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## **Metro-North Commuting 'Like Getting Hit With a 2-by-4' — Cameron on Transportation**

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“Commuting on Metro-North is like getting hit with a 2-by-4. Service is getting worse and now you’re hitting us with a 10 percent fare hike.”

Those comments came from Jeffrey Maron, vice chairman of the Connecticut Commuter Rail Council, a usually mild-mannered, two-compliments-before-any-complaint kind of guy.

But Maron’s tone changed, as he quizzed state Department of Transportation Commissioner Jim Redeker at the recent CCRC meeting in Stamford. The transportation czar outlined the reasons for pending service cuts and fare hikes, explaining the Special Transportation Fund is running dry and he has no choice but to cut

expenses and raise revenue.

Maron reminded the commissioner that council members offered fund-raising suggestions, but never received a reply.

“This is what pi--es off the rider,” Maron said. “We make suggestions and hear crickets.”

I served with Maron on the predecessor Metro-North Commuter Council and this was the first time I heard him raise his voice like that.

Maron was right. Commuters’ suggestions should be heard, considered and accepted or rejected with explanation. But Maron’s ideas would amount to chump change compared to the funding really needed — like handing you a pool float as a tsunami hits.

Why not wrap all Metro-North cars in advertising, like our buses?

“That might bring in a million dollars,” Redeker said.

“So, you don’t care about a million dollars?” Maron replied.

Probably not, considering the STF will be \$338 million in the red by 2022.

Why not collect all tickets? Reasonable idea, but the staffing needed would cost more than the additional revenue collected, the commissioner said.

Rubbing salt in the wound, Maron reminded the commissioner of how much time and money he wasted trying to repair, then demolish and privatize, the Stamford rail parking garage, a transit-oriented development project very dear to Redeker’s heart (and reputation).

And so it went as commuter council members (only half of whom even bothered to show up) bickered with Redeker and representatives of Metro-North.

Maron was right. The council gets no respect.

That's why I resigned in 2013, after serving on that body for 19 years, the last four as chairman. The monthly meetings were a waste of time because neither side was listening to the other.

Over the years, I've realized even simple questions require complex answers. There is usually a logical explanation why the railroad has messed up something.

Despite what curmudgeon commuters may think, the folks at the state DOT and Metro-North are not stupid. They're just dealing with a complicated operation with insufficient resources and little margin for error.

Why did the commuter council blame Redeker for fare hikes and service cuts he never wanted to make? Instead, why didn't they ask legislators what they will do to fund the STF? The council members weren't listening.

So, who's really looking out for rail commuters' interests? It sure isn't hypocritical lawmakers who claim to be fighting the fare hike necessitated by their own legislative inaction.

And sadly, I don't think it's the commuter council. They've lost any credibility by their inability to deal with these issues with anything but bickering.

Nor do I pretend to have that responsibility, though I'm usually the media's go-to-guy for a quote. I'm not even a full-time commuter anymore.

At this point, I think it's every man and woman for themselves.

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***See also:***

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- [Don't Blame Gov for Transport Project Delays, Blame the Legislature: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Feb. 7)
- [State Transportation Chief Describes Service Cuts, Rail Fare Hikes Coming Soon Unless Alternate Funding Found](#) (Jan. 26)
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