



# Penn Station Working Advisory Group

## Meeting Summary

October 29, 2024

## Overview

This document provides a summary of the proceedings from the third Penn Station Working Advisory Group (SWAG) meeting on Tuesday, October 29<sup>th</sup> at the NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.

## Meeting Agenda

- Meeting Goals
- Doubling of Trans-Hudson Train Capacity at Penn Station: Continued Discussion
- Penn Projects Process
- Penn Capacity Expansion Introduction
- Penn Reconstruction Introduction
- Next Steps

## Presentation Summary

### Meeting Goals

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

- Answering questions about the feasibility study, including specific topics:
  - Rationale for achieving the 48 trans-Hudson trains per hour (TPH) goal
  - Dwell times
  - Through-running and regional metro
- Introducing the proposed Penn Capacity Expansion (PennX) project purpose, goals, and preliminary alternatives
- Introducing the proposed Penn Reconstruction (PennR) project purpose and goals
- Previewing the next steps for both the PennX and PennR projects

## Doubling of Trans-Hudson Train Capacity at Penn Station: Continued Discussion

### 48 Trains Per Hour

A representative from Amtrak explained the rationale behind the capacity goal for the Gateway Program and Penn Capacity Expansion project of achieving at least 48 trans-Hudson trains per hour (TPH) in peak periods in the peak direction, outlining and elaborating on the following topics:

- 1) **Ridership trends:** Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT's historic data show a steady increase in ridership since the 1990s combined with sharp recoveries after temporary dips due to historic events such as Super Storm Sandy and the Covid-19 pandemic. NEC Future, the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA's) comprehensive plan for the Northeast Corridor and a Gateway Service Planning effort both projected ridership demand to amount to 52-56 TPH between 2040 and 2050. The completion of the Gateway Program, plus Amtrak's and NJ TRANSIT's planned capital investments and off-peak service improvements are projected to increase ridership during that period and beyond.
- 2) **Policy goals:** With planned infrastructure improvements in New Jersey and New York, the Gateway Program will enable direct "one-seat ride" access to Penn Station for all NJ TRANSIT northern New Jersey rail lines, a long-term policy goal of NJ TRANSIT and the Gateway Program to create additional connectivity and access to and from the region's economic center. Providing meaningful connection with consistent, reliable service between New York and New Jersey will also support environmental policy goals by promoting the shift from cars to trains.
- 3) **Maximizing station capacity:** Although ridership demand is projected at 52-56 TPH, current signal technologies and fire and life safety regulations will result in a maximum tunnel capacity of 48 TPH once the new Hudson River Tunnel (HRT) is built, and the full rehabilitation of the North River Tunnel (NRT) is completed. Making the goal of the PennX project at least 48 TPH ensures the full train capacity of the tunnels is utilized, maximizing the return on the public's investment in the Hudson Tunnel Project. Additional station capacity will also allow for the growth of Amtrak's Empire Line service and/or the introduction of Metro-North Hudson Line service into Penn Station.

### Through-Running

The presentation continued by revisiting the topic of through-running operations, defining through-running as 1) a station operating regime where trains stop in the station and continue on in the same direction and/or 2) a way to support cross-regional mobility. Through-running operations differ from turnback operations, during which trains exit the station from the direction in which they came to continue revenue service or to return to rail yards.

Today, Penn Station operates with both through-running and turnback movements for intercity and commuter trains. This necessary mixture of operating regimes results in varying train dwell times that maximize throughput at the station.

### Regional Metro

Cities that have implemented through-running and regional metro systems have done so by separating the regional metro tracks from the legacy train services. This is because regional metro systems typically need to operate on purpose-built infrastructure that can support frequent,

subway-like service without interfering with legacy services (e.g., suburban and intercity service), such as simpler interlockings; to include regional metro services in the same facilities as suburban and intercity rail would decrease capacity and increase dwell times. The Railroad Partners conducted a survey of international best practices in jurisdictions that had introduced through-running regional metro services, which concluded that those jurisdictions constructed additional infrastructure, such as simplified interlockings and dedicated shoulder stations, to operate through-running services.

The Railroad Partners explained key differences between a through-running regional metro service and traditional suburban service. Regional metro systems are frequent, subway-like services serving the job- and housing-dense inner portions of metro areas (i.e., 25-30 miles from the central business district), using train equipment similar to subway systems (e.g., with many doors allowing for quick boarding/alighting). Suburban systems, in contrast, serve longer distances on fixed timetables.

