

Cuomo's Vision for Penn Station: Goodbye, MSG Theater; Hello, Empire Station Complex



Redeveloped Penn Station exterior: view from 8th Avenue

([Gov. Andrew Cuomo](#) / [flickr](#))

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Referencing the nation's founding fathers, as well as the creation of the Erie Canal, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Wednesday the time has come to think big and take on one of the most hated structures in the city: Penn Station.

"It is ugly, it is dated architecture, it is a lost opportunity," he said. "Frankly, it's a miserable experience. Let me cut to the chase: it is a terrible impression of New York."

His solution, which he will expand upon in next week's State of the State address: move Amtrak across the street to the Farley Post Office building — something originally championed by the late senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan — and renovate the existing Penn Station, bringing natural light into what he

called "a bleak warren of corridors." The two stations would have block-long entrances and be connected via an underground passageway. Cuomo is calling the new hub the "Empire Station Complex."

Predictably, this inspired a number of Star Wars jokes.

The governor made the announcement flanked by officials from Amtrak, the state's Economic Development Corporation, and Madison Square Garden — which may see its Paramount Theater partially demolished in what Cuomo called "a friendly negotiated condemnation."

(Cuomo added that it's "an unusual combination of words. But it is an unusual situation.")

The arena was not mentioned as an option for displacement in Wednesday's announcement, but Madison Square Garden has long resisted calls for it to relocate, so chairman James Dolan's presence on the dais with the governor was in and of itself significant. But it wasn't immediately clear how committed he was to Cuomo's vision. While he called the plans "long overdue," he stopped short of voicing his full support.

"As it advances," Dolan said, "if there's an opportunity to partner with the state, I will gladly take it."

But demolishing the Theater at Madison Square Garden (formerly called the Paramount) was just one of [several options](#) Cuomo tossed out to entice private developers, which will be key to financially pulling this off.

"The private developer will finance the Penn redevelopment in exchange for the retail development rights that are within the station itself," Cuomo said. "There are 650,000 people going through Penn."

That may be enough to entice a developer to sign on to what could be a \$3 billion undertaking. Tom Wright, the head of the Regional Plan Association, said the governor's presentation "chummed the waters" to drum up interest in the project. "They've put enough...economic value on the table to hopefully get the private sector to start thinking very creatively about how they can generate some revenues and do something here."

But Wednesday's proposal amounted to more of a 'plan to come up with a plan' than a concrete path forward, and the unanswered questions abound: how will this fit into plans to build a new tunnel under the Hudson River, known as Gateway? And how much public money might be put into the project?

"It's a bit like, you know, you paint the outside of your house first," said Mary Rowe, the vice president of the Municipal Arts Society.

"You make it clear to folks that you have to probably overhaul the whole thing, but the first thing you're going to do is paint the outside."

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