



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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DELORES RUBIN

Chair

Jesse Bodine

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May 4, 2016

Chairman John Degnan
The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
4 World Trade Center
150 Greenwich Street – 22nd Floor
New York, NY 10006

**Re PABT Community Town Hall
Metro Baptist Church
Hell's Kitchen South, April 18th, 2016**

Dear Chair Degnan,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) would like to thank the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) for its presentation at the Community Town Hall on April 18th about the current state of the Port Authority Bus Terminal (PABT) and the Port Authority's plan to build a new bus terminal.

The Community Town Hall at the Metro Baptist Church on West 40th Street in Manhattan was sponsored by MCB4, Congressman Jerold Nadler, New York State Senator Brad Hoylman, New York State Senator Adriano Espaillat, New York Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal, New York State Assembly Member Richard Gottfried, New York City Public Advocate Letitia James, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, and New York City Council Member Corey Johnson.

At the Town Hall representatives from the Port Authority reported on recent improvements of "customer experience" in the concourse of the terminal; improvements to circulation in the terminal and wait time within the vicinity of the terminal; and the Port Authority's International Design + Deliverability Competition ("Competition") to select a "conceptual design" for a new bus terminal.

As the district's elected representatives, Senator Hoylman, Assembly Member Rosenthal, Assembly Member Gottfried, Borough President Brewer, and Council Member Johnson all

expressed dismay on any PANYNJ preliminary concept plan for a new bus terminal that would expropriate private properties west of Ninth Avenue in Hell's Kitchen South.

A NEW TERMINAL IN THE HEART OF HELL'S KITCHEN

The 65-year old Port Authority Bus Terminal faces, according to the Port Authority, "structural limitations that complicate its day-to-day operations." Moreover, the Port Authority estimates that by 2040, peak-hour passenger traffic will increase by 35% to 51% and peak-hour bus traffic by 25% to 39%. In order to meet this estimated increase in bus traffic, the Board of PANYNJ launched an international competition seeking conceptual designs for a new bus terminal in midtown Manhattan, just "west of Ninth Avenue." The Port Authority Board emphasized that no terminal would be built in New Jersey.

At the Community Town Hall presentation on April 18th, PABT representatives stated that the Port Authority was "at the very beginning" of the process to build a new terminal, adding that it would likely defer to New York City land use procedures, specifically, its Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), in selecting the site for a new terminal.

According to the Port Authority, the design concepts submitted will be "informed by a Trans-Hudson Commuting Capacity Study, and by input from commuters, residents and businesses in the vicinity of the bus terminal, as well as civic organizations and other stakeholders."

Following the Port Authority presentation, the Chair of Manhattan Community Board 4 presented a brief slideshow introduction to some of the residents, businesses, and institutions in the Hell's Kitchen South area where a new terminal might be built. The slideshow also showed photos of the devastation in Hell's Kitchen South wrought by the Port Authority's construction of the Lincoln Tunnel, the bus terminal, and the terminal access ramps.

At the public session which followed, the Port Authority team was informed — robustly at times — by input from the very residents, businesses, and civic organizations upon whose neighborhood a new bus terminal would profoundly, and irrevocably, impact.

THE COMMUNITY RESPONDS

Over 250 members of the Hell's Kitchen community, joined by members of the larger CD4 District, attended the Town Hall meeting, filling the Metro Baptist Church to standing room only. At the public session following the Port Authority presentation, members of the community, residents, business owners, and workers, from 34th Street to 57th Street, spoke, often with passion, of their concerns about the proposed expansion. These speakers made it amply clear that the properties the Port Authority may consider acquiring for a new bus terminal are not just "real estate" but are the homes and businesses of "real people." They made comments about the current operation of the terminal and raised questions about the feasibility — and wisdom — of constructing a new terminal in the middle of a residential district in

midtown Manhattan, in the heart of a residential community, on land where their homes stood, homes in which some had lived for generations.

One speaker urged the Port Authority Board of Governors and the Competition designers to come to the area, to see first-hand a bustling community, to imagine it as their home, their neighborhood, their community — and then to contemplate its obliteration by the erection of a massive bus terminal.

The comments, queries, and concerns clustered around the following categories:

1. Displacement, Demolition, Destruction

Zoning Restrictions

The first speaker pointed out that the area immediately west of Ninth Avenue under consideration for a new bus terminal is governed by the Special Hudson Yards District (SHYD) and that its Hell's Kitchen Subdistrict has specific restrictions against demolition. The speaker noted that MCB4, the New York City Department of City Planning, and our council member, who at that time was Speaker of the New York City Council, spent years in negotiations to achieve the special district and the restrictions against demolition. Dismantling this hard-won zoning — zoning carefully crafted to ensure a vibrant and balanced development of the far west side of Manhattan — might seriously derail the City's vital and ongoing efforts to encourage and integrate commercial and residential development in the area.

Another speaker pointed out that the area under consideration for a new bus terminal is now zoned residential as a result of the same City efforts — in contrast with the present location of the bus terminal on Eighth Avenue, which is zoned commercial.

Displacement of Residents

The Port Authority statement that it will try to "minimize" the use of private land for a new terminal, did not appear to reassure the community. Almost 300 apartments, many of which are affordable, rent-regulated homes occupied by long-term low and moderate income residents, lie west of Ninth Avenue, in the area threatened by a new terminal. Many of the apartments are occupied by families who have lived in the area for generations. The daughter of one of the speakers, the audience was informed, was the sixth-generation of her family to live in the neighborhood. Losing an apartment through condemnation would be more than losing a home: it would be losing a community which had sustained her family for generations.

