



Penn Station Working Advisory Group

Meeting Summary

January 16, 2025

Overview

This document provides a summary of the proceedings from the fifth Penn Station Working Advisory Group (SWAG) meeting on Thursday, January 16th, 2025, at the Amtrak Executive Conference Center at Moynihan Train Hall. The presentation consisted of an update on draft preliminary alternatives under consideration for the Penn Station Capacity Expansion project.

Meeting Agenda

- Meeting Goals
- Penn Station Capacity Expansion (PennX) Draft Preliminary Alternatives
- Next Steps
- Discussion

Presentation Summary

Meeting Goals

An Amtrak representative opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and presenting the agenda. The goals of the meeting included:

- Introduce and begin to solicit early feedback on the draft preliminary alternatives for PennX
- Preview next steps to facilitate the anticipated PennX alternatives analysis process and greater public engagement

PennX Project Status

After identifying the meeting goals, a representative from Amtrak summarized the current project status for PennX. As was communicated in previous SWAG meetings, the Railroad Partners (i.e., Amtrak, MTA, and NJ TRANSIT) have been actively engaged in conceptual design and identifying a draft list of preliminary alternatives. In the previous SWAG meeting, the Railroad Partners highlighted how recent grant awards from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will allow project work to keep moving forward by funding preliminary engineering and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) activities. FRA will be leading both the pre-NEPA and formal NEPA processes. At the time of the meeting, the FRA had not yet reviewed or endorsed the draft preliminary alternatives, so the Railroad Partners expect the draft preliminary alternatives to evolve as both the FRA and the public provide additional input. The Railroad Partners are presenting the draft preliminary alternatives at such an early stage to start soliciting early feedback from SWAG members.

Draft Alternatives Analysis Process

A representative from NJ TRANSIT introduced the proposed process for identifying a preferred alternative, subject to ongoing coordination with the FRA:

- The Railroad Partners will first identify an initial “long list” of draft preliminary alternatives.
- The initial “long list” of draft preliminary alternatives will be screened to eliminate any alternatives that do not meet the purpose and need for the project and/or are deemed technically infeasible.
- The screened list of draft preliminary alternatives will undergo an additional round of assessment, based on evaluation criteria linked to the project goals and objectives.
- The above steps will result in a streamlined list of reasonable alternatives that will undergo a final evaluation to determine a preferred alternative that best meets the project goals and objectives.

The Railroad Partners emphasized that the draft preliminary alternatives still need to be formally considered. The criteria for screening these alternatives will be determined based on ongoing coordination with the FRA and input from multiple stakeholders, including SWAG members and the general public.

Initial Considerations that Informed the Draft Preliminary Alternatives

The Railroad Partners highlighted several considerations that informed the development of the draft preliminary alternatives, grouped into four categories:

- **Operations and feasibility:** How does the alternative impact rail and station operations and what is the extent to which the alternative is feasible to construct?
- **Passenger experience:** How does the alternative impact the way users experience the station and navigate various points along their journey?
- **Urban integration:** What is the anticipated environmental impact of the alternative and how does it position the station within its larger Midtown Manhattan context?
- **Program opportunities:** What is the extent to which the alternative is compatible with other regional and local plans and what is its overall level of sustainability and resilience?

Draft Preliminary Alternatives Analyzed to Date

Attendees received an overview of the draft list of preliminary alternatives. The Railroad Partners noted that some of these alternatives were discussed in previous presentations, and that more may be identified through additional stakeholder input, including from SWAG members and the general public. The Railroad Partners explained that they have investigated multiple concepts for many of the alternatives. The Railroad Partners also noted that one of the considerations that will be part of the alternatives analysis process is an evaluation of the ability of each alternative to support an increase in through-running operations in the future consistent with the long-term vision outlined in NEC FUTURE.

Through-Running Without Expansion

The Railroad Partners have identified two concepts for a through-running alternative within the existing station footprint, generally between 31st and 33rd Streets and 7th and 8th Avenues. The two concepts differ with respect to the number and arrangement of platform tracks, but both are expected to yield a net reduction in the number of

existing platform tracks. Both concepts for this alternative would offer improved regional connectivity with no change in subway connectivity. Preliminary analysis of both concepts is available via the “Doubling Trans-Hudson Train Capacity at New York Penn Station” feasibility study available on the project website: <https://pennstationcomplex.info/>.

