



PCAC

PERMANENT CITIZENS
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Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA
Testimony to
NYS Senate Standing Committees on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions; Finance; and Cities
by Lisa Daglian, Executive Director
June 24, 2022

Good day, I'm Lisa Daglian, Executive Director of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC). Chairwoman Krueger, Chairman Comrie, Chairman Sepulveda and esteemed colleagues, thank you for holding this hearing today.

The reconstruction of Penn Station is something that will affect commuters across our Councils. We can't wait until 2035 or beyond to see improvements in this major hub. The time to fix Penn Station is now.

A more inviting and user-friendly Penn Station is good for riders and good for the region, and we're glad that Governor Hochul has moved reconstruction to the top of the list. Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North commuters deserve a world class train hall – including West-of-Hudson riders who now come in via NJTransit, the new riders from the Bronx and beyond who will soon come in when Penn Access is complete, and those who will come via the increases in service thanks to Third Track, when that comes online.

Penn Station as it stands today is dark, dingy, crowded – in a word, it's abysmal. Anyone who comes through it usually does so because they have little choice – and with the option of LIRR service to Grand Central coming online in the near future, more may make the decision to go to another station. In fact, the relatively short period of time after that service starts and before Penn Access brings Metro-North riders in on the New Haven line will be the perfect window for the reconstruction work to get done. The time to fix Penn Station is now.

Penn Station wasn't equipped to handle pre-COVID travel patterns – when 600,000 passengers passed through the crowded corridors – and it certainly won't be able to manage the future demand the additional Metro-North, NJ Transit and Amtrak ridership will bring. It can barely handle the diminished number of passengers now, though if you've been there recently, you've seen the increasing numbers of commuters, something we hope will continue to steadily trend upwards. To accommodate growth, we need an improved Penn, and hope to see it accompanied by even better and more reliable service with more operating funds from you and your fellow state legislators.

As more people return to offices and travel around the region for leisure and other activities, their first choice should be to get onboard transit. As we've all heard Janno say, "Transit is the antidote to climate change." That's more and more true with each passing year, and as congestion pricing comes online, we're going to need a nice front door to the city to welcome travelers. That means fixing Penn Station.



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Reinvigorating our region's economy means drawing people to New York and giving them a first class first glimpse of what we have to offer. Ensuring commuters have a welcoming and safe space to land – with plenty of amenities while they're waiting for their trains – will help get them back onboard. They, along with subway riders who stream into and out of Penn Station, will benefit from the new entrances and pedestrian spaces. In addition, the reconstructed Penn Station will feature more accessibility options, with 18 new escalators and 11 new elevators to platforms. The station will be easier to navigate with updated wayfinding and will double passenger circulation space. These are critical improvements to create a transit system that truly serves and welcomes all passengers and benefits *all* New Yorkers.

The issue is not whether we want to see improvements to Penn Station, it's when. To that we say, the sooner the better! The Penn Station Reconstruction Plan on the table will get us the transit improvements we need now, even as critical Gateway plans proceed.

The current plan to improve Penn Station is absolutely required and way past due. It addresses the multitude of deficiencies that riders have long complained about and will create a space worthy of travelers. It will meet not only future, but present travel demands, and help drive economic growth, while creating public transportation in a brighter, airier, and more accessible space that is truly equitable for all New Yorkers. We must fix Penn, and we must fix Penn now.

Thank you.