

INSTITUTE FOR RATIONAL URBAN MOBILITY, INC. (IRUM)

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May 26, 2020

Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Philip D. Murphy
Governor of New Jersey
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Re: Stimulating the NY-NJ-CT region's economy by advancing cost-effective transport strategies

Dear Governors Andrew Cuomo and Phil Murphy:

Long before the Covid-19 pandemic devastated the health and economic well-being of the 23 million persons living in the **NY-NJ-CT** urban region, NYC-based nonprofit IRUM called for advancing, affordable, cost-effective transportation infrastructure projects and sensible operating strategies that would greatly improve the region's mobility and stimulate its economy. Now, with much of the economy "on hold" and with dire Covid-19 era state budgets, and uncertain additional federal dollars it would be imperative for the two Governors to consider these proposals.

IRUM urges the two Governors, who control the PANYNJ – the agency that should play a major role in planning and managing the region's interstate transport infrastructure - to move forward with two IRUM initiatives that would equitably repower the region's economy:

1. **Remake** the three commuter rail lines that connect the region's suburban work force to the Manhattan Central Business District (CBD) into a coordinated **Regional Rail System** with frequent service, integrated fares and through-operation
2. **Advance** long-delayed plans to double regional rail capacity across the Hudson River, not expanded since the original Pennsylvania Railroad tunnels were opened in 1910.

The Port Authority has the statutory authority and the financial resources to advance both of these initiatives. The key roadblock that must be overcome by these century-old institutions is cultural. The Port Authority must become more supportive of rail transit, which the agency has resisted since it was forced to take over the money-losing Hudson and Manhattan Tubes (PATH) in 1962. The three commuter rail lines – the sleeping giants of regional mobility - must move well beyond their traditional travel market of moving peak period (mostly white and affluent) suburban residents to job sites in the core. This can be accomplished rather quickly by changing the price structure and off-peak service frequencies.

The Port Authority enjoys a monopoly on all highway bridges and tunnels across the Hudson River within the Port District. Toll revenues that exceed the operating and maintenance costs of these facilities can be used for other transportation operations, largely at the discretion of the two Governors, who have veto power over the agency's budget. IRUM urges the two Governors to direct these surpluses toward the two initiatives shown in the attached pages.

The first page describes an immediate action plan to refashion the three commuter rail lines into a coordinated “regional rail system” with integrated fares, frequent service and through running, initially at Penn Station. By using existing tracks and stations more effectively, the need for midday storage of rail cars at Sunnyside Yard and Long Island City is greatly reduced. These rail yards can be eliminated and the property released and sold for new development.

The second page describes a simple, cost-effective plan to route new Hudson River tunnels by way of the Hoboken Terminal area. A new online station would serve the Hoboken-Jersey City business district, NJ’s largest, and would provide a useful transfer to the Hudson-Bergen light rail line. The new tunnels would connect to existing platforms at Penn Station and then continue to existing tracks and platforms in the Lower Level of Grand Central Terminal, following a plan prepared by the nation’s largest engineering firm in 2003. This plan would avoid the need for costly new embankments and bridges in the Hackensack Meadowlands, by making better use of existing rail facilities. A starting point to advance this plan would be for the two Governors to demand the immediate release of all relevant information about the 2003 Access to the Region’s Core (ARC) Major Investment Study, which detailed the plan to connect Penn Station with Grand Central Terminal. This connection would greatly benefit New Jersey commuters who are destined for Manhattan’s East Midtown, the nation’s densest office concentration and avoid Amtrak’s costly and disruptive plan to expand Penn Station to the south. This connection and the new tunnel would eliminate the need for expansion of the Port Authority Bus Terminal. Instead the bus terminal could be shrunk to existing subsurface bus bays, permitting the massive terminal itself to be leveled and the property sold for real estate development to offset the cost of rail expansion.

For this plan to be advanced, full-throated support would be needed by the two Governors who control these lines. Recently the Governors have demonstrated that they can be effective in advancing coordinated measures to deal with the current health crisis devastating this region, and these efforts certainly should be commended. In a similar vein, the near total economic collapse of the region brought on by the virus provides an ample incentive to advance coordinated measures to improve the region’s rail transportation system that would revive the region’s stalled economy. The Governors can take critical steps to dramatically enhance the near term and future service provided by these long-independent and self-serving rail lines by demanding that they collaborate to advance measures described in this letter. IRUM had a measure of success in gaining attention for these measures in its 2006 exhibit hosted by the Municipal Art Society - see: <http://www.rrwg.org/connectr.pdf> but this support ended with a change in leadership in Albany in 2008. Now’s the moment to restore this collaboration.

