



May 23, 2017

<https://ny.curbed.com/2017/5/23/15681920/governor-cuomo-mta-penn-station-plan>

MTA

Governor Cuomo unveils ‘aggressive action plan’ to fix Penn Station, subway

The multi-part plan is intended to address New York’s myriad transit issues



Photo by Drew Angerer/Getty Images

BY [AMY PLITT](#)

It looks like Governor Andrew Cuomo has started [listening](#) to [his critics](#) when it comes to the infrastructure problems currently plaguing New York City. In an [address](#) at the City University of New York today, Cuomo revealed what he’s calling an “aggressive action plan” to fix Penn Station, as well as mitigate what he claims will be a ripple effect on the city’s other transportation systems—namely, the subway.

Cuomo also announced something called the [“MTA Genius Transit Challenge.”](#) which, according to a press release, is intended to “reimagine the solutions to the systemic challenges with the system, all targeted on expanding the number of trains per hour at peak periods to relieve overcrowding and to enable more reliable service with fewer delays.” How does that relate to Amtrak? We’ll get to that. (Spoiler: it doesn’t, really.)

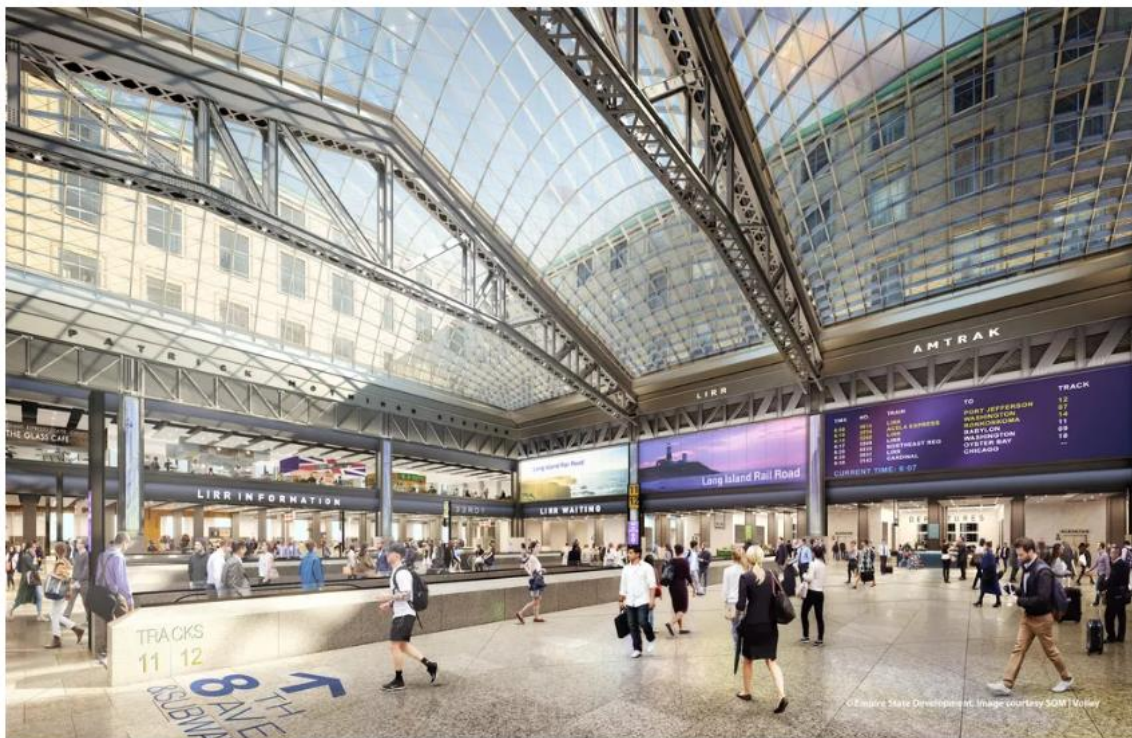
“This multi-pronged effort will address the chronic failures of the system and make critical, long overdue upgrades to ensure our system is of the highest caliber,” Cuomo said in a statement. “After decades of neglect, it’s time to seize the opportunity to make real changes to our transportation system.”

The proposed fixes for Penn Station include the implementation of a task force, which will have two roles: figure out alternative modes of transit to alleviate the problems that are sure to arise as a result of Amtrak’s forthcoming month or so of track closures (which Cuomo’s presentation calls a “summer of hell”), and look into long-term fixes for the ailing train system.

Cuomo has proposed three possible solutions for the latter issue, which would involve either New York state or the Port Authority taking over Penn Station, or Amtrak working with a private contractor to operate the station. In the first two scenarios, Cuomo proposes combining Penn Station’s operations with forthcoming projects like the Gateway Tunnel and LIRR concourse fixes “to create one reimagined, unified transit hub.”

(But considering the problems that have plagued Port Authority projects—including the renovation of its own bus terminal on Manhattan’s west side, and the delayed, \$4 billion World Trade Center Transportation Hub—one has to wonder if that’s the best way forward.)

Members of the task force include former MTA head Joe Lhota, New York state DOT commissioner Matthew Driscoll, and Regional Plan Association president Tom Wright. Two of its members—Vornado Realty Trust CEO Steve Roth and LeFrak CEO Richard LeFrak—also happen to be [part of the team](#) working with the Trump administration on its [infrastructure plans](#).



