

CONTACT

Samuel Turvey, Chairperson of ReThinkNYC

turveysa@gmail.com; 201-274-3109

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ReThinkNYC **A Rumination for the Weekend:** **Number I of a Continuing Series**

The Governor's Proposal for a Subterranean Penn Station? Or Our Proposal for a Modernized Re-Creation of the Original?

ReThinkNYC's proposals for Penn Station, through-running, regional transit, the immediate neighborhood and an above ground station form a coherent whole.

We have, however, been principally focusing on the through-running aspects of our proposals as they are foundational to everything else we propose. Our through-running proposal is also of keen importance as it would obviate the need to demolish a large swath of 31st Street, displacing residents and businesses and destroying historic structures and neighborhood fabric. It remains to be seen if the pause on the Empire Station Complex will result in meaningful course changes for the project or will, instead, serve as a modest steam valve for aggrieved citizens before the same flawed proposal emerges unchanged and proceeds to the final environmental impact statement hearing in a few months. We are cautiously neutral on the subject.

We will continue our focus on through-running for the reasons cited above but are commencing with a weekend rumination series which will focus on the above ground station so that this important issue isn't lost in the compressed time frames for additional public input set by the Governor and the Empire State Development Corporation. These ruminations will be shorter (after this introduction to the series) and, given the subject matter, more visual in nature. This is in no way to suggest that the above ground station issue is not of substantial importance but does recognize that we should resolve the transit operational plan and, then, land on a station design. Regrettably, the Empire Station Complex

proposal has this inverted. It is a real estate development plan first, with the station second and transit third. The illogic of this shows in the many dysfunctions of the proposal.

For our first rumination:

Which Penn Station is Worthy of this City and Region?

#1

The Proposed Empire Station Complex



Offering all the fluorescent charm of a late 1960s shopping mall, this is actually a recent MTA concept rendering of a new Penn Station renamed the Empire Station Complex. After years of debating, competitions and numerous proposed above ground stations (in addition to ours, see for example [Vishaan Chakrabarti / PAU proposal](#) and [Hugh Hardy's Vision for a New Midtown proposal](#)), the Empire Station Complex continues Penn Station as predominantly an underground station. The lessons and successes of the newly minted Moynihan Train Hall, which can only accommodate approximately 20% of Penn Station's pre-Covid passenger count, seem to be immediately lost as a subterranean station is proposed across 8th Avenue. Governor Cuomo thinks you'll accept this and developers like Vornado, who are declaring the neighborhood their campus, also find this acceptable. New Yorkers don't and with good reason--the present and projected Penn Station do not meet our standards or the moment. [Our polling shows that the vast majority of commuters want a great above ground station and most are open to or favor a rebuilding of the original.](#)

#2

A Rebuilt and Modernized Original Penn Station



Rendering by Nova Concepts

A bold and achievable alternative, a rebuilt original Penn Station, updated for the 21st century and beyond with modern track operations, through-running, cutting edge environmental approaches and utilization of all new technologies. Here, we see a rendering of a rebuilt original Penn Station's 7th Avenue arcade for today--high ceilings, clerestory windows and retail spaces. The original Penn Station

contained a series of such public spaces like Washington D.C.'s Union Station, Philadelphia's Union Street Station and our own Grand Central Terminal. In all, natural light is a defining feature. While some oppose rebuilding historic structures at a minimum, rebuilding the original Penn Station should be an exception to that bias. Casting the bias aside, such rebuilds are done in Europe and throughout the world and the results are stunning. Dresden's rebuild of its historic city in Germany, which had been firebombed during World War II, stands as a prime example. If Grand Central were destroyed would we really argue it would be improper to rebuild it?

Penn Station today and as projected under the Governor's plan falls well shy of what we should be accepting--a subterranean confused conglomeration of compromised spaces which promises 50 more years or more of soul crushing commutes. We have already endured these compromises for 50 plus years-- which leaves us now in the middle of a dystopian "100 years of Decrepitude". We need to do better.

Penn Station can be a leading competitive edge for our region or a mediocre, at best, stop gap as presently proposed.

We urge the Governor and all sponsors and supporters of the Empire Station Complex to think long and hard about the impact that complex will have on this region and juxtapose that against the opportunity we will be losing. Because something is "shovel ready" for federal funds doesn't mean it should happen. New York City is littered with failed infrastructure investments funded by the federal government that were built using this logic.

Some of us are old enough to remember a slogan in New York City in the 60's and early 70's, "Give a Damn". At ReThinkNYC we do "give a damn" and hope you will too. We want to see this region, city and the Penn Station neighborhood transition from the deeply flawed spectre of the Empire Station Complex to a transformative and wonderful addition to New York on a par with Rockefeller Center, Central Park, the Public Library, the consolidation of New York and its subway systems and other great

civic gifts.

Join the movement! [Rethink Penn Station NYC](#)

For details of the ReThinkNYC plan, [click here to see our complete proposal](#).

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ReThinkNYC is a New York City-based non-profit organization specialized in transportation infrastructure and how it relates to complex urban, governance and socio-economic issues.

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