

LIRR to purchase 'rescue engine'

Battery-powered, it will tow disabled trains on East Side

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The Long Island Rail Road is adding a battery-powered locomotive to its fleet that will be used to tow trains that break down inside tunnels leading to and from Grand Central Madison, the railroad's chief said Thursday.

Acting LIRR president Robert Free, speaking to the Long Island Regional Planning Council, also revealed that the MTA has taken a key step toward the relocation of its Yaphank train station.

In the Zoom meeting, Free announced plans to purchase a "battery-powered rescue engine" for the Grand Central Madison tunnels.

"This engine will have the ability to go in and rescue a disabled train that we can't get out of the tunnel, and not have to operate on third-rail power nor on diesel power. So it's really a great technology," Free said. "Now, I hope we'll never have to use this engine."

In January 2023 — days before the opening of Grand Central Madison — *Newsday* reported that the LIRR did not have the equipment it would need to tow a disabled train out of the newly bored tunnels in the event of a power outage.

Free noted at the meeting Thursday that, because the Grand Central Madison tunnels are "a little bit smaller" than the East River Tunnels linking to Penn Station, the railroad needed a locomotive that was "more compact" than what it already has.

Free did not disclose any other details of the purchase, including how much it was costing the railroad, who was supplying the locomotive, or when it would roll out. LIRR officials declined to comment further.

If realized, the new rescue locomotive would be the LIRR's first real foray into battery-powered trains. In 2021, the railroad began studying the feasibility of



Acting LIRR president Robert Free ■ Video: [newsday.tv](#)

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using "battery electric multiple units" on its Oyster Bay branch. The technology would have allowed trains to operate on third-rail power, where available, then switch to battery power where it's not.

But the LIRR abandoned the project in 2022 after several concerns arose, including the high cost of retrofitting trains with batteries and the need to remove seats to make the batteries fit. LIRR officials said at the time that they were still interested in incorporating battery technology in future fleets.

Also at the meeting, Free noted that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in December put a contract out to bid for the construction of a new station in Yaphank.

Bidding opened on Jan. 31 for the "New East Yaphank Station," as it's referred to in published MTA documents. The contract, which is estimated to cost between \$10 million and \$50 million, calls for a two-train car platform, a parking lot with 50 spaces, a platform shelter shed, and a "kiss-and-ride loop for drop-offs."

The contract would also require the construction of an access roadway linking it to existing roads, and the demolition of the existing Yaphank station, on Yaphank Avenue and Park Street.

The LIRR has said it is looking to move the existing station farther east. Suffolk County and Town of Brookhaven officials

have recommended a site just east of the William Floyd Parkway and south of the Long Island Expressway.

Free said the contract would be for both the design and construction of the new station, and that the hope is to begin work on the project by the end of 2024.

Suffolk County elected officials and business leaders have, for years, pushed for a new Yaphank station to be built near Brookhaven National Laboratory, one of Long Island's largest employers.

"Yaphank Station right now . . . doesn't really get utilized and isn't really providing much value to the railroad," John Cameron, chairman of the Long Island Regional Planning Council said. "We need to have that Yaphank station relocated."

Free also used the meeting as an opportunity to win support on Long Island for the MTA's congestion pricing plan, which would generate \$1 billion in toll revenue that would be used to fund infrastructure investments, including at the LIRR.

"We have come so far and accomplished so much," said Free, who touted the completion of LIRR megaprojects, such as Grand Central Madison and the Third Track. "We cannot lose that momentum. Too much is at stake. Long Island cannot thrive without a fully functional, safe and reliable Long Island Rail Road."