

# Pataki's \$19B for MTA shy of request

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Gov. George Pataki called for more than \$19 billion over the next five years for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in his 2005 budget address yesterday to "keep our economy moving well into the 21st century," but some transit advocates say the state funding plan falls short.

"It's a real recognition of the MTA's problems, but it doesn't mitigate them," said Beverly Dolinsky, executive director of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter's Council. "There is not enough here."

The MTA had asked for \$27 billion for its capital plan. The state is contributing \$17 billion and the city is expected give another \$2 billion for the extension of the No. 7 subway line. The governor's budget could jeopardize megaprojects such as East Side Access, which will link the LIRR to Grand Central Terminal, and the LIRR's proposed Main Line Corridor Improvement, which would add a third track from Bellerose to Hicksville, some transit advocates said.

The governor's budget again calls for merging the LIRR with the MTA's other commuter railroad, MetroNorth. A similar

plan was proposed in 2002 but stalled in the State Legislature.

Pataki's plan cuts the MTA's core repair and improvement funding request by more than \$2.2 billion and its system expansion budget, which includes new infrastructure and service such as East Side Access, by \$6 billion to \$2 billion.

"We don't think you can buy much for \$2 billion considering the projects they are talking about. It is a gargantuan scaling back of the program," said Jon Orcutt, executive director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a regional mass transit advocacy group.

But Mitch Pally, a vice president with Long Island's largest business group, the Long Island Association, commended the governor for "putting a plan on the table with a specific amount of money." Pally said the governor also went beyond just enough funding to keep the system running to include noted expansion projects.

MTA spokesman Tom Kelly said yesterday that the authority is reviewing the budget. The cash-strapped MTA submitted its five-year capital plan to the state's Capital Program Review Board last year, but the spending plan was vetoed and sent back to the

MTA for revision. LIRR commuters face an average 5 percent fare hike in March.

Pataki identified new revenue sources in his budget for the MTA, including increases in Department of Motor Vehicle fees and mortgage recording taxes within the MTA transportation district, and restructuring of Department of Transportation debt.

Tom Dunham, an aide to state Sen. Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre), who sits on the Capital Program Review Board, called the governor's budget "a starting point," adding that East Side Access is likely to remain intact.