



# Penn Station Working Advisory Group

## Meeting Summary

October 8, 2024

## Overview

This document provides a summary of the proceedings from the second Penn Station Working Advisory Group (SWAG) meeting on Tuesday, October 8<sup>th</sup> at the Amtrak Executive Conference Center at Moynihan Train Hall.

## Meeting Agenda

- Meeting Goals
- State of Regional Rail Service: The Need for Increased Trans-Hudson Capacity
- Doubling of Trans-Hudson Train Capacity at Penn Station: Study Objectives and Findings
- Next Steps
- Small Group & Plenary Discussion

## Presentation Summary

### Meeting Goals

Amtrak opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and presenting the goals of the meeting, including:

- Present context for and findings of recently released engineering feasibility study: “Doubling Trans-Hudson Train Capacity at Penn Station”
- Explain how the study relates to Penn Station projects
- Answer questions about the study
- Gather feedback on planned next steps

### Project Context

NJ TRANSIT provided a review of the long-term vision and near-term capital investment plan for the Northeast Corridor (NEC), including the Gateway Program, Connect 2037 program, and the NEC FUTURE Record of Decision, all of which call for a capacity expansion of New York Penn Station as part of a multi-pronged approach to address the trans-Hudson bottleneck.

The Gateway Program is a series of infrastructure improvements to modernize and expand the constrained 10-mile stretch of the NEC between Newark, NJ and Manhattan. Once Gateway and other supporting projects are complete, the NEC will have the capacity to double rail service between New York and New Jersey from 24 to 48 trains per hour (tph) in the peak direction, taking

maximum advantage of the capacity afforded by the Hudson Tunnel Project. This would provide meaningful connectivity and limit the overcrowding of trains. To do this, substantial construction must be completed at Penn Station and in other parts of the network to accommodate this increase in service.

Capacity for at least 48 trains is needed for the regional system to have full access, reduce auto use (or the growth in auto use, at least), and reduce congestion. The need for 48 trains isn't just about the NEC, it is about the full system and addressing regional ridership demand.

## Project Goals

The presentation transitioned to introducing the proposed goals of the Penn Capacity Expansion Project, which include:

- Increasing rail capacity;
- Creating a unified customer experience;
- Developing a stronger connection between Penn Station and the surrounding neighborhood;
- Minimizing impacts on the human and natural environment;
- Supporting local and regional policy priorities; and
- Optimizing project delivery.

## Doubling Trans-Hudson Train Capacity at Penn Station: Summary and Methodology

The Railroad Partners provided an overview of the recent engineering feasibility study: “Doubling Trans-Hudson Train Capacity at New York Penn Station” (“feasibility study”), completed by the WSP/FXC consultant team as an early step informing the approach for the Penn Capacity Expansion Project. The feasibility study sought to answer a basic threshold question: “Is it possible to meet the Penn Capacity Expansion Project and NEC/Gateway goals of 48 peak-hour trans-Hudson trains within the existing footprint of Penn Station?” The study found that this would not be possible and that it would be necessary to look at additional expansion options that are not constrained by the existing footprint of the station.

The feasibility study focused on two alternatives with two design concepts each and evaluated their potential to accommodate the trans-Hudson capacity requirements of the Gateway Program, as well as increased service on the Empire Line, without expanding the station’s physical footprint.

The study also examined international examples of capacity enhancement including the development of “cross-regional rail” and its potential application at Penn Station. The four design concepts were evaluated with respect to their technical feasibility. The evaluation criteria included: 1) track geometry, 2) constructability, 3) fire-life safety, 4) operational performance, and 5) compatibility with the future regional rail vision that includes creating a regional metro network, maintaining longer-distance suburban commuter service, and expanding intercity service. The study concluded that none of the design concepts met the five established criteria for future evaluation.

## Doubling Trans-Hudson Train Capacity at Penn Station: Analysis

A representative from WSP then presented in detail the two design concepts for an “Under Penn Station” alternative and the two design concepts for a “Through-Running” alternative examined within the feasibility study. WSP discussed each solution’s track geometry, constructability, fire-life safety, operational performance, and regional metro capacity. A summary of each design solution and its corresponding technical feasibility findings are provided below.

