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Leading Civic Groups Launch ‘New Penn Station Alliance’

Regional Plan Association, Municipal Art Society Join Together to Fight for a Better Rail Station, Sports Arena for the New York Region

NEW YORK – Two of the metropolitan region’s most prominent civic groups have launched a public campaign to overhaul Penn Station and reconsider the location of Madison Square Garden atop our busiest and most vital transportation hub.

Regional Plan Association and Municipal Art Society together called on leaders of our city and region to seize a unique opportunity this year to envision substantial changes to Penn Station, where overcrowded and grim public areas have plagued hundreds of thousands of daily commuters for nearly five decades.

Madison Square Garden's special land-use permit, granted in 1963 for 50 years, expired in January and is being reviewed this spring by the Manhattan Borough President and the City Planning Commission, with a final decision rendered by the City Council. Under the City Planning Commission's standard practice, a new permit would give the owners of the Garden rights to the site on top of Penn Station *in perpetuity*. This could permanently block any attempt to improve the transit hub, saddling future generations with a failed Penn Station.

Penn Station can't be moved, because it is linked to a vast network of tracks and other infrastructure that run below the station. Yet its location beneath Madison Square Garden means it would be nearly impossible to bring substantial light, air and space into the existing facility.

Penn Station's problems aren't only aesthetic. The station is so space-constrained that it struggles to accommodate passenger traffic from the rail systems that currently use it or absorb future passenger growth and new services such as high-

speed rail. While large cities around the world—and New York's own Grand Central Terminal—have built and transformed rail stations into appealing destinations for residents and visitors, Penn Station has never been a magnet for west Midtown.

RPA and MAS also believe that New York deserves a world-class sports and entertainment arena. Madison Square Garden is among the country's oldest professional basketball or hockey stadium currently in operation. The building's façade, architecture and freight-loading facilities are severely dated. The arena, which has moved twice since its inception on Madison Avenue in 1879, today faces growing competition from two other modern sports and events venues in the New York area.

“As New Yorkers have learned over the past 50 years, a major transportation gateway and a major sports and music venue can't provide their customers with a high-quality experience while sharing the same site,” said Robert D. Yaro, president of Regional Plan Association. “That is why neither facility meets the needs of our great city.”

“New York can have both a world-class train station and a first-class arena,” said Vin Cipolla, president of Municipal Art Society. “Pursuing these projects would kick off a redevelopment plan for Midtown West, bringing 21st century infrastructure, a greatly improved public realm, thousands of jobs and incredible economic opportunity.”

To remain a globally competitive city, we need to seize this opportunity to rethink the future of Penn Station.

We recommend granting the Garden a permit for 10 years, rather than a permanent extension. This would give the metropolitan region sufficient time to consider the best options for both Penn Station and Madison Square Garden, including a number of potential alternative locations for the arena within Manhattan.

The City Planning Commission is holding a public hearing on April 10 on Madison Square Garden's application for a special permit. On April 19, Regional Plan Association will have a panel discussion at the organization's annual Assembly in New York that will explore in greater detail options for both Penn Station and Madison Square Garden.

We look forward to working with representatives of Madison Square Garden, the City of New York and the civic community to explore the future of Penn Station and the Garden.

Regional Plan Association is America's oldest and most distinguished independent urban research and advocacy organization. RPA works to improve the economic competitiveness, infrastructure, sustainability and quality of life of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan region. A cornerstone of our work is the development

of long-range plans and policies to guide the growth of the region. Through our America 2050 program, RPA also provides leadership in the Northeast and across the U.S. on a broad range of transportation and economic-development issues. RPA enjoys broad support from the business, philanthropic, civic and planning communities. For more information, please visit www.rpa.org

The Municipal Art Society of New York has led New York City's livability movement since 1893. MAS's mission is to advocate for public policies, private sector practices, individual agency and community engagement for a resilient built environment that encourages our city's economic vitality, cultural vibrancy, environmental sustainability, livability and social diversity. For more information, visit MAS.org.