

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING_NOVEMBER 21, 2024

CBIPS Award of Excellence presented to Rick Cotton, Executive Director, PANY&NJ

The Award of Excellence was presented by Board Co-Chairs Richard Anderson & Marcos Diaz-Gonzalez

“Rick Cotton, as Executive Director of The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and previously as Special Counsellor to the Governor of New York State has done more than anyone else in the region to transform public infrastructure. Under his leadership, LaGuardia Airport has become what many have described as the best in the world. His advocacy and advice have catalyzed the construction of a host of other vital projects including the new terminals at JFK and Newark airports, the Moynihan Train Hall and Penn-Farley Complex, the new Tappan Zee Bridge, the expansion of the Javits Center, and the MTA's Second Avenue Subway. Rick has charted a course that recognizes that world-class transportation infrastructure is essential to the economic growth and vitality of the region and nation. The Port Authority is shaping our future and connectivity with inspirational and sustainable structures and infrastructure built for the 21st century and beyond. With unfailing optimism and energy, Rick has been tireless in emphasizing the importance of design and construction excellence to face the challenges of the day and the future.”



Marcos Díaz-González & Rick Cotton



Rick Cotton at the Columbia Faculty House lectern

Remarks followed by Rick Cotton, Executive Director, PANY&NJ (transcription 1/14/25)

I'm going to, first of all, recall where we were eight years ago. And eight years ago, not a single shovel full of dirt - in terms of talking about our airports - had been turned. And LaGuardia, I flew out of the most hated airport in the US. Five reasons why New York's LaGuardia Airport is the worst airport in the US. Nine reasons travelers hate LaGuardia. Joe Biden's very famous quote about if you were blind-folded and you got off an airplane, and came into LaGuardia, you'd think you were in a third world country. That was eight years ago. And it was justified. LaGuardia was probably the worst airport in the country.

So then, if we shift to where we are today. These two awards: the Forbes Travel Guide three weeks ago. A panel of five thousand travel experts and frequent flyers chosen by Forbes rated LaGuardia as the best airport in the US. And even somewhat more astonishing I think because LaGuardia in passenger surveys in years past was always at the back of the pack as the worst. At the beginning of this year, ASQ, very respected within the airport world in terms of passenger surveys, based on the survey responses, LaGuardia rated as the best airport in North America in its class, So, then and now. LaGuardia has now accumulated, on a steady basis, a recognition within the industry and within the world of travelers, as being at the top of the class. Not a one-trick pony.

In terms of its architecture, I think the roofline, LaGuardia reflecting the curve of the Grand Central Parkway which it's built around. In terms of spaces, this is the Departures Hall with the centerpiece of a sculpture that I'll come back to. This is Terminal C, the Delta Security Hall. This is one of what we call skybridges, it's the way you get in Terminal B to the gates. Looking out to see, if you had a long view, it would let you see the New York City skyline. This is one of the skybridges itself, which is, again, in terms of experiences, walking over an active runway looking down on planes.

Terminal A at Newark, again, from the point of view of reactions by passengers. Similar awards. 5-Star Airline Rating handed out by Skytrax. It's an international rating system. There are only three airports in the US that have 5-Star ratings. Now two of them are Port Authority airports, meaning LaGuardia and Newark Terminal A.

Same approach in terms of Newark Terminal A, which is large airy spaces inviting to the traveler, impactful in terms of the traveler's experience. This is the central concession area at Newark. Little detail in terms of those pillars in the middle, those are digital video pillars. They've been nicknamed by those who did it 'the forest of firsts'. But every single display that they have is a 'first' which occurred in New Jersey. Who knew? But there are a lot of those. And it is interesting, and a place where people gather.

So, in terms of Newark, we've completed the new Terminal A. We just last month published a vision plan for the next set of upgrades at Newark. The planning for the new Terminal B has started. And the Newark AirTrain, which is way past its design life. The construction, the purchase of technology, of new rail cars, the commissioning. We've just awarded the contract for the new guideway. Well underway.

