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## **Here's What Metro-North Customers Say Would Keep Them Riding (in an Unscientific Survey): Cameron on Transportation**

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How are we going to get riders back on the trains and save Metro-North from ballooning deficits, potential service cuts or fare hikes? That's the question I crowd-sourced on social media last week and found dozens of great answers!

Most respondents said they won't be commuting as much as before because they will continue working from home. It's not that they are shunning the rails out of fear, just that commuting won't be necessary. "Most of us have figured out how to work without riding a train every day," one rider opined.

A few cynics said mass transit is dead. "Rip out the rails. Pave it over. Deploy autonomous minivans," said

one.

But the believers still want reassurance that, even post-vaccinations, safety will continue: “Better ventilation. More cleaning. Cars look like they’re being ‘wiped down’ using rags from a dumpster. Clean the bathrooms!”

A few sang the praises of the new M8 railcars: “So much better. Never a hot or cold car. No doors out of service. Cars ride smooth.”

But a former Shore Line East rider said the seats on their old hand-me-down railcars were causing him back aches, so he’s now driving.

Yet the biggest areas for needed improvement for Metro-North seemed to be speed, frequency and lower cost.

The vast majority of respondents said the trains are “too slow,” and that “it shouldn’t take 90 minutes to go 40 miles.” As one veteran rider put it, “My 50 minute ride when I started commuting in 2004 is now an hour and 10 plus.” Many noted it’s now faster and cheaper to drive than take the train.

The railroad is still operating under FRA speed restrictions since the 2013 Fairfield derailment. But the other reason the run to NYC is so slow is the schedule. “There’s way too many stops on the New Haven Line,” “go back to zoned service,” and “speed, speed, speed,” they observed.

This is actually an idea CDOT is pursuing — having more express trains skipping stations. So let’s see if they can make it happen.

Commuters said that schedules need to offer better connections to buses and the ferry. Some suggested “through-running service to New Jersey and Long Island,” offering a one-seat ride to JFK and Newark airports. Several wanted bike rentals at all stations.

More frequent service was a big issue. “Rapid transit trains every 15 minutes.” And “more off-peak service”. Surprisingly, nobody complained about rush-hour trains. One person suggested “reserved seating,” others dreamt of “no standees.”

And there were many complaints about the fares and availability of station parking.

—“Between station parking and a monthly pass it’s \$400 a month, almost the same as driving.”

—“Lower fares” and

—“more flexibility on tickets. A monthly is too much and a ten-trip too little. Maybe a 30 trip?”

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Others suggested group fares and lower fares off-peak to spread out the riders. One even wished for “buy-one-get-one weekend fares.” Other desired amenities included “Wi-Fi” and, yes, “bar cars!”

To save money on labor, several proposed prepaid tickets with inspectors and fines. “No other developed countries’ railroads have conductors manually check tickets.” Others suggested cross-honoring tickets on still-empty Amtrak trains.

Thanks to everybody for chiming in with your ideas, all of which I’ll be sharing verbatim with MNRR and CDOT. Let’s hope they include past-riders’ ideas in their future plans.

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*Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for more than 25 years. He is the founder of the [Commuter Action Group](#), sits on the [Merritt Parkway Conservancy](#) board and also serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. The opinions expressed in this column, republished with permission of Hearst CT Media, are only his own. You can reach him at [CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com](mailto:CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com).*