

Port Authority Bus Terminal Plans Raise Questions on Cost, Timing

Estimates range from \$7.5 billion to \$10.5 billion in as many as 15 years



Buses wait in line to enter the Port Authority Bus Terminal last April. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG NEWS

By **ANDREW TANGEL**
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Commuters and visitors to New York City stand to get a new Port Authority Bus Terminal one day, maybe in Midtown West or perhaps even in New Jersey.

But how much it would cost, where to put it and how long it would take to build are up in the air—controversial questions facing the operator of Manhattan’s aging, crowded and widely unloved bus depot west of Times Square.

Commissioners who oversee the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey chewed over five proposals for replacing the terminal, which was built in 1950 and is among the country’s busiest transportation hubs, with about 7,000 buses a day.

They grappled with sticker shock: Construction costs estimated by the authority’s staff and consultants ranged from \$7.5 billion to \$10.5 billion in as many as 15 years.

Those tentative price tags didn’t include windfalls the authority could reap from development rights—the proposals included possible skyscrapers by the Lincoln Tunnel.

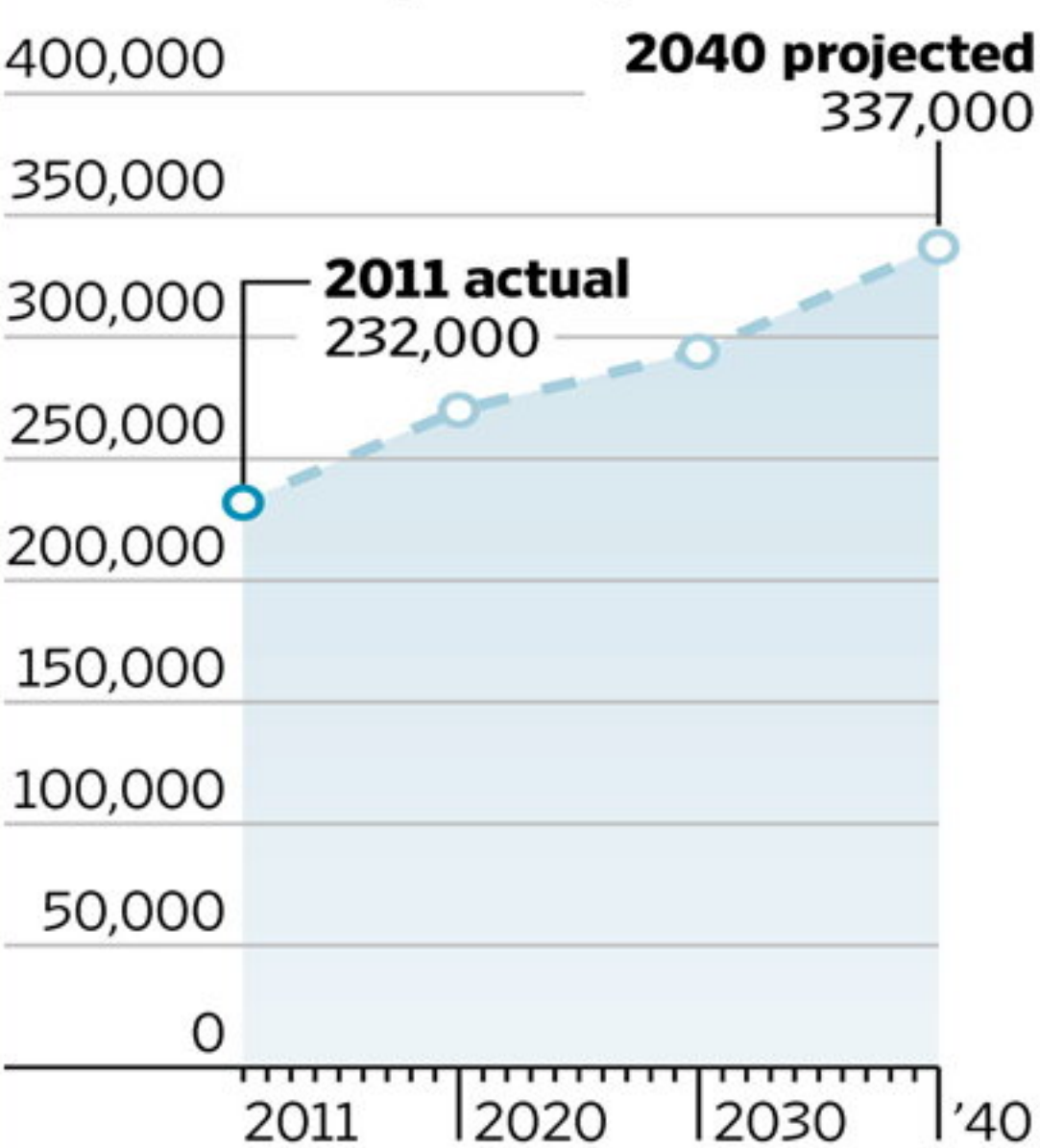
Nor did estimates include projected operating revenue for the terminal, which the authority says currently loses \$100 million a year.

