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**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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March 3, 2017

Gale A. Brewer  
Manhattan Borough President  
1 Centre Street  
New York, New York 10007

**Re: Pennsylvania Station Renovation**

Dear Borough President Brewer:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) believes that transportation infrastructure is a critical component of the city's economic health and contributes significantly to its quality of life. In particular, the creation of Moynihan Station and the redevelopment of Pennsylvania Station are crucial to New York City. Both of these projects have languished for years, but Moynihan Station is now underway and Governor Cuomo has set out a proposal for Penn Station.

In a resolution dated February 10, 2017, Manhattan Community Board 5 (CB5) praises a proposal made by Vishaan Chakrabarti for the redevelopment of Penn Station that includes the relocation of Madison Square Garden (MSG) to the western end of the Farley Post Office block, thus removing an obstacle to the station's renovation. The resolution calls the proposal innovative and exhibiting extraordinary vision and creativity, and calls on elected representatives and transportation leadership to work together to consider and analyze it, and to take concrete steps towards making the midtown transit corridor the proud 21<sup>st</sup> Century portal the resolution envisions.

Based on his earlier presentation to CB4, we also find Mr. Chakrabarti's proposal for Penn Station itself innovative and worthy of further study. We are concerned, however, that his proposal calls for the relocation of MSG to one specific site, the western end of the Farley block. And we note that CB5's resolution supporting a major, almost assuredly disruptive development, in Community District (CD) 4 was issued with neither consultation with CB4 nor proper consideration of the potential impact of the proposal on CD4.

We believe there are substantive issues with this proposed move that must be addressed in order to determine whether the proposal should move forward. We also believe that there are likely to be alternatives that address and overcome these issues, including more appropriate sites for a

relocated MSG. As a beginning, Mr. Chakrabarti's proposal warrants the steps necessary to determine its feasibility, and we call on our elected officials to ensure that they are taken.

We therefore recommend that all parties support a call for Governor Cuomo and the state to pause and consider the concrete steps necessary to determine the feasibility of Mr. Chakrabarti's plan and to explore alternatives to the Governor's current plan

### **A Broad Transportation Context**

Manhattan CDs 4 and 5 are home to an unprecedented number of major transportation facilities. The future Moynihan Station, the Port Authority Bus Terminal and the Manhattan Lincoln Tunnel entrances are in CD4, while Penn Station and the proposed Gateway Project are in CD5. As we have written regarding the Moynihan Station project, we strongly believe that there must be a broad transportation context that informs all of the current and proposed projects. It makes no sense to consider them as independent projects with no effects on each other. Responding to letters from CB4 and our elected officials, the Port Authority agreed last fall to take a broader approach to its efforts to redevelop the Port Authority Bus Terminal.

We strongly recommend that the proposed Penn Station redevelopment similarly be considered in a comprehensive transportation framework.

### **Traffic and Other Neighborhood Disruptions**

CD4 between 30<sup>th</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Streets, between Eighth and Twelfth Avenues, is undergoing an extraordinary transformation. The proposed site for MSG's relocation, the western end of the Farley block, is across Ninth Avenue from a full-block Brookfield development that is under construction; the development's public plaza will be directly across the avenue from the proposed MSG site. The Hudson Yards complex is one block farther west, with two large office buildings flanking a multi-story retail mall on the west side of Tenth Avenue.

We have long been concerned about the traffic impact of several million square feet of new commercial, residential and retail space concentrated in a small area, especially one surrounding an entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel and adjacent to the Post Office's Morgan Annex. The proposed MSG site would add pedestrian, automobile and truck traffic to this already high congested area. While the sidewalks full of boisterous fans and streets full of automobiles, taxis and large trailer trucks around the current MSG suggest that the increase in traffic would likely be significant, the actual incremental amount of traffic is unknown. For this reason alone, the proposal to move MSG onto the Farley block must be evaluated carefully.

We recommend that a comprehensive traffic study be conducted, possibly by updating the Hudson Yards Environmental Impact Statement to include the Brookfield development and the proposed relocation of MSG.

### **Potential Engineering Constraints**

CB5's resolution notes that MSG's supporting columns significantly constrain any improvements to the track and platform level of Penn Station. A Moynihan Station Community

Advisory Committee in which CB4 has participated was told that the supporting columns required for a new MSG on the west end of the Farley block are precluded by similar considerations for the tracks below the building. It is possible that with sufficient public and political interest these engineering constraints could be overcome, but that currently is unknown.

We therefore recommend that any engineering obstacles be looked at carefully in order to determine whether the proposal is physically possible. This information may be available from the Vornado-Related joint venture (see below).

### **MSG is Privately Owned**

Any plans to move or alter MSG face the reality that the facility is privately owned. James Dolan was on the dias last fall when Governor Cuomo announced the state's plans for the redevelopment of Penn Station, which included the razing of MSG's Paramount Theater. He did not appear to be thrilled to be present. Mr. Chakrabarti, who was part of the team working on the Moynihan/Penn Station project during Governor Spitzer's administration, says that MSG signed a deal with Moynihan Station Venture (the joint venture between Vornado and Related) to move into the back of the Farley building approximately a decade ago. The three private parties attempted to negotiate a deal with the State to finalize the move, but Spitzer resigned and everything fell apart. Since then, MSG has invested \$1 billion in the renovation of its existing facility, perhaps reducing their willingness to consider a move. However, some people believe that even with the renovation the arena remains substandard because of infrastructure constraints that cannot be overcome in its current location.

It is imperative that the willingness of MSG to move be ascertained, but it is likely that this must be done in private discussions among the parties. We recommend that our elected officials ensure that these explorations proceed.

### **Project Timing**

Finally, Governor Cuomo and the state must be willing to commit to considering alternatives, which likely would mean that the project could not be completed, or perhaps even started, during Mr. Cuomo's term as governor. Governor Cuomo's exhortation that "we are New Yorkers" as a call to action for long-stalled projects is thrilling, but it runs the risk of moving before potentially better alternatives are properly vetted.

We believe that Governor Cuomo has New York's best interests at heart and hope that if presented with a better alternative to his Penn Station plan he would be willing to determine its viability before pressing forward with his current plan.

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CB4 joins CB5 in wishing to see a plan for the redevelopment of a Penn Station that contributes to a significantly better transportation infrastructure and is an appropriately grand portal for New York City. We believe that Mr. Chakrabarti's proposal is worthy of serious consideration, and we believe that where there is one good alternative there are likely to be others, including ones that overcome the obstacles discussed above. Most importantly, we need our elected

representatives, Empire State Development and transportation leaders to address these issues quickly and thoroughly.

We request that you convene a Penn Station Task Force meeting as soon as possible to formulate the concrete steps that will enable our elected representatives to lead the discussion on addressing these issues.

Sincerely,



Delores Rubin  
Chair  
Manhattan  
Community Board 4



John Lee Compton, Co-Chair  
Chelsea Land Use Committee



Betty Mackintosh, Co-Chair  
Chelsea Land Use Committee



Jean Daniel Noland  
Chair, Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee

cc: Hon. Andrew Cuomo, Governor  
Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor  
Hon. Brad Hoylman, State Senate  
Hon. Richard Gottfried, State Assembly  
Hon. Corey Johnson, City Council  
Manhattan Community Board 5