IRUM’s position is contained in its comments submitted during the Hudson Tunnel DEIS process:
http://www.irum.org/20170815%20-%20Hudson_Tunnel_DEIS_IRUM_comments.pdf

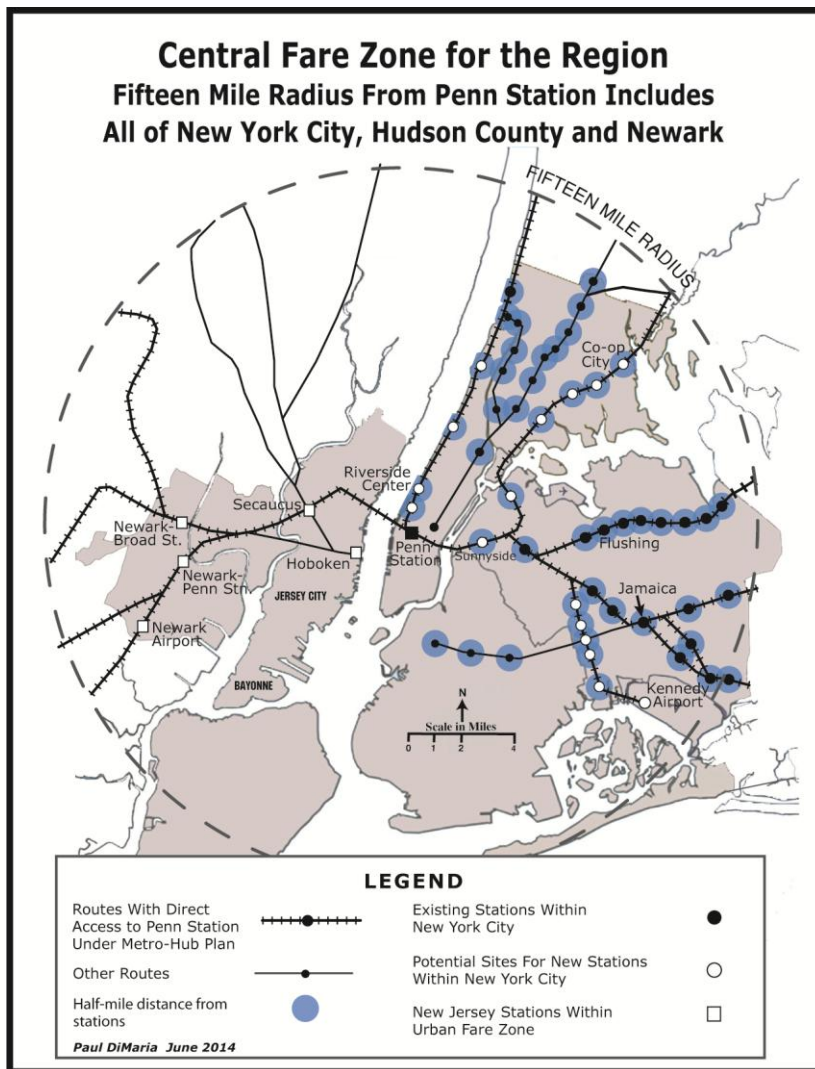
IRUM urges the two Governors to take the lead in developing **a comprehensive vision for a regional rail system** that would better serve the 23 million-person NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area.

