



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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What Is Plan B?

I'm a typical Long Islander which means I sometimes feel as if I live in my car. Clearly, life here is heavily shaped by our reliance on our vehicles. But over 100,000 Nassau residents also rely on our buses daily to get where they need to be. That's why it's especially important that we're all aware of what's happening with Long Island Bus and how it stands to impact friends and neighbors. To that end, I shared these concerns in a letter to Governor Cuomo last week.

To summarize, Nassau County and the MTA, both with fiscal constraints, couldn't agree on a cost sharing formula for the MTA's continued operation of Long Island Bus service. As a result, they decided to sever their decades old service relationship effective December 31, 2011. The County then chose a vendor, Veolia Transportation, to take over bus service as of January 1, 2012. Their proposed contract will go before the County Legislature's Rules Committee for a vote sometime later this month.

That leaves me with a simple question: What happens if the County's proposed contract is not ratified? What is "Plan B"?

The prospect of there being no bus service in Nassau County is obviously not an option. Our district is a major hub for Long Island Bus and I can tell you that not only is it important to the middle class, it's critical to the working poor. We have residents who rely on it to get to work, school, medical appointments and even recreational activities. Our commuters use it to transfer to the railroad and New York City subways, not to mention the thousands of college students who take the bus to our local universities. It also offers mobility to our seniors, the fastest growing community on Long Island, one-fifth of whom do not drive. For all of them, bus service is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

The fact is, we need stability. We need to know that service will continue without fare increases or service cuts. For those on fixed incomes or struggling financially, who have no other access to mass transit, this is vital.

I asked the Governor to take the opportunity presented later this month by the resignation of the MTA's chief executive, to revisit the issue of Long Island Bus. There simply has to be an alternative in place in the event that the Veolia contract is not ratified, an alternative which includes the continued administration of Long Island Bus by the MTA in a way that maintains the service our residents need and deserve.

Public transportation and our commitment to those who use it speak volumes about our society. There are economic, social, and environmental impacts that affect not only individuals but entire communities. Our challenge is to elevate the discourse above the political fray and focus on our government's responsibility to make things better. In doing so we must remember the Latin adage taught to all medical students, "primum non nocere" – which means simply, "first, do no harm."