



# Penn Station Working Advisory Group

## Kickoff Reception Meeting Summary

September 17, 2024

### Overview

This document provides a summary of the proceedings from the inaugural Penn Station Working Advisory Group (SWAG) kickoff reception on Tuesday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, at the Amtrak Executive Conference Center at Moynihan Train Hall.

### Meeting Agenda

- SWAG Purpose & Process
- Moving the Region: Regional Rail Needs & Constraints
- Penn Station in Context: Epicenter of the Regional Bottleneck
- Station of the Future: Priorities & Projects
- Next Steps and Discussion

### Presentation Summary

Amtrak opened the meeting by welcoming attendees, introducing the agenda, and explaining that the SWAG is a joint effort of Amtrak, MTA, and NJ TRANSIT (collectively, the Railroad Partners). The Railroad Partners' goal for the SWAG is to have meaningful conversations in a smaller forum regarding the Railroad Partners' vision for the future of Penn Station with a diverse group of organizations that represent different constituencies and perspectives.

After introductions, the two projects that will be the focus of ongoing discussions with the SWAG were introduced:

- Penn Reconstruction, which is focused on improving safety, platform and access improvements, and the passenger experience in the existing Penn Station facility; and
- Penn Capacity Expansion, which is focused on increasing Penn Station's rail capacity to accommodate at least doubling or more of peak-hour passenger trains between New York and New Jersey.

After introducing the projects, the team previewed anticipated discussion topics for the SWAG. Topics include details on the Railroad Partners' priorities for Penn Station, project goals and scope elements, briefings on relevant engineering and design studies, discussions regarding each project's environmental review process, and public engagement opportunities.

The project team also shared details regarding future expectations for SWAG member participation. The SWAG is advisory in nature and does not have formal decision-making power. The Railroad Partners will request assistance from SWAG members in sharing public engagement opportunities with their constituents, members and/or professional networks. Meetings are in-person, with invites being sent with at least two weeks' notice. Meeting summaries and presentation materials will be available to the public via the project website. The SWAG will meet

two more times before the end of the calendar year and then transition to a quarterly meeting cadence for what is anticipated to be a two-and-a-half-year process through the design and environmental review phase of the projects. Tom Wright, President of the Regional Plan Association and Sarah Kaufman, Director of the NYU Rudin Center for Transportation Policy and Management, will act as co-chairs for this group.

After outlining the expectations for the SWAG, Amtrak, NJ TRANSIT, and MTA delivered remarks contextualizing these projects within the larger needs of the Northeast Corridor and regional rail network, highlighting the essential and connective economic relationship between New York and New Jersey, and acknowledging the need to address the challenge of accommodating current and projected future level of ridership and customer demand.

The SWAG was then presented with immediate next steps, which included notice for upcoming meetings on Tuesday, October 8th (Moynihan Train Hall) and Tuesday, October 29th (NYU Wagner), and an opportunity to ask questions and provide comments to the Partners.

## Questions and Comments Summary

(Questions and answers have been lightly edited for clarity and length)

### SWAG Process

#### **Q: What would successful engagement with the SWAG look like?**

A. We want both formal and informal feedback and will actively ask for input. We want to hear what you think we should be considering and factoring into our decision-making. Successful engagement in this case is where we get to know your priorities and learn what is required to make you proud to call Penn Station your home station. We'll know the SWAG format and environment are working, when everyone is outspoken and sharing their views.

#### **Q. Who can we direct questions to?**

A. We will provide one email that will be fielded by Public Works Partners. When you contact the email, all three agencies will receive it.

### Relationship Between Projects

#### **Q. It looks like we are talking about two disconnected projects: one about capacity and one about the experience on the ground. Are you going to work on improving the situation in the existing station so we can maximize that asset?**

A. Yes, the SWAG will be providing input on two separate projects. The Capacity Expansion Project is focused primarily on the track infrastructure, the station facilities above it, and how we can get more capacity out of the station. Reconstruction is focused on safety, station (not rail) operations, and the passenger experience within the existing station. While separate, both must be designed in parallel to inform each other to ensure the success of each project and ultimate creation of a single, unified complex.

#### **Q. Is it correct to say Penn Reconstruction will not proceed without Penn Capacity Expansion?**

A. Not necessarily. Each of these projects has independent utility and could therefore be advanced at different times. But as of now, the two projects are being planned in parallel, as coordination is important to ensure that we end up with a well-designed station with a consistent customer experience.

**Q. Some of these projects are taking too long and there is a risk funding will be lost when the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) comes up for renewal. How do we go back to Congress with the timeline for this project and still make it compelling? How can it happen fast and affordably, but still in the right way?**

A. This is a key question for all three of us, especially as we consider design options for the station. These are enormous projects given the size, state, and age of the infrastructure.

A key challenge for projects is considering potential service outages on nights and weekends. There is a very low tolerance for service changes and outages among passengers, especially since most are commuting to work. The number of projects taking place in the Northeast Corridor right now is unprecedented and all our agencies are dealing with the tradeoff between a fast project timeline and limiting service disruptions. If you create high enough value at the end of the process, then the pain can be worth it. We are very driven by the fact that this is public money, and we need to create the best value for the public as possible.