Under Penn

The Railroad Partners have identified two concepts for the Under Penn alternative within the existing station footprint, generally between 31st and 33rd Streets and 7th and 8th Avenues. The primary difference between these two concepts is the method of construction of the new station expansion infrastructure below the existing station footprint, which would result in a different number and arrangement of platform tracks. The “Underpinning” concept requires underpinning over 1,000 existing columns between 8th and 7th Avenues. The “Mined” concept would be vertically separated from the existing station and would not require underpinning. Preliminary analysis of both concepts is available via the “Doubling Trans-Hudson Train Capacity at New York Penn Station” feasibility study available on the project website <https://pennstationcomplex.info/>.

Northern Expansion

The Northern Expansion alternative is located northeast of the existing station footprint, generally between 33rd and 34th Streets and 6th and 7th Avenues. Two concepts are currently under consideration for this alternative, including a single-level concept and bi-level concept, which differ with respect to the number and arrangement of platform tracks. This alternative would provide improved connectivity to Herald Square subway lines and, in contrast to the southern family of options, could potentially have no residential or historic property demolitions, but it would offer diminished connectivity to the existing station relative to several other alternatives under consideration.

Eastern Expansion

The Eastern Expansion alternative is located east of the existing station footprint, generally between 31st and 33rd Streets and 6th and 8th Avenues. Like a Northern Expansion, this alternative would provide improved connectivity to Herald Square subway lines, but diminished connectivity to the existing station relative to several other alternatives under consideration.

Southern Expansion

The Southern Expansion alternative is located south of the existing station footprint, generally between 30th and 31st Streets and 7th and 8th Avenues. Six different concepts for this alternative have been defined to date—including a single-level concept, split-level concept, and multiple bi-level concepts—which differ with respect to the number and arrangement of platform tracks as well as the location of the station box. These concepts would offer more convenient connections to the existing station but are farther from the Herald Square subway lines, compared to the Northern and Eastern alternatives.

Hybrid

The Hybrid alternative is best classified as a set of concepts based on variations and/or a mix of the alternatives previously highlighted. Two concepts have been defined to date, both of which are located within and south of the existing station footprint, generally between 30th and 33rd Streets and 7th and 8th Avenues. The concepts differ with respect to the number and arrangement of platform tracks. The level of connectivity is anticipated to be comparable to the existing station. The Railroad Partners expect that additional hybrid concepts may be defined through ongoing and future stakeholder and public engagement.

Next Steps

The Railroad Partners concluded the presentation portion of the meeting by outlining anticipated next steps, which include working with the FRA to develop a draft Purpose and Need document for the PennX project, holding public meetings, and soliciting public feedback on the draft Purpose and Need as well as the alternatives analysis.

The next SWAG meeting has not yet been scheduled. The Railroad Partners anticipate it will likely take place in the spring, and they will provide at least three weeks' notice. The Railroad Partners also hope to share more information about public engagement plans at that meeting based on ongoing discussions with the FRA.

Questions and Comments Summary

Questions, comments, and answers have been slightly edited for clarity and length and organized based on discrete topics.

Process and Timeline

- Q Given the FRA's new role and the updated approach to analyzing alternatives, where do things stand regarding the larger EIS and NEPA process? When will the Notice of Intent (NOI) be issued to formally kick off? Isn't it true that once that happens everything needs to be completed within a 2-year period?
- A The Railroad Partners are still in the pre-NEPA process and do not yet have a firm date for when the NOI will be issued. It could happen as soon as this year but will ultimately depend on further conversations with the FRA, the number of alternatives under consideration, and the public input received during the alternatives analysis process. It is accurate that, once an NOI is issued, an EIS process is expected to be completed within 2 years.

Alternatives Analysis: Underlying Assumptions

- Q When the analysis refers to through-running operational regimes, what percentage of trains would run through versus those that terminate at the station? And how exactly would it work when there is a mix of over-running (catenary) and under-running third rails? Wouldn't you need hybrid vehicles?
- A The through-running alternative that has been defined for the PennX project would convert the existing Penn Station to 100 percent through-running operations. The fact that some services use catenary wire and others use a third rail is one of many operational and equipment changes that would need to be addressed throughout the region in order to implement the through-running alternative.

