Chairman Dinowitz, members of the Committee, and fellow witnesses, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I’m Wick Moorman, Amtrak’s President and CEO, and I’m joined here today by Scot Naparstek, our Chief Operating Officer, and Stephen Gardner, our head of Planning, Technology and Public Affairs, and this morning I will review and discuss Amtrak’s plans for improving Penn Station.

However, before I begin, let me tell you a little bit about my role at Amtrak. I became Amtrak’s CEO eight months ago after retiring as CEO and Chairman of Norfolk Southern, where I spent 40 years in the freight railroad business. I was persuaded to come to Amtrak because I believe that what we do is incredibly important to the country and I wanted to give something back to an industry that I love, and that has been very good to me. My goals at Amtrak are straightforward; I’m here to help Amtrak become a great corporation that efficiently delivers a superior product across all of our markets, all of this built on the foundation of a strong safety culture. Safety is at the heart of everything that we do at Amtrak, and what I’m going to be talking about today obviously has a strong safety component. Our focus at Penn Station is to make sure first and foremost that all of the people who use the station, from the passengers who ride our trains to the employees who deliver our service, are in a safe environment.

Additionally, as a former “track guy” and civil engineer for Norfolk Southern earlier in my career, an area of particular concentration for me is improving our infrastructure, including our maintenance and capital project capacity. So, it is from this background that I will address the recent derailments we had in Penn Station and our new approaches to improving the passenger experience in this critically important station and transportation hub.

As you know, we had two low-speed, track-caused derailments in the station over the past 6 weeks, stemming from different issues but both causing major impacts on the station because of their location. These were followed by a disabled train incident caused by a New Jersey Transit equipment problem and compounded by an incident within Amtrak’s passenger concourse that involved an unruly station occupant. Let me say that we sincerely apologize for the disruptions caused by these events. We recognize the impacts that they have had on Long Island Rail Road, New Jersey Transit and Amtrak passengers and, regardless of the reason for each, we have a responsibility to do all that we can to help prevent disruptions like these and to manage them well when they do occur.

Regarding the two derailments, both involved track conditions which were within the limits of specification when we last inspected them, but ultimately led to these problems. In response, Amtrak immediately tightened our specifications, which were already some of the most stringent in the nation, and inspected all of Penn Station’s track to ensure no similar conditions existed; we found none. We then undertook an additional joint track inspection with the Federal Railroad Administration, the results of which were shared with LIRR and NJT, and followed this by advancing some immediate repairs and previously-planned tie replacement.
Penn Station Capacity

These two incidents highlight the vulnerability and fragility of Penn Station. Old infrastructure, decades of underinvestment by all users at both the track and station concourse levels, and a massive increase in use have created a very fragile state. As you know, Penn Station is the busiest station in America, and it now handles double the number of trains compared to when we took over in 1976 from the bankrupt Penn Central. The station accommodates 1,300+ weekday train movements on an infrastructure designed in 1910 for less than half the current volume. In terms of train numbers, LIRR is the largest single user of the station with 44% of all train movements, but New Jersey Transit is a close second. In both real and proportional terms, commuter train traffic growth accounts for the majority of the increase in use, having grown since 1976 from 505 to 1,034 daily trains. For perspective on this, Grand Central Terminal handles only roughly two-thirds the number of daily trains on double the number of train tracks, compared to Penn Station.

To illustrate the magnitude of traffic at Penn Station, the following images are helpful. First is a diagram depicting the tracks, platforms and switches that make up Penn Station, with the two tubes of the Hudson River tunnel on the left and the four tubes of the East River tunnel on the right. Next up, are two slides that depict the traffic growth at the station, from the routes that originally served Penn prior to 1967 to the routes that serve Penn today, all without any material increase in Penn track capacity. Additionally, on the next slide, you will see a sped-up animation of normally scheduled inbound and outbound trains at Penn Station during 30 minutes of a normal rush hour. Each of the arrows and red lines indicates a train in the station. As you can see, the station is literally filled with trains constantly moving and consuming every available space.

The station was never intended to carry this traffic volume. It’s not just a track issue; the platforms, for example, were designed to accommodate far fewer people than you typically get on a heavily loaded rush hour train which may have upwards of 1,200 passengers. And up in the concourses, the loss of the grand passenger “head house” in the 1960’s deprived the station of the volume necessary to adequately handle the needs of passengers. The fact that the station can handle today’s traffic at all is a real testimony to the tenacity, the fortitude and the skill of all of the railroaders at Amtrak, LIRR and NJT who have kept the place running.

Today, however, we are operating at or even beyond the limits of the possible and we must, all of us, change our approach to the station. This means some shifts in how we approach repairs and renewal as well as greater investment levels from all users. It also means advancing longer-term capacity projects such as the Gateway Program. Gateway, which we are pursuing with our partners at New Jersey Transit and Long Island Rail Road, is a long-term project to build track, tunnel, and terminal capacity in the Manhattan terminal area and the western approach to Penn Station. It is absolutely vital, and without both near-term and long-term capacity investments, incidents of any kind, even relatively small ones, will continue to threaten reliable service for all passengers.