To achieve through-running regional metro service in this region, additional investments beyond the Gateway Program are needed. In addition to capital investment in new rolling stock, tracks and signals, and stations, a full and collaborative regional planning effort must take place in order to introduce new train operations to Penn Station, the metropolitan area, and beyond.

The presentation also reviewed Philadelphia's one-time capital investment in through-running, noting that capital improvements alone are not enough to generate demand. It also requires major region-wide capital investments and sustained operating support.

### Dwell Time

An Amtrak representative also explained the many factors influencing train dwell times, which is the amount of time a train occupies a station platform. Such factors include:

- Service type (regional, suburban, or intercity)
- Platform width and vertical circulation (i.e., how quickly passengers can enter and exit platform levels)
- Train characteristics (e.g., length of car, doors per car, single vs. double level, acceleration, and breaking)
- Passenger characteristics (e.g., intercity passengers with luggage, passengers with mobility challenges, or commuters)

Different types of train services can result in different dwell times, which, in turn, affects Penn Station's operations and capacity.

### **Penn Projects Process**

The Railroad Partners then presented the phases of a capital project and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process required of any federally funded project.

## Penn Capacity Expansion Introduction and Next Steps

A representative from NJ TRANSIT discussed the purpose of the Penn Capacity Expansion Project. The goals of the Penn Capacity Expansion Project include increasing rail capacity, improving customer experience, developing stronger connections between Penn Station and the surrounding neighborhood, minimizing impacts on the environment, and supporting local and regional policy priorities.

## Penn Reconstruction Introduction and Next Steps

A representative from the MTA discussed the need for and purpose of the Penn Reconstruction project and described the project's goals as enhancing safety, elevating the customer experience, upgrading building systems, improving station operations, and optimizing project delivery.

## Status and Next Steps

The Railroad Partners previewed the upcoming November 19<sup>th</sup> SWAG meeting, which will provide a more detailed update on the Penn Reconstruction Project. The Railroad Partners will address the following topics:

- Summary of Penn Station Master Plan process and results
- Update on preliminary engineering progress
- Feedback and engagement from SWAG members on top priorities

The Railroad Partners also directed SWAG members to an online survey where they can provide preliminary feedback on presentation topics and relay what information they would like to hear in future sessions.

## Questions and Comments Summary

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

### Process

#### Questions:

Regarding the options for station capacity expansion: What is the logic that is leading to the decisions the Railroad Partners are making? What are the major pieces of evidence that the existing Penn Station is insufficient for current and future demand? Which ideas have been rejected and which ones can be used for a better station and less impact on the surrounding community?

#### Comment:

SWAG Members would benefit from receiving a simplified Gantt chart detailing all the various project timelines and how they relate to one another.

## Trans-Hudson Train Capacity

### Questions:

Are there other measures that can be taken to continue to increase passenger capacity within the constraints of the Trans-Hudson train capacity of 48 trains per hour?

**A:** We are in the middle of increasing the train length and multi-level fleet, which would greatly increase passenger capacity. We want to squeeze as much as we can out of the tunnels.

Do 48 trains per hour mean 24 trains per tunnel? How do the old tunnels figure into the 48 trains per hour figure?

**A:** Each set of tunnels has one inbound track and one outbound track. This is true for existing North River Tunnel (NRT) as well as in-construction Hudson River Tunnel (HRT). Once the new HRT is built and open for service, we will shift all existing NRT traffic (24 tph during the peak) to the new HRT. A full-scale rehab of the existing NRT will be performed, one track at a time. Once that rehab is complete, the existing NRT and the new HRT will collectively have 4 tracks (2 inbound and 2 outbound) at which point we will be able to operate 48 trains per hour (distributed across 2 inbound tracks in AM peak period or 2 outbound tracks in PM peak period).

Are you expecting additional demand under the East River following the completion of the Hudson Tunnel Project?

## Through-Running + Regional Metro

### Questions:

Are we taking steps to establish a regional metro network that is responsive to the current and anticipated demand for housing and to different job markets, such as Downtown Brooklyn or Long Island City?

**A:** The numbers for the Manhattan CBD far eclipses other regional job centers. We are addressing that neglected need first and relying on other transportation to the secondary job centers.

