

CACWG Meeting #4: Through-Running Response to Follow-Up Questions Submitted After the Meeting

Questions from: Christine Berthet, CB4

Question: Assuming the funding was available, would the following configuration work? If not, why?

- New tracks 5x to 9x are built under 30th Street and are enabled for thru running.
- The station for these tracks is located on the eastern side of Site 1.
- New tracks 5x to 9x connect to a new east tunnel that reaches 2nd Avenue.
- A new rail station is built on 3rd Avenue to connect to Lexington and 2nd Avenue subways with 5 tracks.
- Tracks 1 to 4 are lowered by 25 ft and enabled for through-running with possibly wider platforms (they could be lowered once the new capacity is on-line).

This configuration would deliver improved service to commuters and reduce crowding on the streets, a condition that cannot be mitigated according to the EIS and that threatens to severely limit the amount of real estate development. This configuration would also provide flexibility and capacity for the railroads and avoid most of the destruction of Sites 1 and 2.

Response: This proposal would create a separate new station that would not be integrated with the existing station in terms of both rail operations and easy and smooth flow of pedestrians between the stations. Two separate stations would have, in general, less overall capacity than a single station alternative.

Another problem with the suggested configuration is one of horizontal geometry. A station located on Block 754 (Site 1) would take up almost the entirety of the block due to the length of 12-car trains; it could not be located just in the eastern end of the block. This would place the beginning of the platforms and platform tracks near 9th Avenue, slightly to the west of the A interlocking. In this configuration it would be geometrically impossible to connect the new tracks to the existing interlocking. A key goal of the Expansion Project is to integrate rail operations between the existing station and the Expansion as much as possible to enhance the ability to respond to service disruptions. By not connecting to the existing interlocking, the suggested configuration would not provide that flexibility.

The problem with lowering Tracks 1 to 4 is one of vertical geometry. If Tracks 1 to 4 were lowered enough for them to be able to get below the 6th Avenue IND subway, they too could not connect to the existing interlocking and existing North River Tunnel, which will generally feed these tracks in the future.

Question: What is preventing the new station from being built under blocks 33rd to 34th street? The new development will require these blocks to be demolished anyway.

Response: One Penn Plaza sits in the center of this block. It is a 2 million square foot office building currently undergoing extensive renovation that will not be demolished as part of the GPP. There are low-rise buildings to the east and west of it on that block (Sites 4 and 5), which will be demolished to be re-developed as 1 Penn West and 1 Penn East, respectively.

The feasibility of a station to the north will be evaluated in the upcoming Alternatives Evaluation Report for the Expansion Project.

Question: If the new tracks are accommodating through-running they will be fairly deep. Why is it not possible to use underground boring to create the station and preserve Sites 2 and 3?

Response: See the response to your fourth question in the minutes of Meeting #3.

Questions from: Layla Law-Gisiko, CB4

Question: Who owns the tracks at Penn, in Manhattan, in NJ, in Queens, on Long Island?

Response: The tracks in Manhattan from river to river are owned by Amtrak. The Northeast Corridor (NEC) tracks in NJ (going south) and in Queens (going north) are owned by Amtrak, as are Sunnyside Yard and the Harold Interlocking. NJ TRANSIT owns its branch lines in New Jersey, and LIRR owns its branch lines going east through Queens and Long Island, as well as the West Side Yard in Manhattan.

Question: Who will own the expansion (tracks, platforms)?

Response: The railroads have not yet determined the best ownership arrangement for the expansion facilities.

Question: How much more platform space would be regained by removing columns that support MSG and 2Penn?

Response: Since removing these buildings is not contemplated by the Penn Station projects or the GPP, we have not calculated this area precisely. Some of the columns supporting MSG and 2 Penn are on the platforms and some are in between the tracks. In addition, not all of the columns support these buildings; some support the two passenger levels of Penn Station. Even if one or both of those buildings were removed, additional structures would replace them, so additional columns would be added and/or some would likely be reused where feasible. Because of all these factors, there is not a simple answer to this question. However, under no scenario would removal of either or both buildings alleviate the need for Penn Expansion.

Question: What are the yards capacities?

Response: The West Side Yard has 23 tracks that can be used to lay-over trains. This is an upper limit; sometimes one or more of these tracks has to be used for other purposes. The Sunnyside Yard has a similar upper bound, but operations in this yard are complex, so the number of tracks available for layover can vary appreciably.

Question: Which yards will Metro North use?

Response: It will share the West Side Yard with LIRR.

Question: If Penn is already over capacity how will Penn accommodate additional ridership from Metro North?

Response: When East Side Access becomes operational, as many as one-half of LIRR trains may be diverted to Grand Central Terminal. Metro-North trains will backfill many of those slots when Penn Station Access comes on-line, and LIRR will increase its service to Penn station gradually and backfill the remaining slots.

Question: You said that Penn cannot be the only way to grow ridership - how many and where are the new train hubs planned?

Response: The railroads are not currently planning any new train stations. This observation was offered to emphasize that an integrated regional rail network, if ever implemented, would require additional hub stations.

Question: Are you opting for the Paris model (multiple train hubs), or the London model (few train hubs)?

Response: The same response as above. The observations about Paris and London were offered as examples of successful through-running networks.

Question: Wouldn't the ADA issue you raise about ReThink's plan as to columns at the track level also be implicated with the large renovation you plan via the Empire Station complex, especially with respect to the floors immediately above the track platforms?

Response: Placing new columns less than 6 ft from the edge of a platform in the reconstruction project would likely be viewed as introducing a new ADA deficiency and would likely not be permitted. So, we would not introduce columns less than 6 ft from the edge of any platforms in the reconstruction project.

Question: Are you leaving the 1910 platform widths in place, despite all the issues they present? Are you entitled to grandfathered ADA status?

Response: The platform widths are not themselves an ADA deficiency. It is possible that we will be required to re-position some obstructions, which we would do. As discussed in the meeting, widening the platforms to support through-running has fatal flaws. The same would be true if the platforms were widened without through-running, and this would reduce the train capacity of the station. There is no feasible plan to widen the platforms.

Question: What would be the impact of through-running on yard capacity? Increase, decrease?

Response: Revenue-to-revenue through-running via the Expansion would have no effect on the capacity of the West Side and Sunnyside Yards.

Question: Can you demonstrate that the proposed plan would not just alleviate the current capacity and congestion issue but also offer room for growth?

Response: Service plans that would accommodate growth projected out as far as 2045 are being developed and evaluated as part of the engineering studies that are still in progress. The results will be disclosed and evaluated in the NEPA process for the Penn Expansion.

Question: Can you circulate the 2014 through-running white paper?

Penn Station Master Plan



Response: That paper can be downloaded at:

http://irum.org/20140807_Amtrak_NYP_Thru_Running_Assessment.pdf