

[June 16, 2009]

SCHUMER TO MTA: BRING WIRELESS INTERNET TO METRO-NORTH; TECHNOLOGY IS READILY AVAILABLE TO WIRE ENTIRE METRO-NORTH NETWORK BUT THE MTA HAS FAILED TO MOVE ON THE PLANS

Jun 16, 2009 (Congressional Documents and Publications/ContentWorks via COMTEX) -- U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer today made a direct appeal to the MTA asking the agency to kick start plans to bring wireless internet to the entire Metro-North Railroad system, including all trains, platforms, and stations. Plans to bring wireless internet to Metro-North have been in the works for months but the MTA has still not acted even as other major mass transit systems across the United States have on-board major wireless internet networks up and running. Schumer said the technology to wire the system is readily available and asked the MTA to fast track the pilot projects and the Request for Proposal and approval process saying that if the MTA acts fast, the project may be eligible for federal funding passed as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"The time for high speed internet on rapid transit is right now," said Schumer. "It is long past time to bring the MTA in to the 21st century and wireless internet will make commuting more productive and pleasant for Metro-North riders. The technology is ready and raring to go so it's time for the MTA to get rolling." "We support Senator Schumer's efforts to bring wireless internet service to the entire Metro North Railroad system as soon as possible," Marsha Gordon, President & CEO of The Business Council of Westchester said. "At a time when other mass transit systems across the country have introduced wireless internet networks, New Yorkers can ill afford to be left behind. It is imperative that the MTA act now and fast tract this project that will improve the competitiveness of our businesses." "This is really about helping our region remain competitive from an economic development perspective," said William Mooney, President of the Westchester County Association. "In many other parts of the country and, in fact the world, wireless connectivity is pretty much a given. If we expect to attract and retain business to Westchester and the region, our technology infrastructure needs to be on par or above the industry standard." Schumer said that several internet and media providers have expressed interest in providing wireless internet service on Metro-North. While the typical procurement process could take months or even years to complete, Schumer today asked Interim MTA Executive Director Helena Williams to fast track its approval and consider a implementing a pilot program that could be up and running before the end of the year.

Schumer said there are significant benefits of adding wireless internet service to Metro-North trains. First, for the daily commuter, the train ride would be more pleasant and productive. Schumer also pointed out that the MTA's trains stop at 28 higher education campuses outside New York City so tens of thousands of students would also benefit by being able to catch up on course work during their commutes.

Wireless trains would also benefit MTA through new abilities to streamline its own processes, including enhanced train tracking, improved communications to headquarters and customers, heightened emergency communications resources (redundancy of communication modes is a key). Plus, the potential for mobile ticket collection (think a human EZ-Pass) would lessen paperwork and improve efficiency.

According to Center of Excellence in Wireless and Information Technology at Stony Brook University, wireless internet train services are springing up around the world. The service has become routine in airports and coffee shops, and is even appearing on airplanes, but commuter trains have taken longer to adapt. Almost every large train company has trialed or launched wireless internet services for passengers.

Already in the United States, mass transit systems in Texas, California and even Utah have wireless networks up and running. In 2009, new services will appear in India, Japan, Korea, Norway and Finland to add to those already up and running in the UK, Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and the US.

Schumer today wrote a personal letter to Ms. Williams asking her to work to have a pilot wireless internet service project up and running before the end of the year, saying "This is a no-brainer for the MTA. It's great for passengers, it's great for the MTA, and will help bring Long Island in to the 21st century." Schumer was joined by representatives from the Business Council of Westchester and the Westchester County Association.