A rendering for the revamped Penn Station, due to debut in 2020. | SOM/Volley

As [the Real Deal points out](#), they also have a vested interest in the long-term health of Penn Station: Vornado is one of the developers working on the transformation of the Farley Post Office into the new, revamped Penn Station; LeFrak, meanwhile, is launching [new residential projects](#) across the Hudson River in New Jersey, which relies on Penn Station as a lifeline for commuters in and out of the state.

On the subway side of things, Cuomo says that “outside-the-box thinking and innovative solutions” are needed to fix the issues that have the subways in a near-constant state of disrepair; to that end, the so-called “MTA Genius Transit Challenge” will ask firms to come up with ideas for the following:

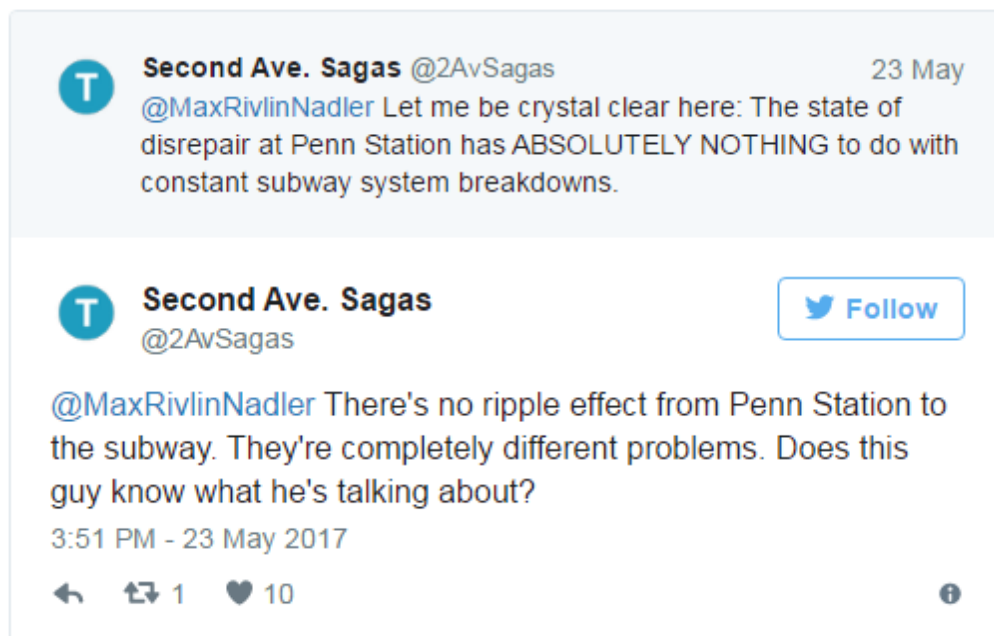
To address the aging signal system in a faster and more efficient way to enable the MTA to expand the number of trains per hour during peak periods;

To address the subway system’s aging cars. Strategies can include the refurbishment of current subway cars, upgrading existing systems, better maintenance programs/protocols, and faster delivery of new cars; and

To design communications technology for cellular and WiFi connectivity that can be installed throughout the entire subway system including tunnels.

The winner will receive \$1 million, and a panel of judges—including Cornell Tech dean Daniel Huttenlocher and SUNY chancellor-elect Kristina Johnson—will select the best ideas for those three categories.

So that’s that. Now, onto the problems: the conflation of the Penn Station’s aging infrastructure, and the broken subway system has some folks scratching their heads, and for good reason.



Both the MTA and Penn Station have state involvement, yes; and both are dealing with crippling delays and other commuter-enraging issues due to their old infrastructure, sure; but that’s pretty much where the similarities end. To imply that fixing one will somehow magically affect the other is disingenuous, or perhaps a bit of wishful thinking on Cuomo’s part. And it’s unclear what, exactly, a “design challenge” will fix, especially

considering that many of the subway's problems—aging signals that need to be replaced, old and busted cars—stem less from a lack of creativity, and more from a lack of funding.

But hey, maybe a solution won't so hard:

 **Christopher Robbins**
@ChristRobbins Follow

1) toll cars driving into Manhattan
2) eliminate free parking
3) use \$ to fix MTA

I get Cuomo's "genius award"
villagevoice.com/2017/05/23/gov...
3:47 PM - 23 May 2017



Governor Cuomo's Half-Baked Ideas To Fix The Subways (W...
In little under a week, Governor Andrew Cuomo has gone from claiming that he has no real responsibility for the MTA, to proposing villagevoice.com

51 140

Naturally, this information dump has already garnered responses from Cuomo's foes and friends. "Governor Cuomo is taking a vital step, which is to declare that it's squarely his responsibility to fix the subway," said Riders Alliance executive director John Raskin in a statement. "The next question is: what is the actual plan, and where will the Governor find the money to pay for it?"

The New York Building Congress was decidedly more chipper, with President Carlo A. Scissura releasing a statement that reads, in part, "Governor Andrew Cuomo has once again demonstrated his deep commitment to modernizing New York's infrastructure, which will lead to strong economic growth and a heightened quality-of-life for all New Yorkers. His proposals today reflect his determination to enact immediate measures to alleviate the problems currently affecting commuters at Penn Station and throughout the subway system."

Cuomo's full 143-page presentation can be viewed [here](#), if that's your sort of thing. For a more thorough breakdown of the Cuomo presser itself, [the Village Voice](#) has you covered.

[Governor Cuomo Announces Aggressive Plan to Combat Long-Term Crisis at Penn Station](#) [Official]