- Q For each of these draft alternatives, is the best-case scenario to net 12 new tracks?
- A Correct. What you can accomplish with 12 tracks will vary based on the operating regime.
- Q The Railroad Partners previously said that all through-running was a non-starter. Why are we now seeing through-running presented here with the other preliminary alternatives?
- A We have received input, including from SWAG members, requesting to see all the preliminary alternatives defined to date evaluated together against consistent criteria. To be responsive to this feedback, we are including both the Through-Running Without Expansion and Under Penn alternatives in the list of draft preliminary alternatives.
- Q How does the “48 trans-Hudson trains per hour” capacity target factor into the alternatives analysis? Is that still the mark to be achieved?
- A Yes. That target has not changed and will be part of the alternatives analysis process.
- C All alternatives must have pedestrian connections from Penn Station to Herald Square. This is essential given the volume of commuters and the current condition that requires them to travel above ground to get between these two points.

Evaluation Criteria

- Q What level of analysis do you anticipate releasing to the public?
- A We have already released the feasibility study that analyzed the Through-Running Without Expansion and the Under Penn alternatives. The forthcoming alternatives analysis process will include publication of additional documentation evaluating the performance of alternatives.
- Q Can you say more about the evaluation criteria? How clear and quantifiable will they be?
- A Releasing the draft Purpose and Need and the Goals and Objectives will allow opportunity for substantial public input, which will in turn inform the criteria used to evaluate the alternatives. We will therefore be able to say a lot more about the evaluation criteria later in the process.
- Q How will costs figure into the evaluation criteria? We also talk extensively about hard costs but what about soft costs?
- A Cost is certainly a factor, falling into the “operations and feasibility” set of considerations we referenced in the presentation. How exactly cost is reflected is still to be determined, but it is expected to include all manner of costs and not only those associated with construction.
- Q What is the cost of doing nothing? More specifically, how are we accounting for costs associated with things like congestion in a no-change scenario? It feels like this is important information to convey to policymakers.

- A The Regional Plan Association (RPA) has been working with consultants on the economic benefits of implementing the full Gateway Program, including the expansion of capacity at Penn Station, so hopefully consideration of the costs of doing nothing can become a bigger part of the conversation.
- Q The description of the Northern Expansion alternative includes the phrase “diminished connectivity.” Can you clarify what “diminished connectivity” means?
- A Diminished connectivity, in the case of the Northern Expansion alternative, would require separate operations from the existing Penn Station tracks and platforms. A Northern Expansion would allow increased connectivity to Herald Square subway service, but it would limit operational flexibility, particularly for NJ TRANSIT service. The Penn Station dispatchers would not be able to make decisions about which track to route a train to at the last minute. Passengers would also be required to go to different stations depending on the type of service they need.
- Q Do you currently have a list of the anticipated impacts on properties for each of the alternatives? To what extent do the proposed expanded footprints north and south of the existing station require acquisition of additional property?
- A Potential property impacts, including the potential need for property acquisition, will factor into the alternatives analysis. The locations of the tracks and platforms as shown and described in the slides from this meeting provide a high-level indication of the extents of the various concepts under consideration. There are substantial variations across the alternatives and much that still needs to be fleshed out.
- C It is important that the alternatives analysis process includes evaluation of the potential for through-running towards Sunnyside Yard. I would not want to see an alternative selected and discover too late that it precluded connectivity eastward. It is important for the alternatives analysis to consider the possibility of future expansion of the East River Tunnels (and coordination with future projects generally) as part of the screening process.
- C The East Side Access project built tail tracks going to 37th Street and Park Avenue. If there is sufficient depth, the PennX project should include tail tracks instead of stub-end tracks, as it could enhance capacity.

