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### **Excessive LIRR work hours pose severe fatigue and safety risk**

***LIRR Engineering employees worked 7% of all their reported hours at risk of severe fatigue***

***267 Track employees worked 24 hours or longer on 4,375 occasions***

Excessive work hours for railroad workers pose a high risk to safety, according to a new audit released by the Office of the MTA Inspector General (OIG). The audit found that many Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) Engineering department employees, especially in the Track division, work a high number of hours, often consecutively, which can lead to fatigue and increase the risk of accidents.

In June 2017, a Track Foreman was fatally struck by a passenger train near Queens Village Station. After investigating the incident, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) stated that based on the foreman's and the watchman's work schedules, they were unable to receive restorative sleep for two consecutive nights prior. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) found that both employees were fatigued.

Fatigue can cause workers to take shortcuts, delay reactions, and make poor decisions. As a result, the NTSB concluded that roadway workers are at higher risk for fatigue-related accidents because they are not covered by FRA regulations limiting the hours of service allowed for other railway personnel.

For this audit, OIG's analysis covered the 18-month period ending in June 2022. OIG studied which groups of LIRR employees regularly work long hours, the factors that drive up the number of excessive hours worked, and what the LIRR can do to reduce these hours. The study found that 267 Track employees worked 24 hours or longer on 4,375 occasions, with one worker on duty continuously for 24 hours or more 64 times. Another employee was on duty for 84 consecutive hours on one occasion. The 20 employees who most often reported working long hours spent 39% of their hours working 24 hours or more, with 1,055 instances of such shifts.

Employees of the railroad's Engineering department (including the Track division) worked 7% of all their reported hours at risk of severe fatigue. The 20 employees with the most frequent long

shifts, who were all Track employees, worked 37% of their assigned hours with a severe fatigue risk.

“Fatigued workers put the safety of employees, the public, and railroad assets at risk, and we should not continue to normalize the situation,” **said Acting MTA Inspector General Elizabeth Keating**. “Railroad management is also concerned and plans to take constructive actions to vigilantly manage excessive work hours.”

Reducing excessive hours will be a Herculean task for the Railroad, plagued by a range of operational and contractual challenges. Employees work long hours for various reasons, including agency directives and contractual work rules. The problem is compounded by the current capital program that requires labor in the evenings and weekends. The scheduling situation is further impacted by a previous hiring freeze, coupled with the pandemic's fallout, leaving staffing levels relatively low.

Nationwide, the FRA recognized the urgency of addressing employee fatigue and took decisive action in July 2022. Currently, the LIRR is in the process of developing its fatigue risk program and aims to finalize and submit it to the FRA by July 2023.

Based on this audit, OIG offered four recommendations, all of which the LIRR accepted.

The audit was conducted by members of MTA OIG’s Audit Unit staff.

[The audit can be found here.](#)

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