Penn Station Initiatives

So, looking forward, let me describe what Amtrak is doing and our additional plans to meet these challenges.
**Penn Renewal:** As you know, we have established a base plan to accelerate needed track renewal work in the station this summer and are busy working through the service implications with our partners at Long Island Rail Road and NJ Transit right now. This work, which primarily impacts the western side of the station, has long been scheduled, but is simply taking too long to accomplish using just the very few hours for maintenance and construction activities that are normally provided to Amtrak on nights and weekends. Upon personally walking some of the track in the station, I determined that we needed to move aggressively to advance this work more quickly and efficiently by just going ahead and doing it all at once. While this will create some significant impacts on service levels this summer, it will compress work that might take years into a period of weeks and, in the end, give us brand new infrastructure in a critical part of the station that will be more reliable and require less disruptive maintenance for years to come. This in turn, will allow our forces to focus their efforts on other parts of the station that require renewal and to provide support to the various other projects, such as Moynihan Station, the East Side Access Project, and the rehabilitation of the East River Tunnels which compete today against maintenance and renewal for both track outages and manpower.

I know all of you are anxious to know what impacts will occur as a result of this work. We don’t yet have the final answers to that question, but all three railroads are working together cooperatively with an absolute goal of trying to get this work done as quickly as possible, and with the least amount of disruption for all passengers. What is clear is that all services will be impacted for two multi-week outage periods this summer, but that significant levels of service will continue to operate in the station. We know this will be a challenging period for passengers, and disruptive for all the station users, but it is clear that we need to take decisive action to ensure reliability for the long term. We will work closely with our partners to shape and carry out these plans.

Part of any plan will be a shared communications strategy between all the railroads about the impacts and alternatives that are available to passengers, so that we can lessen the difficulties they will face during this period. Additionally, we will work to make sure this information is provided well in advance of the major work that will begin in July and that our planning efforts also include the PATH system, the City and other impacted stakeholders.

One thing I do want to address at this point is the question of whether Amtrak is adequately maintaining Penn Station. Despite these last two track incidents, which are very rare, the answer to this is yes. As someone new to company and with plenty of railroad experience, I have been very impressed that Amtrak has been able to hold together this incredibly complex, busy and fragile infrastructure as well as it has, in spite of many impediments. This fact is borne out by Long Island Rail Road and New Jersey Transit’s better than 90% on-time annual performance records for their services over Amtrak lines. This is the busiest train station in North America, and it is operating at twice its designed capacity. I have looked at the numbers of Amtrak-caused disruptions over the last five years, and they are remarkably low, particularly considering the age of the infrastructure. While minimal delays and strong on-time performance are vital to our commuter partners, they are just as important to us, as Penn Station is our most important station and the biggest source of ticket revenue for our most important service line. If Penn Station doesn’t perform well, then the NEC doesn’t perform well and Amtrak’s bottom line materially suffers. It is always our goal to maintain our infrastructure for the best possible performance, and since taking charge of the station in 1976, we have always taken our responsibility very seriously.
None of this means we can’t do a better job at maintaining this most critical asset. We should, we can and we will. In fact, as I said, this is part of the reason I was brought in to help lead Amtrak. But everyone needs to understand that the railroad is not and, frankly, never has been in a true state of good repair, meaning that many of the assets that make up the infrastructure are past the point at which they would normally be replaced. This doesn’t mean that the railroad is unsafe, but it does mean that it is prone – and more and more prone - to problems which impact reliability. We’ve publicized this fact for decades now and while we are responsible for maintaining what exists, years of underinvestment by all parties and steady traffic growth have created a situation where what exists is no longer adequate and reliability is below what we desire. Fixing this won’t be easy, but we at Amtrak know what needs to be done and we are doing it. Additionally, as the only end-to-end user of the NEC, we play the role of asset steward that can balance the needs of all of the users of the station for the benefits of the entire network.

**Penn Station Concourses:** Now let me turn to discuss the passenger concourses at Penn Station, which are the waiting, ticketing and passenger circulation areas above the tracks. I want to begin by clearing up a few facts about the station. First, while Amtrak’s name is on the station deed, we do not control all of the passenger space. In fact, rather than think of Penn Station as a single station, it is more accurate to think of it as three separate but connected stations, spread across two levels, that each serve many of the same tracks and platforms below. Both the Long Island Rail Road and New Jersey Transit each control their base of operations in Penn, which they manage through a long-term lease from Amtrak, along with space which they own outright. Additionally, each of these facilities are then each impacted by the various other owners and operators of adjacent space, such as One and Two Penn Plaza and Madison Square Garden arena, which owns the surface property and overbuild structures above the station and the station’s limited street-level entrances.

The one thing I think all parties agree on is that collectively, these facilities are grossly inadequate for the needs of some 450,000 daily rail passengers in terms of capacity, quality, and comfort. But, I think there is a false impression held by some that Amtrak is the reason for this or that Amtrak could unilaterally fix many of the well-known capacity problems at the station. This just isn’t true, as many meaningful improvements require the participation of at least two of the entities who occupy the Penn site and will involve significant capital investments by those parties or the public sector. Furthermore, it is not Amtrak’s responsibility to improve the spaces used solely by commuter railroads and we cannot, by law, use our Federal funds for that purpose.

