

Port Authority Bus Terminal Replacement in New York

Background

Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) is a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decision-making that 1) considers environmental, community, and economic goals early in the transportation planning process, and 2) uses the information, analyses, and products developed during planning to inform the environmental review process required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). PEL can help transportation agencies achieve efficient environmental review and permitting timelines, which is important to decision-makers and the public. Using PEL can create higher quality, more efficient, predictable, and integrated transportation planning and environmental review processes, and can ultimately accelerate project delivery.

This case study describes how the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) applied PEL to a project that would [replace the existing Port Authority Bus Terminal](#) (PABT) in Manhattan.

Project Context

The PABT, originally constructed in 1950 and last significantly expanded in 1981, serves 260,000 commuters and intercity bus passengers per weekday. The PABT is located on the west side of Manhattan and services bus routes that carry travelers to and from New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and Canada. Within the city, the facility connects travelers with subway lines and city bus routes and provides pedestrian access to many employment districts.



Rendering showing the main components of the PABT Replacement Project. Image source: Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

A replacement facility is needed to address functional and operational deficiencies. For example, the facility is unable to accommodate the projected growing demand of passengers and buses. In addition, the PABT facility suffers from various circulation bottlenecks and constraints that inhibit efficient bus operations and pedestrian circulation. The current facility cannot sufficiently accommodate double-decker and longer articulated buses and does not fully meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) Case Study

Several planning studies on the future of the PABT, conducted between 2013 to 2018, informed the need for a replacement facility and led to the development of 13 potential project alternatives in Midtown Manhattan and New Jersey. These alternatives included various options to meet bus storage and staging needs, including using a separate facility, using other property owned or leased by PANYNJ, or accommodating storage and staging within the terminal.

Approach

The Port Authority implemented a PEL process by conducting a planning-level scoping process that provided the public with a formal opportunity to comment on the proposed project, its purpose and need, the screening of alternatives, and the approach to assessing project impacts. This PEL process took place in advance of the formal NEPA process.

PANYNJ kicked off the effort by releasing a [draft scoping document](#)¹ in May 2019. PANYNJ undertook significant outreach including providing information via a project website, multilingual newspaper advertisements, social media, and posters in the existing terminal, on NJTRANSIT buses, and in park-and-ride lots; distributing hardcopies of the draft scoping document at the existing terminal; and engaging with community leaders and PABT tenants.

PANYNJ held four (4) [public meetings](#)² in July and September 2019 in New York and New Jersey. The meetings included an open house component, multiple presentations on the proposed project, and opportunities for oral testimony from attendees. During the public meetings and throughout a 120-day comment period, the Port Authority received comments from 242 individuals including those representing elected officials, government agencies, Manhattan Community Boards, bus carriers, civic organizations, residents, and commuters.

Outcomes

Through PEL, PANYNJ conducted planning-level scoping and accomplished the following:

- Applied “fatal flaw” screening criteria, which eliminated 10 of 13 alternatives from further consideration. One criterion assessed whether each alternative would accommodate projected peak trips and another assessed whether each alternative would avoid the need to acquire private property.
- Based on public input, identified and applied a new screening criterion: Maintain the present seamless passenger connectivity to the Eighth Avenue mass transit options and pedestrian accessibility to those options and Midtown. Application of this criterion eliminated two of the remaining three alternatives from further consideration.
- Developed the enhanced build-in-place alternative as the locally preferred alternative (LPA), which incorporated key concepts from other alternatives based on stakeholder input. The LPA would 1) accommodate curbside buses and bus storage/staging operations within the PABT property, rather than use local streets and surface lots; and 2) reduce impacts to commuters by allowing continuous bus service operation during phased construction and shortening the construction schedule.

