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CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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February 7, 2022

Hon. Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. Phil Murphy
Governor, New Jersey
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Re: Through Running Plan for Penn Station

Dear Governors Hochul and Murphy,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) at its February 2nd Full Board meeting, voted by 41 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to support making Penn Station more efficient, improving riders' safety and comfort, and advancing transportation equity in the Penn project. We support expanding "Through-Running" in the current station in both directions (New York and New Jersey). We urge you to direct your respective agencies and partners to focus their efforts on a full and exhaustive evaluation of Through Running in the current station as the preferred option for the Southern Expansion of Penn Station and hire an independent consultant to advance such a design.

In expanding Penn Station, the railroads' focus to-date has been on redesigning halls for each rail system and adding tracks for New Jersey Transit. As a result, platforms were not widened as part of the Moynihan Hall's magnificent upgrade. Riders continue to queue up in the hall, waiting for the trains to empty and make space on the platforms and stairs for boarding. Track efficiency and platform capacity must be addressed in priority to achieve a world class station.

The August 2, 2021 report of the Working Group of the Community Advisory Committee on the Penn district, which included MCB4, recommended to "Guarantee the provision for future Through-Running on as many tracks as technically feasible, and do so as quickly as possible"

and “Study all possible options, including a deeper new station, to avoid demolishing the southern blocks.” An effective way to achieve these goals is to implement Through-Running now, in the existing station.

“Through-Running” is the method used by all subways and many regional and long-distance train systems where trains pick up and drop off passengers at a station and continue to the next station or yard. This is the current mode of operation for most Amtrak trains at Penn Station. And a modified version of it is used by some New Jersey Transit (NJT) and Long Island Railroads (LIRR). In Paris, France, for example, such regional systems run up to twenty-four (24) trains per track, per hour at stations just as busy as Penn Station.

This contrasts with the “Terminal”¹ approach, where trains make their final stop at a center city terminal and must turn back - with or without passengers - to a yard or to their point of origin. Currently, most NJT and LIRR trains use this method during peak hours. Operating this way means that each track can accommodate a maximum of two to three trains per hour. According to the MTA, the proposed Southern Expansion that requires razing three blocks between West 30th and West 31st Streets would be operated as a Terminal for the next 60 years.

There are numerous benefits to the Through-Running approach:

- Achieve maximum efficiency and return on investment
 - For each track built, Through-Running delivers at least three times more trains per hour than the Terminal option.
 - Avoid performance degradation for existing operations: in the Through-Running method, trains do not turn around and go back in Penn Station. They do not cross the path and conflict with incoming trains and thus do not cause a delay for each incoming train. With the goal of a total of 24 new trains per hour in the Southern Expansion, the Terminal approach could cause significant delays for existing trains at peak hour.
 - Reduce the costs of the South Expansion: it avoids a very large and complex construction in a congested district of Manhattan that will most likely trigger lengthy lawsuits related to evictions. Instead, Through-Running relies upon limited underground work and less expensive building of surface yards in areas with available space, which will limit delays and construction overruns.
- Deliver safer and better quality commute to millions of riders
 - Safer platforms: the significantly higher efficiency of Through-Running allows a reduction of the number of tracks to deliver the needed increase in capacity. In turn, the reduction in number of tracks frees up space, which can be used to widen the platforms². This would make it easier to install more stairs and escalators in spite of the many columns in the station. The Terminal option would not allow platform widening in the current station or Southern Expansion plan.

¹ Also called “Hub and Spoke”

² This is similar to reducing the number of roadway lanes and widening the sidewalks.

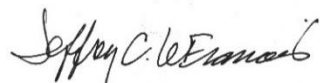
- No more queuing in the halls: riders could go to their platforms as soon as the track has been assigned and would not have to wait until all alighting passengers have left the platforms, which lengthens the boarding process and delays trains.
- Infuse this project with equity
 - Through-Running expands our regional transportation network by linking many neighborhoods and increasing housing and job opportunities across the region. It requires development of a station and yards in distributed locations while preserving small businesses in Manhattan.
 - This contrasts to the Terminal approach of creating billions of dollars in additional wealth for developers of Class A office buildings in the heart of Manhattan.

The objections to Through-Running do not stand up to scrutiny:

- Disruption to ongoing passenger operations during construction: Initial work on yards and underground track connectivity outside of Penn Station is independent from station and platforms. Completing this work would allow some trains to change from terminating trains to through trains. The resulting increase in track efficiency will allow unused tracks to be decommissioned one by one to widen the platforms and achieve the maximum capacity. Detailed studies have demonstrated how to implement Through-Running without negatively impacting current operations³.
- In the foreseeable future, a lighter ridership at peak hour will reduce pressure on operation and create more space and time for platform conversion: The opening of the LIRR East Side Access next year will substantially decrease the number of LIRR trains and passengers to Penn from Long Island. There is a minimum four-year period before the Metro-North Penn Station Access program will partially fill out this gap. And recently NJT and LIRR predicted that the ridership in general will be lowered by 25% due to post COVID⁴ practice to work from home.

We ask that billions of taxpayers' dollars not be poured into an antiquated approach that is ineffective, does not resolve riders needs and is inequitable. We trust you will direct your agencies to cooperate with each other and choose the right approach to build a world class station.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey LeFrancois
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4

³ [PENN STATION THROUGH-RUNNING CONSTRUCTION AND DEMOLITION SCHEDULE OPERATIONS DIAGRAMS](#)
[Benefits of Through-Running in New Jersey.](#)

⁴ [New York Times. January 21st.](#)



Christine Berthet
Co-chair
Transportation Planning Committee



Dale Covino
Co-chair
Transportation Planning Committee

cc: Hon. Jerry Nadler, U.S. Congressman
Hon. Chuck Schumer, U.S. Senator
Hon. Brad Hoylman, NYS Senator
Hon. Richard Gottfried, NYS Assembly
Hon. Erik Bottcher, NYC Council Member
Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
Stephen Gardner, President & CEO, Amtrak
Janno Lieber, Chair & CEO, MTA
Kevin S. Corbett, President & CEO, New Jersey Transit
Phillip Eng, President, MTA Long Island Rail Road
Polly Trottenberg, U.S. Department of Transportation
Amit Bose, Administrator, Federal Railroad Administration
Nuria Fernandez, Administrator, Federal Transit Administration