## **Penn Reconstruction**

**Q. Previously, Penn Reconstruction was anticipated to occur when there would be fewer trains coming into Penn Station due to the work from the East Side Access and Penn Access projects. Is there an ideal timeframe you're aiming for now?**

A. It is difficult to say at this point, but this is something we are discussing and considering in relation to the project lifecycle. We are currently in the concept development design process, followed by the environmental review. We anticipate this work will take at least a year before construction can occur.

**Q. What start date do you expect for Penn Reconstruction?**

A. We are working on the design now. This will be followed by environmental review, the procurement process, and then construction. We will have a better sense of timing as we conclude design.

**Q. We heard about some potential designs previously, including new levels and an entrance on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Are those still being considered?**

A. At our October 29 SWAG meeting, we will go into more detail around design considerations.

**Comment:** A key priority for the future station should be making it as easy as possible to navigate the station complex.

**Comment:** A major priority is the design and the function (i.e., ingress and egress) of the station. We must use this opportunity to make a truly grand station. This is a once in a century opportunity. About a year ago, we were debating

the entrance on 8th Avenue and the idea for an 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue train hall. When the project is complete, we want everyone to say “Wow!” We should strive for the grandeur of the previous station. We also need to ensure sufficient public engagement during the project. Overall, I hope we move forward with a great design and am excited to work with all the stakeholders. Remember to think on a timeline of decades or a century out from today.

## Penn Capacity Expansion

**Q: Is Penn Capacity Expansion outside the current station’s footprint still on the table?**

A.: Yes, we will discuss this in future meetings.

**Q.: Is Penn Capacity Expansion only considering projects that are currently planned, such as Penn Access and Gateway? Or do you intend to maximize capacity to make unplanned projects possible? For example, if the Metro-North Hudson Line provided access to Penn Station, will the station be able to absorb this?**

A: Penn Capacity Expansion will enable 48 trains per hour crossing the Hudson River to enter the station. We are also considering accommodating additional trains off the Empire Corridor (namely Metro-North’s Hudson and Amtrak’s Empire services). Empire Corridor frequency is currently limited because it is a single-track tunnel ducking under LIRR’s Westside Storage Yard. Our primary goal is meeting future demand across the Hudson River and Penn Capacity Expansion needs to be future proofed for that goal.

## Attendance

### Station Working Advisory Group

Dan Biederman- 34<sup>th</sup> Street Partnership  
Jesse Lazar - American Institute of Architecture New York | Center for Architecture  
Carol Lopez- Amtrak Accessibility Representative  
Chad Purkey - Association for a Better New York (ABNY)  
Anthony Russo - Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey  
Gabriella Green - Empire State Development  
Francesca Giarratana - Office of Hudson County Executive  
Christine Berthet - Manhattan Community Board 4  
Dave Sigman - Manhattan Community Board 5  
Quemuel Arroyo - MTA Accessibility Representative  
Lisa Daglian - Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, Metro North Railroad Commuter Council  
Andrew Albert - NYC Transit Riders Council  
Ed Hoff- New Jersey Transit Accessibility Representative  
Carlo Scissura - New York Building Congress  
Edith Hsu-Chen - New York City Department of City Planning  
David Breen- New York City Department of Transportation  
Joshua Kraus - New York City Office of the Mayor  
Ferlanda Fox Nixon - Newark Regional Business Partnership  
Andrew Albert- NYC Transit Riders Council  
Councilmember Erik Bottcher - NYC Council District 3  
Carl Wilson - Office of City Councilmember Erik Bottcher  
Lizette Chaparro - Office of Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine  
Madeline McGrory - Office of Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine  
Dana Adelman - Office of New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy  
David Ullman - Office of New York State Governor Kathy Hochul  
Assemblymember Tony Simone: Office of New York State Assemblymember Tony Simone  
Emma Johnson - Office of New York State Assembly Member Tony Simone  
Alex Marinides - Office of New York State Senator Liz Krueger  
Jonah Rose - Office of New York State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal  
Joe Raguzin - Office of Rockland County Executive  
Joe Sgroi - Office of US Senator Cory Booker  
Aman Patel - Office of US Senator Kirsten Gillibrand  
Craig Lader - Office of Westchester County Executive  
Stacey Matlen - Partnership for New York  
Todd Goldman - Port Authority of New York and New Jersey  
Scott Elliot- Progressive Center for Independent Living  
Jim Mathews - Rail Passengers Association  
Tom Wright - Regional Plan Association  
Betsy Plum - Riders Alliance

Sarah Kaufman - Rudin Center for Transportation Policy and Management, NYU  
Elizabeth Goldstein - Municipal Art Society of New York  
Mark Diaz - The New School  
Judy Kessler - Vornado Realty Trust

## Project Team

Julie Cowing - AKRF  
Sara Appleton - Amtrak  
Petra Messick - Amtrak  
Kate Cunningham - Amtrak  
Craig Schulz - Amtrak  
Laura Colacurcio - Amtrak  
Jason Abrams - Amtrak  
Max Sokol - Amtrak  
Wei Yu - Amtrak  
Anabel Frias Rosario – Amtrak  
Ryan Morson – Amtrak  
Danelle Hunter - Amtrak  
Temoor Ahmad - MTA  
Joe O'Donnell - MTA  
Jeremy Colangelo-Bryan - NJ TRANSIT  
Paul Wycoff – NJ TRANSIT  
Todd Discala - NJ TRANSIT  
Allison Quigney - Public Works Partners  
Jake Markey - Public Works Partners  
Joel Hochman - Public Works Partners