

How to Complain Effectively About Train Commuting: Cameron on Transportation

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Categories : [Opinion](#), [Transportation](#)

Tagged as : [Cameron on Transportation](#), [Cameron on Transportation 2017](#), [Jim Cameron 2017](#), [Jim Cameron's Transportation Column](#)

Date : April 7, 2017

You may start your day with a cup of coffee and a hearty breakfast. I start mine by reading complaints about Metro-North: emails, tweets and social media posts by fellow commuters who don't know where to turn for help.

It's just another day in the life as a "commuter advocate."

The problem is every ride on Metro-North is controlled by different agencies and there's no way for commuters to know who's responsible. For years, I offered a simple solution: a sign at every station explaining who was in charge of parking, the station, the conditions of the trains, and the names and phone

numbers for those to contact.

Lacking this simple signage, I suggest the following:

How to complain

You must be specific: date, time, location and names. Simply saying “my train is always late” does not provide enough information. But saying “train No. 634, the 7:31 out of Westport has a standing-room-only condition on dates X and Y because it is operating with six cars and used to have seven,” gives folks a chance to analyze a problem and perhaps find a solution.

Where to complain

Here’s where it gets tricky. You must direct your complaint to the proper agency with authority.

Station parking

Parking is usually controlled by the municipality where the station is located, so call Town Hall. Stamford and Bridgeport are notable exceptions with the state Department of Transportation managing the stations and the adjacent parking.

[Editor's note: In Darien:

— *Department of Public Works Director Edward Gentile:* egentile@darienct.gov — (203) 656-7346

— *Town Administrator Kathleen Clarke Buch:* kbuch@darienct.gov — (203) 656-7378]

Train stations

The stations are owned by the state Department of Transportation, but are operated by the local municipality. If your station’s waiting room is locked, leaving you standing on a freezing platform, call City Hall.

Schedules

The trains operate on a schedule agreed upon by the state DOT and Metro-North. But don’t waste your time appealing to either because you don’t like the service. Instead, go to the folks who control their budgets: your state elected officials. A [search engine for those politicians](#) can be found on [the Commuter Action Group website](#).

Conditions on the train

In this case, Metro-North is responsible. Buried on its website, you'll find an [e-complaint template](#). There's also a direct link to it on the Commuter Action Group website. Fill it out with specific information every time you see a problem and ask for a follow-up. Sadly, once acknowledged, we have no way of knowing if the railroad ever does anything to address the issues.

Train personnel

Unhappy with a conductor or train engineer? Complain to Metro-North with specific information, including names or descriptions. Get the names and contact information for other witnesses. If a complaint actually escalates to disciplinary action, be prepared to attend a hearing.

Grand Central

Don't like that your train always arrives on the lower level? Unhappy the bar carts are still missing after three months? [Complain to Metro-North](#) and copy your elected officials.

Fares

Fares in Connecticut are set by the state DOT, not Metro-North. There's always a public hearing process before new fares go into effect, but it's all just "[political theater](#)." The people who really control fares are [your elected officials](#) in the Legislature.

Filing a complaint shouldn't be this difficult. Nor should we be so cynical about the lack of response. But we are dealing with local and state agencies running a monopoly, not a competitive, for-profit, customer-oriented business.

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing," [Edmund Burke](#) once said.

So do something: complain!

Darienite.com editor's note: That's a great statement often attributed to Edmund Burke, and he wrote statements somewhat like it, but it turns out [there's no proof he ever wrote or said it](#), which is regrettable.

Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for 25 years. He is the founder of the Commuter Action Group and also serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. The opinions expressed in this column are only his own. You can reach him at CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com

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