

ReThinkNYC

Angry Block 780 Resident—Gene Sinigalliano—Wants Sequestered Amtrak Penn Transformation Jury to Get Answers to Some Questions

I note that while Governor Kathy Hochul, Assemblymember Tony Simone, State Senator Erik Bottcher, Borough President Brad Hoylman-Sigal, and Controller Mark Levine have all declared my Block 780 neighborhood off-limits to demolition plans, Amtrak invited commercial development proposals as part of their Request for Letters of Interest (RFLOI). My neighbors and I have wanted to be in a position to respond to any such submissions that call, in whole or in part, for the demolition of our neighborhood—which will serve to displace many residents and small business jobs. It will also destroy much viable Class B and C office space and many historic and architecturally noteworthy buildings. As it appears our inputs will not be solicited before Amtrak narrows the finalists to one, I set forth below further commentary from me on this subject. I take no issue with Andy Byford’s efforts as he is a long overdue breath of fresh air and competence for these important projects but I do question the “gag” component of Amtrak’s procurement procedures on a project generating this much public interest. Notwithstanding Amtrak’s procedures, I include questions, expressed or implied, that I would like to see answered for the sequestered Amtrak Penn Transformation Jury before any decisions are made.



-Photo Credit: Rich James

Aug. 30, 2022: Gene Sinigalliano is a resident of Block 780 (uptown side of W. 30th Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues). He is seen here speaking at an Empire Station Coalition Rally held on the steps of Farley Post Office on behalf of angry neighborhood residents.

My Speech at April 26 Press Conference of Local Elected Officials at Penn Station– Which Includes Implicit Questions for the Sequestered Amtrak Penn Transformation Jury

“My name is Eugene Sinigalliano. I am here representing my at-risk-of-destruction community to the south of Penn Station as I was the only ‘at risk’ member of both Penn Station Advisory Groups.

Amtrak claims their protocols prevent them from disclosing proprietary and other sensitive information to the public in the Penn Station Request For Proposals. But my neighbors and I believe there must be transparency and accountability especially concerning possible destruction of our community before any decision is made by Amtrak. We have a right to know which plans, if any, are saying they need to demolish our neighborhood. We need to be informed about specifics like this before a recommendation is made to the Amtrak Board so we can be more fully heard on the possible fate of our community. We are steadfastly opposed to any plan that includes demolition of our neighborhood and we should have the ability to voice these concerns on a fully informed basis before any decisions are made.

My community is extremely upset that we may lose our homes, business, employees will lose their jobs and historic buildings including our beautiful St John the Baptist Church will be destroyed. We have lived in constant fear and tremendous stress for over 5 years about what will happen to us and our entire neighborhood.

Now former Governor Andrew Cuomo who is not currently elected to represent anyone wrote an op-ed recommending demolition of at least one square block of Midtown West in order to build new underground terminal tracks to the south of Penn Station to meet alleged future capacity needs.

Cost-effective plans have been put forward that do not involve demolition including ReThinkNYC’s plan. These call for Penn Station to be adaptively reconfigured to allow the through-running of trains as opposed to terminating them at Penn Station. Many believe through-running can meet current and future capacity needs at Penn Station, do so for far less money, improve the commuting experience, and provide other transformative benefits.

Neither the Railroads original demolition plan before Andy Byford was appointed, nor Cuomo's demolition plan, nor ReThinkNYC’s adaptive reconfiguration plans have undergone capacity studies backed by Rail Traffic Controller simulation software (RTC) that the rail industry always uses for projects of this magnitude.

In view of the wildly different costs of the plans and the possible destruction of our vibrant neighborhood by some plans, we question how such an important determination can be made without thorough independent studies using RTC.

Penn Station’s redevelopment is too important not to require RTC modelling. It is the most reliable quantitative tool available to resolve competing visions to meet capacity needs at Penn Station. With billions and billions of our precious taxpayer money at stake, the public demands accountability and transparency.”