### Under Penn Station - Underpinning:

Underpinning would add 10 single-level tracks and platforms below the existing tracks of Penn Station. While underpinning meets track geometry feasibility requirements and does not preclude the future implementation of a regional metro system, underpinning 1,000+ columns is an unprecedented construction challenge that would also require claiming space on the tracks and platforms during construction, leading to a long-term reduction in service. The plan would also require the removal of existing tracks within Penn Station to make vertical circulation possible for passengers moving between the expanded station below the existing concourses, substantially lowering the net increase in total station train capacity.

### Under Penn Station - Mined Cavern:

This design solution would also add 10 tracks directly below the existing Penn Station built deeper below grade, avoiding the need for underpinning. The required operational capacity cannot be achieved due to train movement conflicts at the new single-level interlocking west of the station expansion, which would feed the new lower-level platform tracks.

Both concepts for Under Penn Station fail to meet constructability, fire-life safety, and operational requirements. They were eliminated from future evaluation.

### Through-Running - Full Reconstruction of Platforms:

Implementing a fully reconstructed through-running system would involve completely reconfiguring the track and platform level of Penn Station, providing 17 new tracks and nine 30-foot-wide platforms. It would require the complete reconstruction of the track and platform level under both Penn Station and Moynihan Train Hall, including the removal, relocation and strengthening of approximately 1,045 structural columns supporting Madison Square Garden, the PENN 2 office building, Eighth Avenue, and the Eighth Avenue A/C/E subway lines, which results in a projected 12-year span of 30% reduction in service. The concept fails to meet the constructability, operational performance, and future regional rail criteria and is therefore eliminated for further study.

### Through-Running - Limited Reconfiguration:

A limited reconfiguration addresses the extreme constructability impacts of the above concept by proposing to widen the existing platforms to a width of 30-feet by decking over or eliminating the existing track on one side of each island platform, retaining 12 of the 21 station tracks in their current

locations. This would reduce but not eliminate the need for structural modifications and track re-alignments under both Penn Station and Moynihan Train Hall.

This concept fails to meet the operational performance requirements as it does not have enough tracks to reliably deliver the additional 24 tph through each Hudson River and East River Tunnel tube (48 tph total in each direction of travel). It also fails the future regional rail criterion. It is therefore deemed technically infeasible and not recommended for further study.

As part of the through-running discussion, additional technical requirements and constraints for enabling a true regional metro system were reviewed. Outside of Penn Station, significant infrastructure would need to be built, including additional tracks, flyover junctions, electrification systems, new stations, and new turn-back facilities in the Meadowlands and in the east Bronx, requiring property acquisition.

## Next Steps

A representative from MTA Construction and Development concluded the presentation by reviewing the study's main constraint—working within the existing footprint of Penn Station—and how the feasibility study impacts and informs the Penn Reconstruction project. All attendees were reminded of the next upcoming meeting to take place on October 29th at NYU Wagner.

## Small Group Discussion Summary

After the presentation meeting attendees, who were seated in six groups, were asked to discuss the following questions:

- Was any part of the feasibility study analysis unclear?
- Is there any information you wish the Railroad Partners had included in this briefing?
- Do you have any feedback or suggestions regarding the Railroad Partners' planned next steps?

Each table designated a facilitator and a notetaker. Following the discussion period, each facilitator reported to the plenary group the following questions and comments, so that the Railroad Partners can attempt to address questions and topics of interest in future meetings.

## Questions and Comments Summary

(Questions and answers have been lightly edited for clarity and length and organized based on discrete topics.)

## Process

### Questions:

Will the four alternatives be presented under NEPA?

Will other alternatives to the scenarios presented be explored?

What is the next step of this report? What about the general public?

Are there lessons we can learn from this process that can inform the next evaluation?

**Comment.** The discussion today did not specify construction end dates for each of the design solutions.

## Trans-Hudson Train Capacity

### Questions:

Is there flexibility on the 48 trains per hour goal?

Why is 24 trains per hour the hard number to meet? Is there flexibility here? Where did this number come from?

What are we going to do if we can't reach the 48 minimum?

How many years would the 30 percent reduction in capacity last?

The dwell times seem extremely long compared to other cities. Why can't we improve dwell times at Penn Station?

**Comment:** There has been talk of looking beyond the station footprint, but we hope to make efforts to maximize capacity in our existing station no matter what, even if that means not achieving the desired 48 trains per hour.

