

# Harried LIRR Adds a Trouble-Tooter

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By GEORGE CARPOZI JR.

It was the perfect setting for the interview with the Long Island Rail Road's new public relations chief—a rickety old passenger car with dirty, peeling paint, broken and cracked windows and squarish wheels.

Even the seat he occupied was an ideal conversation piece—it was broken and wobbly.

"What are you going to do about cars like this?" was the question put to Hank Boerner, the man who left a cushy job as community affairs director for American Airlines to take over the LIRR's bottom-of-the-barrel public relations hot seat.

"We're not going to do a thing about trains like this," Boerner replied. "I'm being honest. We're going to scrap them as soon as we can. And until then we'll just run them until they can't run any more."

The bumpy ride from Mineola to Jamaica made it seem like the train's last run.

"No doubt about it," Boerner said, "conditions on this railroad are abominable. It's a hold-off operation until we can get those 620 new high-speed cars into service by the end of next year."

Boerner, a commuter on the LIRR for many years, has come into his new \$20,000-a-year job with the vigor and vision of an airline PR man, but he admits that he is working for an outfit that is still in the throes of the horse and buggy era.

How does Boerner plan to sell the railroad's bill of goods to the harried and harassed commuter?

"It Will Take Time"

We're dealing with highly sophisticated commuters who have

the capacity to understand the railroad's plight," Boerner replied. They have a right to complain about the poor quality of service and equipment. They are paying \$40 and \$50 a month for their rides. They're entitled to get their money's worth—and they feel they're not.

"But the problem today is that the railroad was neglected for so many years under the Pennsylvania's operation that it can no longer be responsive to the needs of commuters, much as it wants to be. They ran it into the ground and our job now is to revitalize and rebuild it. We are in the process, but it will take time."

Boerner said the LIRR was receiving delivery of the new supercars from the Budd Co. in Philadelphia at the rate of one a week and the outlook is for an accelerated rate of delivery.

"We already have two eight-car trains in service," Boerner pointed out. "Others will go in operation as soon as they arrive in our yard. The commuters riding those new trains really believe the day of redemption is coming."

"If those political hotshots stopped taking potshots at the railroad and paid their bills, we'd have funds to hire people to plow platforms when it snow," Boerner said caustically.

He was referring to Mayor Lindsay and Nassau County Executive Nickerson, especially the latter.

"That was a grandstand play when Nickerson tried to invade the Dunton shop at Jamaica to see why cars weren't being inspected, sen-iced and turned out," Boerner said.

"It'd be better if Nickerson

sat down and wrote a check out for the amount he owes (lie railroad for station maintenance costs.

## Balked At Bills

Both New York and Nassau have balked at paying their assessment on the ground that the charges are "illegal and exorbitant."

Boerner's statement drew an immediate response from Nickerson:

"Dr. William Ronan (MTA chairman) has admitted that payment of the bills would have no effect on car repair or station maintenance. A more useful function for the new PR man might be to explain to the taxpayers of Nassau County why the bills for station maintenance are three times higher than Dr. Donan said they would be."

## The Laughing, Rolling Stock

"We've become the laughing stock of radio announcers and newspaper writers," Boerner admits. "It's been a one-sided attack. One train runs late and they lead you to believe every train on the railroad is behind schedule. This is something I'm going to try and correct."

"As bad as our schedules and equipment may be, we still perform a useful service and there's only one way we can go—up. We have started on that road, but it's a long, hard pull. But we'll get there."



HANK BOERNER  
"Conditions abominable"