**More Questions for the Sequestered Amtrak Penn Transformation Jury
On Each Penn Station Proposal Submitted (Renderings Set Forth Below Will Likely
Differ From Actual Submissions)**



-2023 Rendering by Vishaan Chakrabarti/PAU Associates and HOK

Penn Transformation Partners [ASTM/Halmar]: To their credit, ASTM/Halmar have never proposed to tear down our neighborhood to fund Penn Station improvements and they have been very open to through-running solutions (and early on produced a drawing of a 12 track through-running plan very similar to that of ReThinkNYC with some improvements in circulation to the ReThinkNYC plan along the southeast corner of the station) that do not require adding terminal tracks to the south. I believe they have even promised to cap and absorb cost overruns as part of their proposed partnership with Amtrak. Their removal of the Hulu Theater, while definitely expensive, will eliminate the constant incursion of sound trucks on Eighth Avenue which impede pedestrian flow at the largest transit hub in America and mar the view from the Farley/Moynihan colonnade. It would also allow for natural light to come into the West side of the station. This plan also would lift the cross beams at the truck entrances on 33rd and 31st Streets and would implement a truck through-routing via MSG that would also get trucks off the streets and the public realm. These are very attractive features of safety and public realm issues to us. We realize that this was the first plan to nix moving Madison Square Garden to an alternate site and there are some pluses and considerable minuses to this approach. We do not doubt that the vertical support columns of MSG and 2 Penn Plaza negatively impact the circulation patterns in the station. The sequestered Amtrak Penn Transformation Jury should ask very hard questions about this. However, on balance, my neighbors and I would want the sequestered Amtrak Penn Station Jury to ascertain whether the many positive aspects of the ASTM/Halmar plan remain in place which would cause our neighborhood to favor it or were they somehow lost in translation.



-2025 Rendering by Alexandros Washburn, DRAW Global and the Grand Penn Community Alliance. Note Madison Square Garden location east of 2 Penn Plaza on the former Hotel Pennsylvania site. Under one alternative by this effort supertalls abound (as pictured above), but St. John the Baptist Church survives as does the facade of the McKim, Mead and White Power Station.

Grand Penn Partners [Macquarie]: Alex Washburn and the Grand Penn Community Alliance's (GPCA) proposed park and plans to move Madison Square Garden are laudable and worthy of consideration. However, my neighbors and I oppose any plan or alternative which sacrifices the neighborhood to do so. Saving the church and performing a facadectomy on the McKim, Mead and White power station is not satisfactory. We take GPCA representatives at their word, as they have indicated that the demolition alternative depicted above will only be pursued if the Railroads chose an expansion to the south of 31st Street. We would ask the sequestered Amtrak Penn Transformation jury for clarity on which alternative is being presented or are multiple alternatives being presented? The jury can guess where we stand on this one. We oppose all demolition proposals to allegedly accommodate through-running ranging from the Railroads' previous \$17 billion Penn southern expansion to add stub end terminal tracks or the RPA's Trans-Regional Express proposal which carries a price tag of \$71.5 billion in 2018 dollars and will only provide through-running capabilities after 2080.



Penn Forward Now: [Fengate]: Due to Amtrak’s procurement procedures, we know very little about the Penn Forward Now proposal except rumors but I can hazard some guesses: the architecture firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill assisted with the Moynihan and is mindful of President Trump’s executive order favoring classical architecture, so I predict some extension of the Moynihan is likely and include the above. While my hypothetical focuses on the Moynihan the approach is similar to Richard Cameron and Renaissance Rails’s deeply authentic classical proposed Penn Station which combined a perimeter based on the original Penn Station and upper portions modeled on the [Stanford White Madison Square Garden](#). Cameron’s proposal favored a through-running solution within the envelope of Penn Station and did not look to demolish the neighborhood south of the station. However, the ARUP firm is also part of the Penn Forward Now [Fengate] team, and was previously hired to design the proposed extension of terminal tracks south of Penn Station and we believe they will favor a deep cavern southern expansion. Kohn, Pedersen and Fox were also part of the team charged with designing a southern expansion of Penn Station. We believe they and The Penn Forward Now team will likely look to develop the property over a demolished Block 780 with some style of supertall (which I show in the rendering above).

