

## OPINION

# Train Daddy speaks: Andy Byford explains why Penn Station needs through-running out the other side instead of a dead-end new terminal

By Daily News Editorial Board

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Last Thursday was a public online seminar sponsored by [ReThinkNYC](#) about finding better alternatives to [Amtrak's plan for an \\$11 billion stub-end terminal](#) in Manhattan south of Penn Station, known as Block 780. One of the people calling in was Andy Byford, the former head of the [city's transit system](#) who was later commissioner of [Transport for London](#) before being hired for his current post as executive vice president in charge of high-speed rail for Amtrak.

*He spoke for five minutes and we print his monologue in full.*

First of all I am honored to be in a conversation with people that I regard as absolutely luminaries in the transit space, people like Prof. [Robert] Paaswell, people like Dr. [Vukan] Vuchic. These are luminaries to me in the field of, not only transport planning, but in the particular area we're talking about today, namely through-running.



*Andy Byford, president of New York City Transit, rides the subway back to the MTA offices after leaving City Hall after a meeting with Mayor Bill de Blasio on Tuesday, July 10, 2018. (Jefferson Siegel / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)*

I was very encouraged to hear Assemblymember [Tony] Simone talk about the benefit of avoiding demolishing a beautiful part of New York City, which although I live in D.C. now, is a city that is so

dear to my heart. I feel I'm an adopted New Yorker, I love that place and it would break my heart to see beautiful buildings torn down on Eighth and Seventh Aves. when they don't need to be.

I should say at the get-go, that I'm not speaking on behalf of Amtrak. I'm speaking as a railway professional. I've worked in transit now for 34 years. But I just feel this is a golden opportunity — and the assembly member mentioned that — and one of the other speakers also mentioned the benefits of through-running and made reference to what happened in London

London learned that lesson. There are two effectively two cross London railroads.

There's the Elizabeth Line, which I had the pleasure of opening with Her Majesty the Queen back in 2022, and that's has been transformative in that where people used to have to jump on the Central Line, had to get off at Paddington and then go down to the Central Line and or down to Lancaster Gate and go through Central London to go to East London to Liverpool St. and then go out the other side, now they don't have to.

The Central Line has been immediately relieved of pressure and you've got a state of the art, very high speed actually, through-service state of the art railway, under the wires. Beautiful stations, air conditioned, which at a stroke has been a game changer for London, connecting not only the key parts of Central London, but also Heathrow Airport, Paddington, Liverpool St., Canary Wharf and the City of London. It is a game changer. People in Frankfurt, people in Amsterdam, people in Paris and dare I say, New York, are probably gnashing their teeth because that was a game changer for London.

Well, I live in the States now, I'm going to be an American hopefully in a few years time and I want to do my bit for the States. So it seems to me that this is a golden opportunity for the U.S. and for New York City to have something similar to the Elizabeth Line, to have something that has that economic regenerative impact in New York.

And the other corridor of course, was Thameslink, that preceded Crossrail, but that's the north/south corridor. There again, once upon a time you used to rock up in South London and have to get on the Tube you'll be getting on the Vic Line or you're getting on the Northern and have to go up to Houghton or Kings Cross to go north.

Now, you don't have to do that and what London has seen is the benefit of that cross-London traffic and that through-running because you've got not only the economic benefits of the City but the knock-on effect of north, south, east and west of businesses popping up, of housing being developed and of relief to the existing transport lines.

So I don't know how this is going to pan out, but what I would say, Sam [Turvey]: is good for you for at least calling the question. This is a golden opportunity. It's not just about building something that's more aesthetically pleasing — important as though that is, Penn Station is kind of an embarrassment — but you can't fix it by just putting in a few light boxes, by just heightening the ceilings, by just widening a few corridors.

If we're going to do all of that, why not take the opportunity to fix the damn thing once and for all, which is, I'm going to say: get rid of the pillars, which means move MSG, but at the very least, do something with the track configuration to enable through-running.

So that's it, that's my pitch. I do stress that's my personal opinion. I'm not speaking on behalf of Amtrak. I don't know all the facts. If it was the case that someone asked me to have a look at this, I'll be honored to do that, but I'm just speaking as a private person who cares about New York City,

who cares about the States and who's seen what good looks like along with people far smarter than me like Prof. Paaswell and Dr. Vuchic. So thank you so much.