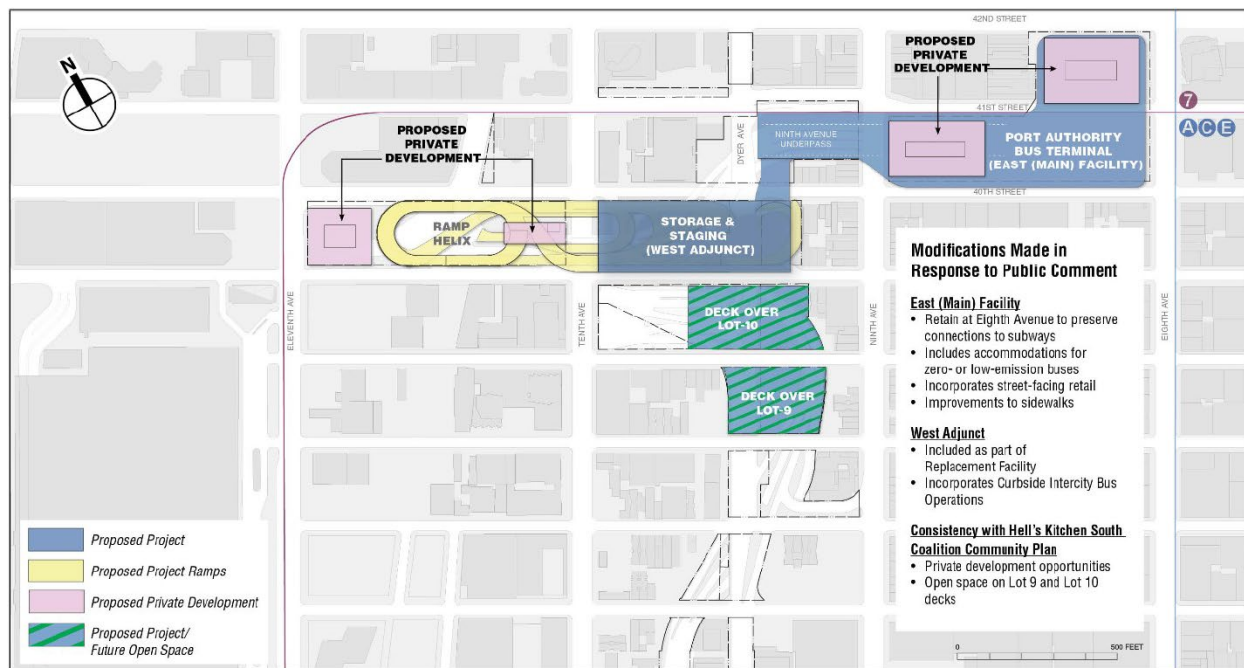
¹ Port Authority of New York & New Jersey Planning-Level Draft Scoping Document for Public Comment, Bus Terminal Replacement Project, 5/23/2019

² Port Authority of New York & New Jersey Final Scoping Report, Bus Terminal Replacement Project, Appendix C: Materials of the Public Outreach Process, 1/21/2021



Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) Case Study

The proposed PABT replacement project that moved forward into the NEPA process included a main terminal to house passenger operations; an adjacent facility to provide space for intercity bus operations, storage, and staging; a ramp structure to connect the terminal to the Lincoln Tunnel; public green/open space; and four high-rise buildings for commercial and mixed-use private development.



Map depicting the locally preferred alternative and identifying project modifications made in response to public input.
Image source: Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

Key Takeaways

There are a few best practices and lessons learned from the development and implementation of PEL activities for this project.

PEL can position lead agencies for success in the NEPA process by narrowing the range of alternatives. The Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA implementing regulations establish a two-year schedule requirement to complete the NEPA process from the notice of intent to the record of decision for an environmental impact statement (EIS). Engaging stakeholders early during the project development process, refining the proposed project by developing purpose and need and reasonable alternatives, screening and eliminating alternatives from further analysis, and assessing environmental impacts during planning-level scoping can streamline the environmental review process.

PEL can provide a framework for effective engagement with stakeholders and the public.

The proposed PABT replacement project has evolved and improved through planning-level outreach. PANYNJ was able to integrate the best attributes of alternatives eliminated from further consideration during planning into the LPA. PANYNJ also garnered improved public support by recognizing community needs and integrating them into the proposed project, such as the inclusion of 3.5 acres of open space. PANYNJ recognized public engagement on this effort as an opportunity to redress community impacts from prior transportation projects.



PEL can address construction staging issues. PANYNJ identified construction staging areas upfront, which addressed community concerns about potential impacts to neighborhood streets of continued bus operations and any potential historic resource impact issues during construction. PANYNJ proposes to build the West Adjunct facility first, which can then be used as temporary “swing space” for bus storage and staging while other construction is ongoing.

Looking Ahead

Following the planning-level scoping process, NEPA scoping on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) took place in summer 2021. The DEIS and associated public hearings are anticipated winter 2023, and the Final EIS and Record of Decision are expected in summer 2023.

For More Information

- View the Port Authority’s [project website](#) and [supporting materials](#)
- Read FTA’s Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for this project in the [Federal Register](#)
- Track the project’s environmental review progress on the [Permitting Dashboard](#)