**A:** Manhattan is still the great engine of job growth, and most housing is being built in New Jersey, and to a lesser extent, the five boroughs. These are numbers that are orders of magnitude larger than housing growth in Westchester County, Rockland County, Long Island, or Connecticut

**A:** The Gateway Program addresses the urgent need to upgrade and expand existing 100-year-old infrastructure that had not received adequate public investment until the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021. Gateway represents just the beginning of planned and contemplated

investments across the rail network that can be implemented with sustained and robust public funding.

Have there been other discussions about making the transit experience easier, either through consolidated ticketing, coordinated timetables, or other less capital-intensive improvements? Do they solve the more urgent problems more quickly?

## Penn Capacity Expansion

### Questions:

Why is eminent domain and property acquisition not enough to eliminate certain Penn Station expansion alternatives as feasible? Have we prematurely eliminated alternatives that are possible and do not require property acquisition?

Are there additional capacity needs expected from Penn Access and the East River tunnels?

What have you all learned that we can apply to improvements at Penn Station? Do the alternatives provide the opportunity to reduce impacts? What are the neighborhood implications of placing the expansion in different places?

## Penn Reconstruction

### Comments:

Please explicitly incorporate improved wayfinding as a goal of the Penn Reconstruction project. It has gotten to the point where New Yorkers themselves don't know where to go.

It is important to design for people with vision issues and incorporate something with auditory or tactile features as a meeting point within the station for those users. It is essential that this station is accessible, and that the accessibility features are intuitive.

*\* The Railroad Partners will address all questions and comments from SWAG members in subsequent meetings and/or through the formal responses posted to the Penn Station projects website at <https://pennstationcomplex.info/>.*

## Attendance

### Station Working Advisory Group

- William Otterson, 251 West 30th Street Residential Tenants Association
- Maddie Baker, 34th Street Partnership
- Gabriella Green, Empire State Development
- Gary Prophet, Empire State Passenger Association
- Christopher Boylan, General Contractors Association of New York
- Paul Macchia, Madison Square Garden

- David Sigman, Manhattan Community Board 5
- Howard Levine, MTA Accessibility Representative
- Lisa Daglian, LIRR Commuter Council
- Randy Glucksman, Metro-North Railroad Commuter Council
- Andrew Albert, NYC Transit Riders Council
- Ed Hoff, NJ TRANSIT Accessibility Representative
- Carlo Scissura, New York Building Congress
- Edith Hsu-Chen, New York City Department of City Planning
- Joshua Simoneau, New York City Department of City Planning
- David Breen, New York City Department of Transportation
- Joshua Kraus, New York City Economic Development Corporation
- Ferlanda Fox Nixon, Newark Regional Business Partnership
- Madeleine McGrory, Office of Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine
- Dana Adelman, Office of New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy
- Matthew Anderson, Office of New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy
- Julia Kerson, Office of New York Governor Kathy Hochul
- Dave Ullman, Office of New York Governor Kathy Hochul
- Jacob Golden, New York State Assemblymember Tony Simone
- Jonah Rose, Office of New York State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal
- Joe Raguzin, Office of the Rockland County Executive
- Craig Lader, Office of the Westchester County Executive
- Joe Sgroi, Office of U.S. Senator Cory A. Booker
- Aman Patel, Office of U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
- Patrick Donovan, Office of U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer
- Brook Jackson, Partnership for New York City
- Todd Goldman, Port Authority of New York & New Jersey
- Jim Mathews, Rail Passengers Association
- Tom Wright, Regional Plan Association
- Sarah Kaufman, Rudin Center for Transportation Policy and Management, NYU
- Elizabeth Goldstein, The Municipal Art Society of New York
- Audrey Wilson, Vornado Realty Trust

## Project Team

- Julie Cowing – AKRF
- Connor Lacefield – AKRF
- Sara Appleton - Amtrak
- Petra Messick - Amtrak
- Kate Cunningham - Amtrak
- Craig Schulz - Amtrak
- Laura Colacurcio – Amtrak
- Ryan Morson – Amtrak
- Jason Abrams - Amtrak
- Purvesh Shah – Amtrak

- Sharon Tepper – Amtrak
- Audrey Heffernan – HDR
- Temoor Ahmad - MTA
- Joe O'Donnell - MTA
- Sean Fitzpatrick - MTA
- Jessica Mathew - MTA
- Jeremy Colangelo-Bryan - NJ TRANSIT
- Todd DiScala - NJ TRANSIT
- John Chartier – NJ TRANSIT
- Jake Markey - Public Works Partners
- Joel Hochman - Public Works Partners