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Madison Square Garden

**It's time for a world-class Penn
Station.**

Read Borough President Mark Levine's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure
Recommendation concerning Madison Square Garden.

NYC's Next Big Thing? A Bold New Vision for Madison Square ...



For decades, the future of Penn Station has been tangled up in the question of whether Madison Square Garden could be relocated.

When MSG's special permit was last extended in 2013, the hope was that a ten-year term would be sufficient to plan and complete the relocation of the arena. But today a plan for relocation is no closer to reality than it was a decade ago.

50 years since its construction, MSG is still on top of Penn. And while the MTA and Amtrak have made significant improvements to the station in recent years, the busiest rail station in North America is far from the top tier transportation hub that it could and should be.

MSG may yet move. But there's a problem with continuing to wait for this: There is not currently a viable alternative site with a willing property owner, community buy-in, and mass transit access comparable to that of the arena's current location. There is also no clear way to pay for the multibillion-dollar cost of relocation.

But that doesn't mean we can't create a world class Penn Station.

By using the leverage of the special permit approval process, I believe we have a chance to—finally—make the vision of a grand train hub a reality. This will require cooperation by all railroads on the site (Amtrak, NJ Transit, MTA),

and it will require that MSG make significant accommodations and concessions to ensure that the arena is compatible with an improved Penn Station.

It is my view that key elements of such a plan should include:

- The creation of a new grand train hall on 8th Avenue (necessitating the demolition of the MSG Theater) as well as new station entrances at the midblock;
- A new perimeter building around MSG, which would allow station operations to be moved to the perimeter of the site, thus opening up room for a double height concourse throughout the station;
- Activation of the sidewalk via a new perimeter building which will include retail and other engaging uses on 8th Avenue;
- Clearance in the taxiway to allow through-traffic for loading trucks to enter on West 33rd Street and exit on West 31st Street; and
- A new truck loading area underneath the Arena, to avoid the current need for trucks to unload outside, which at present often causes disruptions in the surrounding streets.

I believe the case for demolishing the Theater at MSG and creating a grand train hall on 8th Avenue is particularly compelling. While the MTA estimates that only 30% of Penn passengers come from the west, that amount alone would make the 8th Avenue entrance the fourth busiest rail hub in America. The estimate of over 100,000 daily riders entering from the street on the west side of Penn dwarfs the 8,000 total riders currently using Moynihan daily. And the rapid growth of new housing and offices in Hudson Yards and nearby means the number of users entering Penn from this direction is certain to grow.

The presence of the Theater today means there is currently a blank wall on 8th Avenue, making for an extremely uninviting streetscape. Demolition of the Theater would open the façade for more active uses, allow a widening of the sidewalk, and eliminate the disruption of trucks unloading before shows on the corner of West 31st Street. A grand new entrance on 8th Avenue would pair nicely with the Moynihan Train Hall across the avenue and would help achieve the goal of unifying the whole two-block complex.

Implementing an ambitious redesign of Penn that is compatible with the Arena will require that MSG cooperate in significant ways. The special permit process should be used to ensure this outcome.

I support DCP's proposal for a zoning text amendment which would require MSG to provide adequate public spaces, amenities, and entrances compatible with the transit facilities and with above- and below-grade pedestrian circulation.

I also support DCP's assertion that MSG should enter into a restrictive declaration with the City, which will outline requirements and be recorded against the property. I believe that MSG should also exchange property rights for the so-called taxiway to accommodate an enclosed loading facility for MSG and loading operations for Amtrak and 2 Penn. This part of the block should also include new entrances to provide commuters access to Penn Station.

MSG also needs to provide the easements necessary to facilitate the conversion of the Theater at MSG into a new train hall on 8th Avenue and work on plans for the creation of a new façade around the perimeter of the arena that would relocate operational equipment and activate the sidewalk.

MSG must also improve accessibility in the arena for patrons with disabilities.

I support extending the special permit for a period of five years to allow time for completion of designs for a new transit hub, ensure cooperation from MSG, and focus the attention of the three rail agencies on coming to an agreement on this complicated project.

Transformation of Penn will not be possible without substantial federal support. We currently have strong partners in the White House, at US DOT, and in leadership in congress. That may not be true in the future.

There is now enormous momentum on the site, with the opening of Moynihan Train Hall, widening of the LIRR passage, the new entrance to Penn from 7th Avenue, and upgrades to the public plazas and commercial spaces in the 1 and 2 Penn buildings. These on-site improvements are coupled with massive investments in our regional transportation system now underway, including Penn Access and the Gateway program.

We must build on this momentum to once and for all transform Penn station into a world-class facility worthy of our great city. With sufficient focus and will from all parties, we have a chance

in the coming five years to lock in a plan for such a bold transformation. That opportunity may not come again. The time to act is now.

BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION

Therefore, the Manhattan Borough President recommends **approval** of DCP's ULURP Application No. N 230240 ZRM to amend the Zoning Resolution to add findings to Section 74-71.

And the Manhattan Borough President recommends **conditional approval** of Application No. C230238ZSM for a special permit pursuant to ZR 74-71 on the condition that the following criteria are met:

1. The term of the special permit be limited to a term of 5 years, during which time the Applicant shall present updated plans at a hearing of the community board and obtain certification from CPC that these plans continue to meet the findings set forth in ZR 74-71 and that the arena is compatible with Penn Station and the surrounding area.
2. The Applicant, within the 5-year term, work in good faith with Amtrak, the MTA, NJ Transit, and the DOT to develop plans that include the following elements, which shall be facilitated via easements and exchange of property rights with the appropriate parties:
 1. Repurpose the Theatre at MSG to serve as a new train hall with frontage, along with street level activation on 8th Avenue; and
 2. Ensure that the taxiway serves as a loading area that minimizes truck traffic and queueing in the public rights of way while providing new station entrances.
3. The Applicant work with DCP, Community Board 5 and local stakeholders to achieve CB5's recommendation to create an "ambitious public realm scheme.... that include[s] positive activation of the plazas, high quality public realm design, and improved wayfinding"; increased bike storage, and a public bathroom.

Downloads

- [MSG Special Permit ULURP](#)



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