A number of people who spoke were in the twenties and thirties and had lived in the neighborhood all their lives. Others had raised their children, some, their grandchildren, in the apartments they occupied. Many shopped, worked, and worshiped in the neighborhood.

No one spoke in favor of losing their home.

Loss of Businesses

Many speakers brought up their daily trips to the reasonably-priced stores located in the affected area and noted that Starbucks and Jamba Juice in the current bus terminal were not businesses providing valuable services they could afford. A number of businesses on that stretch on Ninth Avenue provide affordable fresh food to many of the hundreds of seniors residing at Manhattan Plaza and in the larger Hell's Kitchen neighborhood.

Loss of Community Institutions

Some of the institutions whose buildings would be demolished if private land were acquired for a new bus terminal provide services not just for the immediate neighborhood but for a wider community. One speaker reminded the attendees that the Farm Project on the roof of the Metro Baptist Church provides fresh vegetables to the food pantry in the basement of the church which serves over 800 people a month. The Farm Project had just been recognized by a national organization and awarded a \$5,000 grant for its work.

Another speaker referred to the head start program that welcomed her children when all the other programs were full or too expensive. The Pastor of Metro Baptist showed how the Church helped the Port Authority by taking in many young people who come to the city by bus for the first time and need guidance to stay on "the right path."

A catholic nun from the Dwelling Place — a transitional women's shelter on West 40th Street, founded in 1977 — spoke about her concern about the poor, the vulnerable getting pushed out "as so often happens" in the name of "progress." A woman who "graduated" from the shelter spoke about how the Dwelling Place turned her life around so that now she is healthy, has a permanent home and a steady job.

A speaker from the Damayan Migrant Workers Association, which serves Filipino migrant workers, explained how grateful she was that the Metro Baptist Church has been giving their non-profit organization space since 2000.

Speaking last, the pastor of Metro Baptist Church, in a moving speech about how the church provides services to the most vulnerable people of midtown including patrons of the Port Authority Bus Terminal, pointed out that the church sees people from the terminal at the beginning or the tail end of their dream, arriving in the city or leaving the city. The church helps the arrivals with food, clothing, and toiletries and assists the departing with money for a ticket home. The loss of the assistance Metro Baptist has provided over the years, and continues to provide, to our vulnerable citizens and visitors to the bus terminal — would be an irredeemable blow to the midtown community.

2. Traffic and Infrastructure

Lincoln Tunnel

A number of speakers questioned the logic of building a new terminal without improving old infrastructure. The Lincoln Tunnel, which opened in 1937 — when you could still buy a Pierce Arrow — is now one of the country's busiest roadways, with over 120,000 cars passing through every day and 1,700 buses every morning. The width of each tunnel roadway is 21 feet and 6 inches, narrower than most of the streets in Hell's Kitchen. During rush hours today it is backed up with traffic. How will it then accommodate an estimated increase in car and bus traffic by 2040?

More Rail, Less Traffic

One speaker, to thunderous applause, pointed out that logical urban planning would move the bus terminal to the Meadowlands Sports Complex and then build a light rail into Manhattan.

Midtown Congestion

A resident questioned how a new terminal, ostensibly built to accommodate increased bus traffic, would make a dent in the already choked traffic conditions on Ninth Avenue during rush hours. Wouldn't a new terminal make the situation worse?

3. Current PABT Operations

Commuter vs. Community Experience

A presenter from the PABT spoke of the retail improvements PABT had made to enhance the "customer experience," by adding a Starbucks and a Jamba Juice to the first level. A speaker pointed out that while those retailers may enhance the "commuter experience", chain store outlets were antithetical to the character of the neighborhood.

A Bad Neighbor

No one at the Town Hall expressed neighborly feeling towards the current PABT. "The Port Authority is a horrible neighbor," said a business owner. "The back end of Ninth Avenue is their dumping ground."

A resident who lives close to the PABT agreed it had been a bad neighbor for years, adding: "If you want to make people feel better about you, be better neighbors. Don't be the guy who leaves his car jacked up in the front yard."

CONCLUSION

The response from nearly every member of the community at the Town Hall was clear: people live, work, and worship here; demolishing their homes and institutions would be a devastating blow to their lives and their neighborhood.

The position of MCB4 is equally clear: Hell's Kitchen South is an essential part of the larger Hell's Kitchen community. It must not be demolished. This Board believes it is crucial to preserve the homes, businesses and institutions in this area to maintain our neighborhood as well as our district character. We call on the Port Authority Board to reexamine the feasibility of building a new terminal in our residential district and encourage it to continue to improve its relationship with the community.

And in the spirit of the October 22, 2015 Port Authority Board resolution directing the Board and staff to "solicit substantial public and stakeholder input" we urge the Port Authority Board to provide to the competitors MCB4's letters about the proposals for a new terminal and to direct the competitors to meet early on with the community in order to gain insight on the deliverability of their design.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that the selected design takes the appropriate measures to help us achieve this goal.

Thank you,



Delores Rubin
MCB4 Chair



Jean Daniel Noland, Chair
Clinton Hell's Kitchen Land Use
and Zoning Committee

Cc Congressman Jerold Nadler
 State Senator Brad Holyman
 State Senator Adriano Espaillat
 New York State Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal
 New State Assembly Member Richard Gottfried
 Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
 New York City Council Member Corey Johnson
 Pastor Tiffany Henkel, Metro Baptist Church
 Joe Restuccia, Clinton Housing Development Company