Sincerely,



George Haikalis, President, Institute for Rational Urban Mobility,

copies to other interested parties



Advancing a Central Fare Zone for Regional Rail

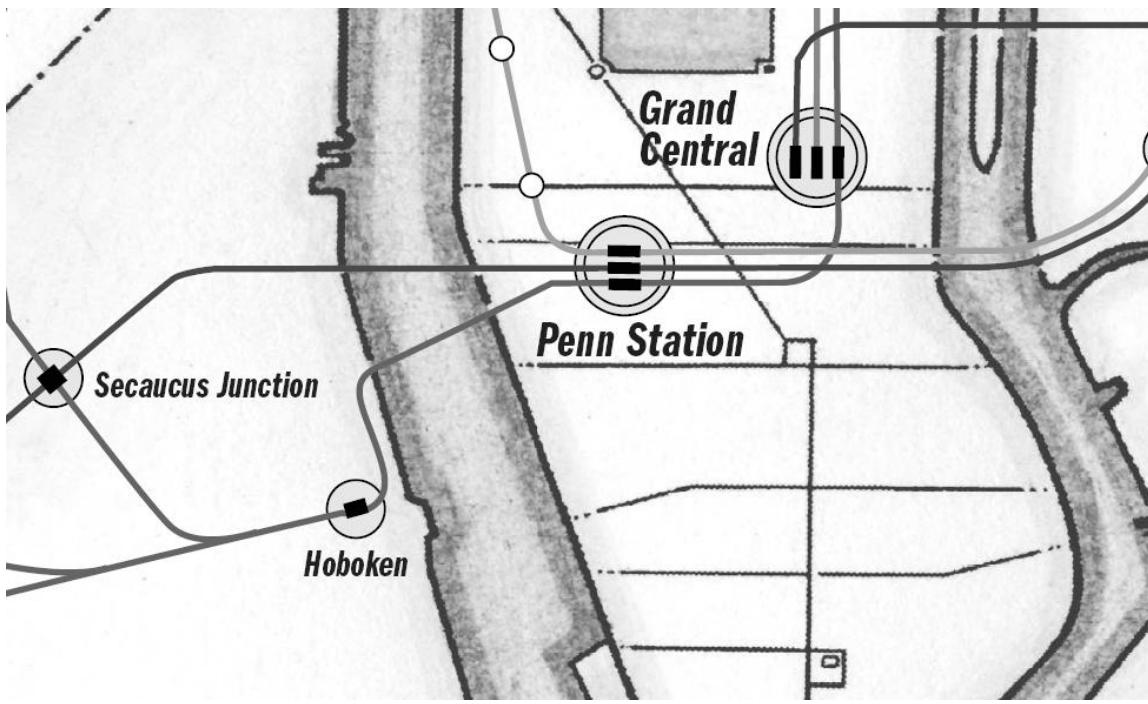
An important near-term initiative for enhancing public transit in the NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area is to recast the region's three commuter rail lines into a single **Regional Rail System** with frequent service and integrated fares. Through-running at Penn Station can increase peak hour train capacity by 25% or more, by eliminating conflicts between inbound and outbound trains, improving operating efficiency and equipment utilization. Fare integration can be achieved by advancing a single *central fare zone* which includes all of NYC together with Hudson County and Newark, NJ. The central zone, with concentric rings of fare zones extending into the suburbs, can be implemented immediately using existing fare collection technology. The region's rail transport institutions can advance this plan without a full merger, through a cooperative effort, with the encouragement of local and state elected officials.

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Build new Hudson River Passenger Rail Tunnels via Hoboken/Jersey City/Penn Station and Grand Central

A simple and cost-effective way to remake the region's three commuter rail lines into a coordinated **Regional Rail System** is to route much-needed new Hudson River passenger rail tunnels by way of the Hoboken/Jersey City waterfront business district. A new on-line station would be constructed just south of the Hoboken Terminal and a new 2.3 mile two-track tunnel would connect with existing tracks and platforms at Penn Station, NY. A new 1.2 mile two-track tunnel would be constructed under 31st Street and Park Avenue to link with existing tracks and platforms in the Lower Level of Grand Central Terminal. New stairways and wider concourses are critical to rebuilding Penn Station into a suitable gateway to NYC. Thru-running increases capacity and connectivity while permitting removal of rail yards for new resilient waterfront development. It efficiently uses existing rail infrastructure, avoiding adverse environmental impacts of new rail trackage in the Hackensack Meadowlands.

The Penn Station-Grand Central connection allows west of Hudson residents to easily reach destinations in East Midtown, the largest concentration of office buildings in the nation without transferring to crowded subways and makes it easier for Bronx, Westchester and Connecticut residents to reach the growing West Midtown area as well as Hoboken/Jersey City, Newark and Newark Airport. An interconnected **Regional Rail System** -- with frequent service, integrated fares and through-running -- provides an attractive alternative to driving on crowded highways that cannot be expanded and increases the economic viability of the region in the face of growing global competition. IRUM estimates that this can be constructed for less than \$6 billion, in contrast to the \$25 to \$30 billion needed for the Gateway tunnel project.