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Port Authority's $30B budget draws a crowd

Daniel Geiger

In February, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey passed a sweeping $27.6 billion capital plan that creates one of the biggest pots of money in the New York City region for transit and infrastructure spending

Now advocates for major transit projects that were conspicuously left out of the capital budget are angling for a piece of that pie.

Among them is the New York Building Congress. On Tuesday it will host Patrick Foye, the executive director of the Port Authority, at a breakfast at the Hilton New York. The group, which represents construction companies and developers, will use the occasion to lobby Mr. Foye to have the Port Authority help fund the development of Moynihan Station and related projects that will expand its transit capacity.

To coincide with the breakfast, the Building Congress will be releasing a report that calls for the $700 million redevelopment of what today is the Farley Post Office on 8th Avenue into a train terminal that would serve as a grand annex to Penn Station. It also advocates a long talked about $14 billion rail tunnel project under the Hudson River that would increase both Amtrak's and New Jersey Transit's rail capacity into the city and alleviate congestion.

"I'm calling on more money for this," said Richard Anderson, the president of the Building Congress.

The Port Authority is already in charge of work under the Farely Post Office that is currently being done to expand train platforms in Penn station to extend farther west and for commuter accessways to those tracks to be constructed in the post office building. But the agency, which pledged $3 billion for a previous rail tunnel project that was subseqently cancelled by New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, so far has not included money in its budget for any spending on the Moynihan Station or tunnel project.

The Building Congress report also calls for Metro North rail service to be brought to Penn Station, a plan that the MTA has promised will come after it finishes its East Side Access project which will bring Long Island Rail Road trains into Grand Central Terminal for the first time. It also calls for a comprehensive study on how to improve the much-maligned Penn Station.

“Tomorrow Pat will address our report,” Mr. Anderson said.

Other groups have also begun to call for Port Authority money. A group of landlords, community members and transit experts, for instance, is pitching a rival project to the new Amtrak rail tunnel. They believe the No. 7 subway should be expanded via a new Hudson tunnel to Secaucus, N.J. The group, which is seeking $2 million for a study of its plan, has solicted help from the Port Authority, whose congested bus terminal on West 42nd Street would benefit. Meanwhile, Ken Lipper, a commissioner at the Port Authority, has called on the agency to spend more than a billion dollars fixing the terminal, which suffers from a daily backup of buses.

The Port Authority’s current capital budget is different than past spending plans in that it allows for the authority to adjust its spending priorities. This ostensible flexibility has opened the door for groups to lobby the authority to change its funding plans.