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### **Gateway Program Update Public Hearing**

Good morning, and thank you, Chair Paulin, for holding this hearing today. My name is Liam Blank, and I am the Policy & Communications Manager for Tri-State Transportation Campaign.

*Tri-State is a 501(c)(3) non-profit policy and advocacy organization fighting for sustainable mobility in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.*

The Gateway Program will deliver a series of critically important projects that will fix one of the busiest and most fragile segments of the Northeast Corridor, which connects 20% of our nation's GDP. Of most significant priority, building a new rail tunnel under the Hudson River, and rehabilitating the existing tunnels, must be done proactively, instead of waiting for the next big infrastructure failure.

Nearly all the projects in the Gateway Program are necessary for expanding trans-Hudson capacity to meet the needs of commuters today and fifty years from now. We are very concerned, however, about the current plans for Penn Station.

There are currently three separate processes happening now that will ultimately determine what happens with Penn. There is the General Project Plan, or GPP, which is a land use plan for redeveloping the blocks surrounding the station for several new commercial office buildings akin to Hudson Yards.

It remains very unclear how much this new development will cost, how much it will generate in tax revenue, and where that revenue will be allocated.

Next, there is the MTA's Penn Station Renovation Plan, which will modernize the station's concourses, add some additional stairs and elevators between the concourse and platforms, as well as some other necessary improvements.

This project alone is expected to cost \$7 billion, which is surprising, given the lack of work that will be done at the track level, and the fact that Madison Square Garden and 2 Penn Plaza will still be left above the station. For comparison, it cost \$1.6 billion to build Moynihan, an entirely new train hall across the street from Penn.



Lastly, there is the Penn Expansion, a \$9 billion project of the Gateway Program, that aims to increase Penn's capacity for additional trans-Hudson rail service. One of the biggest problems with Penn is that it's pinned beneath MSG and 2 Penn Plaza. The expansion would add nine new stub-end terminal tracks below ground, with commercial development above it. There will be no new above-ground station. So, in other words, the current plan is to make the same mistake that was made in the 1960s.

The expansion is Amtrak's preferred alternative, and it is currently going through the federal NEPA review process. We are very concerned, though, that a more transformative and less destructive alternative is not getting the serious consideration that it deserves.

It has long been a goal of the region's planners to unify our disjointed commuter rail networks and run trains through Penn Station, so that a person living in Newark can have a single-seat ride to a job in Queens, and vice versa. Just because it's an old idea doesn't mean it's a bad one, and frankly, it's embarrassing that we haven't solved this problem yet.

Today, the station's operations as a terminal are incredibly inefficient. Trains have to cross paths when entering and exiting the station, which significantly reduces capacity, makes service much less reliable, and causes severe overcrowding in the concourses.

Additionally, the existing platforms are too narrow to safely accommodate passengers waiting for a train there like one would at any other station. So, why are we spending billions of dollars to "fix" Penn Station, while doing nothing to address the root cause of nearly all the station's problems?

Look no further than the Port Authority Bus Terminal, which is now on its third expansion, to understand the issue with terminals. We spend billions to expand, capacity fills up again, then we're told another expansion is needed. How many more blocks of Midtown will we need to level before we follow the lead of New York's peer cities and finally rethink the commuter rail paradigm?

Penn Expansion will allow for more trans-Hudson service, but it does so by doubling down on an inefficient and inequitable model. Through-running has the benefit of increasing Penn's capacity, while connecting more people to more jobs and affordable housing, and stimulating transit-oriented development in parts of the region that need it most.

The way commuter railroads operate today reflects outdated biases about where people and jobs are located, and how people want to move about the region. Relying on the railroads for service outside traditional work hours, "reverse-commuting," or to reach destinations beyond Manhattan, is difficult, unreliable, and, oftentimes, impossible. The railroads operate today as a premium shuttle service for "9-5" workers who live in the suburbs and work in Manhattan. Expanding Penn's terminal functions will only solidify this inequity.



The inefficient use of one of our region's most valuable assets—a robust and extensive rail network—contributes to worsening traffic congestion, segregation of people and opportunities, and unsustainable land use, particularly in the suburbs. Without a comprehensive plan to transform the commuter railroads into a unified regional rail network (with frequent, all day service), New York and New Jersey could waste billions of dollars on expensive new infrastructure, and still be ill-equipped to face two of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century: climate change and social inequality.

We must act urgently and aggressively to move toward a regional unified network, and through-running trains at Penn Station is at the crux of this transformation. We do not have time to wait until 2080, as Amtrak and MTA intend, to finally make this change—it will be too late by then.

Therefore, we are requesting that a serious cost-benefit analysis of through-running trains in the existing station is part of the NEPA process. And we mean a serious consideration—not Amtrak pre-picking their preferred alternative and then backing into it, which is the very thing the Port Authority got caught doing with the LaGuardia Airtrain.

We don't need any more sandbagging and siloed planning to uphold the status quo—we need a comprehensive plan that factors in the entire region and reflects the severity of the issues at hand. As New York looks to build a transit network for the future, we must do better than “business as usual.”

Thank you.