

Op-ed: Momentous transportation projects need an overarching plan to link them together

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by Christopher Ward

Two huge municipal projects will define the future of Manhattan and the region. Penn Station is one; the Port Authority Bus Terminal is the other.

These two projects are without question the most important city transportation initiatives in almost 100 years. Servicing more than a half-million commuters per day, these projects raise serious questions about the city itself and the future of mobility, office work and the entire West Side of Manhattan.

The previous governor tended to the needlessly monumental in his efforts: the expensive and poorly placed great hall at LaGuardia Airport, the even more convoluted [AirTrain project](#) and the soulless Moynihan Train Hall. To her credit, Gov. Kathy Hochul has reversed this focus and has [put transit riders and the community first](#). That is the critical first step as these projects move forward. Unfortunately, the city has a long way to go before these projects fully reflect this new approach.

A massive real estate play

Though the [existing Penn Station is universally reviled](#), the [new redevelopment vision](#) remains a massive real estate play in search of a transit project. The unspecified and murky financing of the project through the construction of 10 large towers raises the question of what exactly is driving this plan.

What are the real transit priorities? Do we need this amount of density to even fund the project? What is the financial tax structure and potential risk of such a massive venture? Where will office demand be in the post-Covid economy? And, finally, is this the city we will want to live in?

Many elected and community officials have begun to raise these important questions. It is time to begin answering them. Otherwise, we might well repeat the mistakes of the original Penn Station and replace it with a canyon of bleak office towers. The city pulled back from an equally misplaced plan for Times Square years ago. We need to do it again.

But to fully realize this historic opportunity, consideration must be given to the replacement of the bus terminal. It's four blocks north of Penn Station, and it services more daily bus commuters than rail passengers. These two projects should be inextricably linked to create a new urban vision for the West Side that's built on transit-oriented community development.

Unfortunately, each project is proceeding as if the other does not exist. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey is seeking public comments on the new terminal while the Metropolitan Transportation Authority appears to be hoping simple inertia will carry the day for the redevelopment of Penn Station.

Reimagine the city's future

It is time for Mayor Eric Adams and Hochul to forge a new partnership and take this opportunity to demonstrate that collectively we can envision a place where people live, work and commute, a place where infrastructure is the foundation of the community, not the other way around.

Now is the time for optimism and ambition: the alchemy that built the city. Let's not once again grind through meaningless public hearings; instead, let's step back and embrace the soaring opportunity to reimagine the city's future. If we don't, we will only rebuild the same mistakes, and that's a dreary prospect indeed.

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