The Impact on Penn Station Reconstruction

- Q Is it true that the Railroad Partners are still considering using a NEPA Categorical Exclusion (CE) for the Penn Station Reconstruction project?
- A We are currently working with the FRA to determine what level of NEPA review is appropriate. There will be a robust and extensive public engagement process, regardless of the NEPA path decided upon.
- Q Why are we not trying to get more capacity out of the existing station?
- A The Railroad Partners have been investigating the viability of opportunities to increase the capacity of the existing station, as demonstrated by our contemplation of the Through-Running Without Expansion and Hybrid alternatives, as well as our analysis documented in the “Doubling Trans-Hudson Train Capacity at New York Penn Station” feasibility study available on the project website: <https://pennstationcomplex.info/>. The station is, however, already heavily utilized today, and opportunities

to substantially increase its capacity without expansion appear limited and present challenges for maintaining robust and reliable rail service.

Q How will the Railroad Partners ensure work that occurs under the Penn Station Reconstruction project is not an obstacle to the Penn Station Capacity Expansion work? What if we learn something new through the latter process that requires undoing elements of the former?

A Part of the reason for advancing the work in the feasibility study, which contemplates capacity expansion alternatives entirely within the existing station footprint, was to understand whether the future capacity needs of the station could be accommodated within the existing station footprint, as that would clearly significantly influence our plans for renovating the existing station. We are committed to making sure the capacity expansion and reconstruction efforts stay well-coordinated, but we do not want to wait many years for perfect information to advance urgent safety improvements for the existing station.

Attendance

Station Working Advisory Group

- Eugene Sinigalliano, 251 West 30th Street Residential Tenants Association
- Maddie Baker, 34th Street Partnership
- Jesse Lazar, American Institute of Architecture New York | Center for Architecture
- Bernadette Kraus, Amtrak Accessibility Representative
- Chad Purkey, Association for a Better New York
- Pam Sucato, Connecticut Department of Transportation
- Gary Prophet, Empire State Passenger Association
- Derek Piper, Federal Railroad Administration (observer)
- Christopher Boylan, General Contractors Association of New York
- Paul Macchia, Madison Square Garden
- David Sigman, Manhattan Community Board 5
- Christine Berthet, Manhattan Community Board 4
- Brian Fritsch, LIRR Commuter Council
- Tom Devaney, The Municipal Art Society of New York
- Andrew Albert, NYC Transit Riders Council
- Ed Hoff, NJ TRANSIT Accessibility Representative
- Carlo Scissura, New York Building Congress
- Joshua Kraus, New York City Economic Development Corporation
- Ferlanda Fox Nixon, Newark Regional Business Partnership
- Assemblymember Tony Simone, New York State Assembly District 75
- Madeleine McGrory, Office of Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine
- Matthew Anderson, Office of New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy
- Matt Tighe, Office of New York State Assemblymember Tony Simone
- Jonah Rose, Office of New York State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal
- Alex Marinides, Office of New York State Senator Liz Krueger
- Joe Raguzin, Office of the Rockland County Executive

- Craig Lader, Office of the Westchester County Executive
- Ben Giovine, Office of U.S. Senator Andy Kim
- Richard Sun, Office of U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer
- Joe Sgroi, Office of U.S. Senator Cory A. Booker
- Brook Jackson, Partnership for New York City
- Todd Goldman, Port Authority of New York & New Jersey
- Jim Mathews, Rail Passengers Association
- Joshua Berman, Regional Plan Association
- Tom Wright, Regional Plan Association
- Sarah Kaufman, Rudin Center for Transportation Policy and Management, NYU
- Judy Kessler, Vornado Realty Trust

Project Team

- Julie Cowing – AKRF
- Sara Appleton – Amtrak
- Laura Colacurcio – Amtrak
- Kate Cunningham – Amtrak
- Petra Messick – Amtrak
- Ryan Morson – Amtrak
- Craig Schulz – Amtrak
- Maxwell Sokol – Amtrak
- Sharon Tepper – Amtrak
- Wei Yu – Amtrak
- Nikolas Dando-Haenisch – Grimshaw
- Audrey Heffernan – HDR
- Sean Fitzpatrick – MTA
- Joe O'Donnell – MTA
- Todd DiScala – NJ TRANSIT
- Emery Ungrady – NJ TRANSIT
- Cailean Kok – NJ TRANSIT
- Kate Ward – NJ TRANSIT
- Joel Hochman – Public Works Partners
- Daniel McCombie – Public Works Partners
- Molly Hollister – WSP