

# Officials seek MTA leadership review

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A state senator, a union president and a transit advocate all called yesterday for state officials to review the management of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, citing the massive underfunding of an employee pension fund as the latest incidence of "incompetence" at the agency.

The outcry came as MTA and LIRR officials agreed to almost a dozen recommendations by the office of MTA Inspector General Matthew Sansverie on how to reorganize the mismanaged pension fund, which Newsday on Sunday reported was underfund-

ed by at least \$64 million because of miscalculations by financial firms hired to monitor it.

Tom Dunham, a spokesman for Sen. Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre), who is the Senate representative on the MTA Capital Program Review Board, said a review of MTA finances is warranted.

He cited the pension issue, impending fare hikes and service cuts based budget shortfalls announced last year, and a decline in on-time performance among MTA agencies, including the Long Island Rail Road, New York City Transit and bus operations.

"Whether some type of audit or some other type of oversight

needs to be instituted, whether we need a shake-up of the MTA — well, it's clear something needs to be done..." Dunham said. "This issue [with the pension fund] might have been the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back."

Echoing the call for oversight, Bob Evers, head of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers union, said: "It seems to be that it's just another illustration of overall managerial incompetence. It's one big mess... It makes you embarrassed to come to work sometimes."

A spokeswoman for Gov. George Pataki, Lynn Rasic, citing pending legislation in the 2005-06 Executive Budget seek-

ing to streamline the agency, said Pataki "believes there is a need for restructuring that will allow the MTA to operate more efficiently and with greater fiscal responsibility."

But MTA spokesman Tom Kelly last night defended the authority, saying the MTA has been overhauled to become "the most public agency in the state with both its financial records and its internal organization... We continue to strive to allay people's fears."

Newsday on Sunday reported that a six-month investigation by the MTA inspector general found that seven years of "mismanagement" and lax oversight led to the dramatic under-

funding of the pension fund.

It also found that overtime costs, which are figured into pension payments, were higher than estimated, and that LIRR employees had boosted their salaries an average of 44 to 51 percent before retirement. In one case, an employee with a base salary of \$56,000 was found to have retired with a pension of more than \$88,000 thanks to overtime payments of \$127,883, \$107,267 and \$74,972 in his last three years.

"The first thing we need the MTA to say is: 'New York, we have a problem.' We need to get the ship righted," LIRR Commuter's Council vice chairman Gerard Bringmann said.