

LIRR: Ridership boost from Barclays events

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Photo credit: Charles Eckert | Signage at the Barclays Center directs [Long Island Rail Road](#) riders to [LIRR](#) Atlantic Avenue Terminal in Brooklyn. (Jan. 27, 2013)

Brooklyn's new Barclays Center has been a boon to the [Long Island Rail Road](#).

LIRR ridership has surged an average of 334 percent on event nights at Barclays, pushing the transit system's 2012 ridership numbers slightly ahead of the previous year's, according to railroad officials.

The increase comes despite more than a month of service interruptions and reductions as a result of superstorm Sandy.

"Barclays Center has been every bit the draw we had anticipated it would be, creating a whole new customer stream for the LIRR," railroad president [Helena Williams](#) said in a statement.

The commuter line has carried an average of 3,300 new customers on event nights, according to the LIRR.

The biggest rider attraction so far: the first meeting of the [New York Knicks](#) and [Brooklyn Nets](#), which drew 4,852 arriving customers and 5,377 departing LIRR customers on Dec. 11.

The 18,000-seat Brooklyn arena is home to the Nets and has hosted events including concerts by [Jay-Z](#).

Before the arena opened in September, LIRR would have averaged 990 arrivals and 430 departures at Atlantic Terminal on a typical Thursday evening, officials said. The station is across the street from the arena.

On Oct. 13, when [Barbra Streisand](#) performed at Barclays, ridership to Atlantic Terminal jumped 358 percent -- carrying 4,033 passengers, up from the normal 880, officials said. Eastbound departures were up 995 percent from its normal 400 passengers, with trains carrying 4,378 passengers, according to the LIRR.

The railroad has responded to the surge by adding late-night eastbound trains from Atlantic Terminal on event nights.

The service additions are the first since the [Metropolitan Transportation Authority](#) made widespread cuts in 2010, including eliminating all LIRR trains to and from Brooklyn between midnight and 5 a.m.

Mark Epstein, chairman of the LIRR Commuter Council, said he hopes the increased ridership will help stave off future fare increases and convince LIRR officials to offer "fan fares" for major sporting events at Barclays and other arenas.

"It proved the adage, if you build it they will come," Epstein said. "It's also a lesson for developers on [Long Island](#) -- when you build something, it has to be accessible to mass transit."

Railroad officials are to release the ridership numbers -- including overall figures for 2012 -- Monday at a meeting of the LIRR Committee of the [MTA](#) board of directors.

While the new arena has provided a boost to its ridership, the railroad had experienced a steady 13-month increase before Sandy. [MTA](#) officials shut down trains, buses and subways in anticipation of the storm in order to prevent damage to the fleet. But the storm destroyed some tracks and equipment, limiting LIRR service into Penn Station until Dec. 10, when a full schedule was restored.