Despite this, Amtrak has been working to improve the facility, by undertaking various enhancements within our space, assisting with investments made by our partners, and playing a leading role in various planning initiatives to determine both near term and long term solutions. Critical examples of this include a Penn Visioning study that was undertaken by all three railroads to look at how we could unify the various spaces of the station to create a truly integrated terminal. Similarly, Amtrak’s participation with Governor Cuomo and ESDC on the creation of the Moynihan Train Hall is a key step towards unlocking the redevelopment potential of Penn Station. With construction work now underway and Amtrak about to execute our final occupancy agreements, we will move our passenger ticketing, waiting, and baggage functions from Penn Station to the new train hall. This relocation will allow for improvements to the main concourse on “Level B” of Penn Station, which is now shared by Amtrak and NJ Transit, with an aim to creating a spacious common concourse with high-quality passenger amenities. To advance the planning for the redevelopment of this space, we went out to the private sector in
partnership with the state last year through an RFI to get fresh ideas and gain a better understanding of what might be possible through innovative partnerships. From this, we are working on developing a solicitation to be released this year for a best-in-class building manager that can handle building operations and maintenance within Amtrak’s space. In addition, Amtrak is undertaking near-term improvements such as renovating the main concourse restrooms, expanding Club Acela, upgrading the HVAC, and rebuilding elevators.

It was out of this planning work and in response to the recent incidents that we recently announced several initiatives to improve the concourse levels, including having former MTA Chair Tom Prendergast lead a Penn Station Passenger Concourse Coordination Review to help us improve the collaboration between the various railroad concourses within Penn Station. We’ve also proposed the Development of a Joint Station Concourse Operations Center to bring together the railroad managers in a common location to improve coordination among the concourses, similar to the Penn Station Control Center, where we and Long Island Rail Road today jointly dispatch the trains in Penn Station; and lastly, we have assembled a Safety and Security Task Force involving our partner railroads, first responders, law enforcement and other stakeholders who have started to review and improve protocols and procedures to respond to and mitigate station disruptions and incidents.

Penn Station Development Entity
While all these initiatives are critically important and will advance meaningful near-term improvements, the fundamental challenge at Penn Station standing in the way of transformative change is the bifurcated control and disjointed nature of the three railroad’s respective passenger concourses. I am therefore announcing the next step in this effort to improve the station today – the creation of a new concourse development entity to unify concourse management and operations, partnering with the private sector to bring in world-class expertise to manage and improve the facilities in this incredibly complex environment. Building on collaborative Penn Visioning work, and through our RFI for our concourse, I’ve instructed my team to have Amtrak set up a new entity which will seek private sector partners to handle concourse operations, maintenance and deliver improvements. Of course to be truly successful, everyone involved in Penn Station should be part of this venture and we will be inviting the Long Island Rail Road and New Jersey Transit to join this new entity so we can bring all the concourses under joint and transparent control and solicit partnerships to integrate operations and improve the station.

Amtrak participates in similar models elsewhere and is pursuing master developers at a number of our other major stations. We are convinced that the only way to significantly improve the passenger experience in Penn Station is by combining the railroads’ forces and investment capabilities and coupling these with the expertise, innovation and focus of the private sector. The truth is that the status quo is no longer sustainable and that only through collective action and change will the situation improve.

I believe we have to do this, because our futures are bound together in this station. None of us can tolerate a future where service disruptions or “crush load” conditions in the station become the norm. Amtrak is already making changes to strengthen our capabilities and improve the railroad, but it is only through working together that we can stabilize the infrastructure and improve the station. Central to this in the long term is the advancement of the Gateway Program. While many people rightfully associate Gateway with the new Hudson River Tunnel that must be built to protect current services into New York and the economy of the entire region, Gateway is also the only path towards building new
tracks and platforms at Penn Station, so that we can decrease the pressure on the existing facilities and accommodate ever-increasing demands for more train service. Without this, Long Island Rail Road, Amtrak, New Jersey Transit and eventually Metro-North will be capped forever at today’s service levels.

I know that the road ahead is going to present challenges and that the path to meaningful and real improvement is long. We’ve now reached the point where we must change our approach and work together with a common goal so that Penn Station and the Northeast Corridor have the capacity needed to serve this region for decades to come and, that all of the railroads that serve Penn Station deliver that capacity safely and reliably.
Routes Serving Penn Station, Pre-1967

Courtesy of Walt Peters
Routes Serving Penn Station, Post-2003

- New Rochelle
- Pt Wash
- Huntington
- Port Jeff
- Ronkonkoma
- Babylon
- To Patchogue
- To former CNJ Station, Jersey City
- Trenton
- So. Amboy
- Mattawan
- Long Branch
- Dover
- Gladstone
- Plainfield (CNJ)
- Cranford
- Montclair
- Newark
- Secaucus
- To Hoboken
- Spuyten Duyvil
- To Albany
- To Suffern

Courtesy of Walt Peters