For some, price was a secondary consideration: “What difference does it make what it costs? We have to do it,” said David Steiner, an authority commissioner from New Jersey. “Without it, we’re out of business. We’re there to transport the people from New Jersey to New York and back.”

The options included replacing the terminal of approximately 1.5 million square feet, expanding it, or moving it nearby and erecting skyscrapers as well as a bus garage. A temporary bus terminal could go up during construction.

Climbing Higher

Projected growth in Port Authority Bus Terminal passengers



Source: The Port Authority of N.Y. and N.J.

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The most expensive option presented on Thursday to the Port Authority’s board would cost an estimated \$10.5 billion.

This proposal would build a bus terminal on the existing site but expand it west to accommodate expected growth in bus ridership by 2040.

A skyscraper would rise at Eighth Avenue and 42nd Street, but this scenario would yield the least funding from development rights and would require a temporary depot during construction.

The cheapest proposal, at \$7.5 billion, would entail a smaller terminal between Ninth and Eleventh avenues and 39th to 40th streets.

This option would have bus parking and staging areas, but construction wouldn’t include a temporary depot. It could yield a development boon and take as few as 11 years, but could only accommodate little more than half the commuter demand expected in a quarter-century.

One option was off the table: An authority official said rehabilitation won’t work. Massive concrete slabs carrying heavy busloads are approaching obsolescence, Port Authority official Cedrick Fulton said.

Repairs disrupt the terminal’s tightly choreographed operations; a breakdown or weather can delay trips or back up buses on the street, he said.

“The terminal is just old,” Mr. Fulton said. “We’re facing significant infrastructure issues.”

Scott Rechler, a New Yorker who is Port Authority’s vice chairman, questioned whether building a bus terminal across the Hudson River in New Jersey might save billions of dollars that could somehow fund a way to funnel bus riders onto the New York City subway system.

Expanding passenger rail service between both states has been something of a holy grail for political leaders and transportation experts.

Mr. Rechler alluded to an earlier plan to connect the 7 train to Secaucus, N.J., and noted Amtrak’s unfunded plan to build two new passenger railroad tunnels under the Hudson River.

“We shouldn’t ignore the fact that we have two problems that we’ve got to solve and maybe there’s a solution that solves both,” Mr. Rechler said.

Veronica **Vanterpool**, executive director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, urged scrutiny of the price, citing “a troubling trend to inflate the cost of transit projects as a justification for killing them.”

Port Authority officials planned to set up a committee to focus on the bus terminal as they weigh alternatives, and Chairman John **Degnan** suggested a final plan could emerge by the end of the year.

The Port Authority, looking to move past its recent scandal-marred history, wants to is looking to refocus on the region’s transportation needs.

“We need to lead,” Mr. Degnan said, calling for moving quickly on a new terminal. “It can’t wait any longer.”

At the Port Authority Bus Terminal on Thursday, commuters faced an out-of-service up escalator and a broken electronic information display board flicking gray.

“It’s always 10 or 15 minutes late,” Emanuel **Mayorga**, 28 years old, said of the bus he takes between the city and Ridgefield Park, N.J. “It probably could look nicer,” he added of the terminal.

Passenger discontent wasn’t unanimous. Stan **Jakubaszek**, a retired architect who lives in Hasbrouck Heights, N.J., offered some faint praise.

“It’s not bad,” he said. “I’ve been in a lot of train stations.”

—Adam Janos contributed to this article.

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