## Through-running

### Questions:

What is the Railroad Partners' bottom-line perspective on through-running? Is through-running off the table?

Why can we not use the current West Side and Sunnyside Rail Yards in a 100 percent through-running scheme?

Has any analysis been done on what the market might be for through running?

## Alternatives Design

### Questions:

What are the political ramifications of each of the alternatives? There are a lot. The impact on the surrounding communities will be expansive.

For each of the design solutions, what are the specifics of how service would be affected? Can we get more information on the mined cavern alternative?

Why is it so necessary to widen the tracks? LIRR can run every five minutes or so on narrower tracks. Can this variable be adjusted in future analysis?

### **Comments:**

While many variables were examined, there was no exploration of expanding capacity into the space currently occupied by Madison Square Garden. This is an option that should be explored.

The presentation today did not discuss the possibility of consolidating or making improvements to concourses.

Today's discussion did not cover the "8 tracks 4 platforms" solution from the Gateway plan, or the "southern solution." We are all excited about constructability, and so we need to see an analysis of constructability, including one in which real estate adjacent to Penn Station is acquired. It is important to be able to consider all options.

We are interested in more comparisons with international models, particularly European examples.

## **Demand Projections and Regional Impact**

### **Questions:**

This discussion solely considered peak-hour service at Penn Station. What would a projected non-peak hour throughput look like?

How would an integrated rail network affect existing demand, especially in New Jersey?

How would this impact the Gateway Project?

What is the demand forecast for the regional rail/metro service? For example, are there really people who want to travel from New Rochelle to Ronkonkoma?

## **Attendance**

### **Station Working Advisory Group**

- Craig Lader, Office of the Westchester County Executive
- David Ullman, Office of New York Governor Kathy Hochul
- Maddie DeCerro, Real Estate Board of New York
- Joe Sgroi, Office of U.S. Senator Cory A. Booker
- Stacey Matlen, Partnership for New York City
- Jonah Rose, Office of New York State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal

- Matthew Anderson, Office of New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy
- Carl Wilson, Office of New York City Council Member Erik Bottcher
- Paul Macchia, Madison Square Garden
- Elizabeth Goldstein, The Municipal Art Society of New York
- Brian Fritsch, NYC Transit Riders Council
- Gerard Bringmann, LIRR Commuter Council
- Randy Glucksmann, Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council
- Maddie Baker, 34th Street Partnership
- David Breen, New York City Department of Transportation
- Tom Wright, Regional Plan Association
- Joshua Kraus, NYC Economic Development Corporation
- Chad Purkey, Association for a Better New York (ABNY)
- Madeleine McGrory, Office of Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine
- Jesse Lazar, AIA New York | Center for Architecture
- Gary Prophet, Empire State Passenger Association
- Joe Raguzin, Office of the Rockland County Executive
- Howard Levine, MTA Accessibility Representative
- Todd Goldman, Port Authority of New York & New Jersey
- Pam Sucato, Connecticut Department of Transportation
- Christine Berthet, Manhattan Community Board 4
- Matt Tighe, Office of New York State Assemblymember Tony Simone
- Alex Marinides, Office of New York State Senator Liz Krueger
- Eugene Sinigalliano, 251 West 30th Street Residential Tenants Association
- David Sigman, Manhattan Community Board 5
- Judy Kessler, Vornado Realty Trust
- Ron Hicks, Office of the Dutchess County Executive
- Assemblymember Tony Simone, New York State Assembly District 75
- Ed Hoff, NJ TRANSIT
- Julia Kerson, Office of New York Governor Kathy Hochul
- Sarah Kaufman, Rudin Center for Transportation Policy and Management, NYU
- Jim Mathews, Rail Passengers Association
- Rich O'Malley, New York Building Congress
- Christopher Boylan, General Contractors Association of New York

## 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
- Anabel Frias Rosario – Amtrak
- Audrey Heffernan - HDR
- Temoor Ahmad - MTA
- Joe O'Donnell - MTA
- Sean Fitzpatrick - MTA
- Jessica Mathew - MTA
- Jeremy Colangelo-Bryan - NJ TRANSIT
- Paul Wycoff – NJ TRANSIT
- Todd DiScala - NJ TRANSIT
- Ilan Ackelsberg- Public Works Partners
- Joel Hochman - Public Works Partners
- Foster Nichols – WSP
- Dan Siragusa – HDR