As with the Grand Penn Partners proposal, we will want the sequestered Amtrak Penn Transformation jury to ask hard questions about why an expansion to the south of Penn Station is even being contemplated. As I indicated in my speech above, no RTC calculations have been performed to justify this incursion and such calculations are uniformly performed to predict capacity in situations such as this. While I am not a lawyer, I ask the sequestered Amtrak Penn Transformation jury: how can a project get through the “alternatives” phase of an environmental review process when it fails to use the software routinely used in the rail industry to measure capacity to predict the capacity that would be generated by the more environmentally friendly alternatives proposed by ReThinkNYC and others.

**And One More Question for the Sequestered Amtrak Penn Station Jury:
What If It Was *Your* Home Instead of Ours?**



-Photo Credit: Daily News

My neighbors, Block 780 residents Craig and Mary Barnes, shown here at one of Governor Hochul's 2023 press conferences, would lose their home of over 40 years on 30th Street if the proposal for a "deep cavern" expansion of Penn Station takes place. The Barnes, like me, would keep their home if the rail agencies instead implemented the modern and truly transformative operating model of through-running at Penn Station. What if it was *your* home instead of ours? Many small businesses and historic sites would also be spared if through-running is implemented.



-Photo Credit: Rich James

Eugene Sinigaliano speaking at the June 15, 2022 Rally on the steps of St. John the Baptist Church. Lynn Ellsworth, then Co-Coordinator and founder of Empire Station Coalition, rally sponsor (right of Eugene in photo)

Thank You,

Gene Sinigalliano

-President, 251 West 30th Street Residential Tenants Association

-Leader, Penn Area Residents Committee (Member Organization/Empire Station Coalition)

-Beautification Director of the Midtown South Community Council

-Residential Advisor, Empire State Development's Community Advisory Committee Working Group (CACWG)

-251 W 30th St Residential Tenants Assoc Representative, New York Penn Station Working Advisory Group (SWAG)



-Just Released MTA Rendering: FX Collaborative

Editor's Note: "It's just a box of rain.....". Giving new meaning to the phrase "a day late and a dollar short" the MTA has released renderings of its last Penn Station iteration which appeared in [Monday's The Real Deal in a piece authored by Kathryn Brenzel](#). We will likely comment on this further next week as we have only seen one rendering which appears to put large white boxes on the corner of 33rd and 8th Avenue and presumably 31st and 8th Avenue. While we hope to comment on this further, we believe this effort represents an attempt to put a better face--however minimalist--on the fact that the MTA underestimated HVAC needs and cost for Penn Reconstruction which was under their leadership. As a preliminary matter, we question why this rendering wasn't made available to the public long ago as well as a more fulsome discussion of how the MTA got to this point (for instance, what happened to Scottish Architect John McAslan's work?). While MTA reps have been lauding their bringing things in "on time and on budget" and are very proud of their work on the LIRR Concourse they owe the public a more humble and forthright accounting of how these "boxes of rain" came to be. And while they are at it, maybe the MTA can explain where the RTC calculations are for Penn Station as they routinely run them for projects of this magnitude. Better yet, if they have been completed but are being withheld from the public and even Andy Byford through some style of legal maneuvering, lets end the continued "masochism tango" and get this critical and foundational data in front of the public and decision makers. While the MTA and allies are asking for transparency and inclusion from every one else, why don't they dig deeper and square up with the public. They could show good faith by joining Andy Byford's effort, where they very much have been invited to participate, instead of sitting it out.

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ReThinkNYC is an organization dedicated to applying innovative thinking to the future of New York City and its greater region. We focus integrally on transportation infrastructure, land use, governance, and socio-economic issues. ReThinkNYC is a not-for-profit corporation and is pursuing its educational and advocacy efforts for Penn Station through ReThinkPennStationNYC. ReThinkNYC's executive ranks do not take a salary.

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