the third track proposal based upon an expected 30% increase in passenger ridership by the year 2020 and an increase in reverse commuters. Apparently, once realizing that Long Island residents knew these reasons were unsubstantiated, Helena Williams then justified the project's importance to improve service and reliability, stating that an additional track can improve on-time performance by offering a "passing lane" around disabled trains. Why would we want to spend over $1 billion on a third track for a passing lane? Does the MTA/LIRR have historic statistical data? How many switch track points would have to be made available to make this a practical solution or that could possibly justify this enormous expenditure? Why not spend less by merely installing more switch tracks to the existing system? There is more than enough segmented track available along the line (especially in the Mineola, Garden City, New Hyde Park and Floral Park areas). In our opinion, it is obvious that the LIRR has not been forthright with Long Island residents; nor could this information be accurately presented to those voting on the project (including Governor Paterson, Joseph Bruno, and Sheldon Silver) because they would never agree to a misguided plan with such detrimentally permanent results.

Although the MTA/LIRR refuses to admit to it, the reason for the third track initiative is freight and freight revenues. By providing more available track, this MTA/LIRR wasteful project will allow increased daily freight shipments on the main line (day and night). If freight is not the "reason," it is certainly going to be the "result." Regardless of any reason, the result will be increased freight which is much more detrimental to all Long Island residents with respect to the safety of their families, their quality of life, and the permanent values of their homes.

Apparently, the sad reality is that since 1997, the NY & Atlantic Railway has been transporting freight on the LIRR Main Line tracks. Citizens are concerned about this seemingly unmonitored, dangerous cargo, including hazardous waste, radioactive materials, toxic waste, garbage and liquid propane gas in 30,000-gallon tank cars. The added track will only increase the possibility of an accident or derailment, resulting in lost lives and environmental damage. Long Island residents are justifiably concerned about this, and about all other increased freight traffic being transported perilously close to our homes, schools, playgrounds and businesses. It is strongly believed that the LIRR has not revealed what dangerous cargo they are transporting daily, and many feel that it is substantial. Increased freight traffic will further compromise the already overburdened infrastructure, which was not built to accommodate this type and volume of traffic through our neighborhoods. Additional freight traffic will also magnify levels of noise, vibrations, water and air pollution. Derailments and track fires will occur with greater frequency

with more traffic volume.

This reality is supported by the fact that on January 12, 2008, Assemblyman Tom Alfano and State Senator Kemp Hannon announced that they found it extremely important to draft legislation to mandate freight companies to give 24-hour notice to Village Officials and first responders before they transport hazardous materials. While this is encouraging, and residents support them in this effort, it only addresses notification in our current situation, which will only become more dangerous with added track availability.

As taxpayers, we are entitled to know the additional amount of freight expected to result from the third track expansion. Long Island residents will no longer sit back and listen to the LIRR continually provides little or no information, or make statements that are not credible. We certainly deserve and demand better. Clear and accurate information (historical, current and future estimated with and without the added track) about the number of freight runs, number of freight cars, freight train length, weight, speed and decibel levels must be presented to you, your peers and to all citizens in order to be completely transparent.

We implore you to please thoroughly investigate this issue, and please inform your electorate regarding the detailed (direct and indirect) impact of the LIRR expansion plan, as well as the long-term affect of such plans. We ask you to unite with your fellow politicians to demand that the LIRR be more forthcoming about increased freight transportation on the main line tracks as a result of their plans. If you find it best to establish a special committee to investigate this important matter, it must include fair political appointments (both major political groups and independents) and local representatives (Mayors from Floral Park, and Garden City). Afterwards, we are certain that you will agree that this impending wasteful project will have extreme negative effects, further driving home values lower, on all your constituents.

We urge and respectfully insist that you become more pro-active in the fight against the third track proposal. The MTA plans to waste over $1 billion of our tax dollars to fund this unnecessary project. The third track proposal plans to use our tax dollars to increase commercial use of our crowded and under funded public commuter transportation system. These funds should be better used to improve the system and to hire expert administrative staff to better control maintenance and scheduling.

On May 16th 2007, at his State of the Village speech, Garden City Mayor Peter Bee linked both the County's "HUB" plans along with "Third Track Project" and stated that they would be disastrous for Garden City. He said that opposition to the entire project is growing. Garden City's Board of Trustees is actively involved in the efforts of nearby Villages as well as the efforts of Supervisor Kate Murray from the Town of Hempstead, to defeat this project.

Our purpose is to inform all constituents along the main line that any government official who does not get involved and investigate this matter with "zeal and voracious enthusiasm,'' will be deemed supportive of the third track addition. If that is the result, when increased hazardous freight trains rumble through our neighborhoods, and when the sound of loud moving cars and sounding horns are heard, it will serve as a constant reminder that their representatives abandoned them.

Sincerely,