

# The Chief

Civil Service **LEADER**  
**THE CIVIL EMPLOYEES' WEEKLY**

'Right in Our Wheelhouse'

## Alternative L-Train Fix to Mean Work for TWU

By BOB HENNELLY Jan 9, 2019

The alternative rehabilitation plan for the L train being championed by Governor Cuomo, which would not require the 15-month shutdown originally planned, will also mean additional work for members of the Transport Workers Union Local 100, according to union officials and Andy Byford, the CEO of New York City Transit.

"Our forces will be much more heavily engaged where previously the contractor was pretty much doing all the work in and around the tunnel," Mr. Byford said in a phone interview. He said that before he gave his sign-off on the Governor's proposal, he would be doing his own "due diligence" by commissioning an independent panel of engineering experts to review it.

'Do It Properly, Safely'

"How we go about this and the detail of its practical application—I am leaving that door open," he said. "I want to be certain that we do this properly and we do this safely. I owe that to the staff, our customers and all New Yorkers."

Mr. Byford added that while it was "unlikely" his review would be completed in time for the MTA's next board meeting Jan. 24, it would be far enough along that he would have an interim report and provide some answers to the board.

Under the previous timeline, the L train tunnel under the East River would have been closed to service start-



Andy Byford would keep more work in-house.

ing on April 27. Work has already started on both the Manhattan and Brooklyn ends of the subway line that feeds the tunnel that extends from First Ave. in Manhattan to the Bedford Ave. station in Brooklyn.

"The work they are now talking about is right in the TWU's area of expertise, right in our wheelhouse," John Samuelsen, president of the International TWU, said in an email exchange. "It means lots more work for Local 100's NYC Transit construction crews and our bus operators doing the weekend shuttle work. We like this."

'Our Crews Can Do This'

"We have to review the scope of the project, but we definitely will be meeting with the MTA to discuss what can, and should, be done by in-house forces, our members," said Tony Utano, president of Local 100 in an email. "We have capital construction crews with the

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ability to do some of this work. They change-out track, replace components, run cables, patch cement, etc.”

Earlier this month, the Governor announced the dramatic change of plans generated by a collaboration between the engineering departments at Columbia and Cornell Universities. They were commissioned to evaluate how the MTA could best deal with the extensive damage done to the century-old subway tunnel in 2012 when Superstorm Sandy generated a record surge from the Atlantic Ocean that produced significant salt-water intrusion into the L-train tunnel.

While the structural integrity of the two-tube tunnel remained intact, the presence of the salt water, and the residual salt left behind when the storm surge subsided, undermined portions of the bench wall, a two-foot-wide walkway that extends the entire 1 ½-mile length of the tunnel that provides a place for workers to stand and an emergency exit for the public.

### Encased Cables, Switches

While the bench wall provided access to the track in the tunnel, the original designers of the tunnel, concerned about the possible impact of a fire, encased the train line's electric cables and switching boxes inside it. In addition to eroding the concrete, the storm surge and residual salt corroded those cables and switches.

Under the plan from the Columbia and Cornell engineers, the bench wall would be repaired and replaced where required, with new electric cables and switching equipment being strung along the outside of the length of the 50-inch-high walkway.

“The game-changer is the academics. The engineers have actually proven to us...there is a way of limiting the amount of bench wall that needs to be removed,” Mr. Byford said. “Under the previous program, it was all going to come out and then get replaced, and that was what took the time.”

Should “Plan B” prove feasible, it could be a breakthrough application for other tunnels in the region's transit network that were undermined by Sandy's storm surge, he said. “It is potentially transferable to other projects,” including Amtrak's Hudson River rail tunnel. “Amtrak has contacted us and met with one of my colleagues.”



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