I'd just like to talk a little bit about the art because it actually becomes a very important part of the experience. And this is not what you might call airport art. These are highly curated selections. Competitions. Very big emphasis on local artists, but we've wound up with international artists as well. And this is just a series of three. Because the art reporter for the New York Times became fixated. So it starts out with Terminal B, was the first terminal. With art that might make you want to go to LaGuardia. The next terminal, Terminal C. Terminal C, 'ready when you are.' Terminal C is now an art destination. And the third is Newark Terminal A, Art tells New Jersey stories. And the lead of the article was 'Move over LaGuardia.' One of the things we've created is a virtuous circle of the terminals now competing with each other, can their art programs outdo what has gone before.

Here is the centerpiece for Terminal B at LaGuardia. Sara Fay's 'Shorter than the Day'. A translucent globe, and in the lower right corner there is one of the largest mosaics actually in all of the United States, with little touches of New York. This is the centerpiece of the central concession area. It is a laser light show on a curtain ceiling-to-floor of droplets of water. The show itself is about New York scenes and New York references. And it's a big hit with the kids.

And this is the baggage area at Newark Terminal A. Quite a well-known artist. Huge mural. Dominates the experience. People are fascinated by it as they wait, hopefully not too long, for their luggage. So, we're continuing. Here's the most recent reveal, if I can call it that. Terminal 6 at Kennedy. It's going to be one of two very large international terminals but again with very significant public art installations.

So, what's going on at Kennedy. Nineteen billion dollars worth of construction. Leave extra time. We are doing our best as we did at LaGuardia to operate the airport while the construction is going on. And at both airports, the same experience which is, you would think that the construction would deter people. But both Kennedy now and LaGuardia, both then and now, have just every month set new records for the volume of passengers.

So there is construction during peak periods. We apologize for that. But we are moving this ahead private investment. We get a three-to-one leverage in terms of scarce Port Authority capital dollars. We're now getting close to 50% through the JFK construction.

As I said, there are three major construction projects. We're now getting close to JFK construction. To prove that something is happening. New Terminal 1 is the granddaddy in terms of size. It's going to be a 2.4 million square foot terminal. All of LaGuardia, both terminals, is 2.4 million square feet. The New Terminal 6 will be just over a million square feet. And we're redoing the whole roadway network.

This is the rendering as to what Terminal 1 will look like. Lots that could be said positively about the design. The point I want to make today is that it is actually happening. This is an interior rendering with New York references, but again natural light with floor-to-ceiling windows. This is not a rendering. This is a picture in terms of the current state of construction, Again, not a rendering. A picture of where we are in the building. And again, not a rendering, a picture in terms of the large departure hall which you will enter first as you arrive at the terminal

Terminal 2, like Terminal 6, like Terminal 1, will be completed in phases. This is the rendering of what it will look like when it's done. It actually stretches from what is currently the Jet Blue terminal through the vacant Terminal 6 current which was demolished. And it will extend ultimately, we will demolish Terminal 7. And it will have a very large footprint.

This, again, an artist's rendering of what the Arrivals Hall will look like with a public art installation in the center. Again, not a rendering. This is the steel topping-off ceremony that occurred within the last month. We're making progress. Again, not a rendering. Actually materializing. Terminal 6.

The Port Authority is rebuilding the actual infrastructure of Kennedy. The roadway network, we're spending four billion dollars. This is the Port Authority capital. Seventeen miles of new roads, six new bridges. We're getting rid of traffic signals and making an effort at least to simplify the roadway network. These are not renderings, these are pictures as the new roadways go up. This is one of the large areas where roadways have been knocked down. And we're rebuilding new.

These are obviously huge construction projects. But really one of the tenets as we build these major projects is that you have to pay attention to the communities that surround these construction projects, that surround these facilities. They bear with a lot of impositions from both the construction and the operations of these facilities and benefits have to accrue to the communities.

So, at Kennedy, I'm just using it as an example, we have set up a 42-member Community Advisory Committee. It includes virtually every elected official and every community leader.

We have really brought in every community voice that we can in terms of explaining what we're doing. The four focus areas minority and women owned businesses, career and workforce development, educational and environmental stewardship. We tried actually to create in partnership with the Community Advisory Committee what we are going to do in each of these areas. And then, we not only do it, but we have hired monitors to actually report to the community on whether what we say is accurate. So, we're looking at economic benefits to the community.

We've got a focus on 30% of the contracting that we do going to minority and women-owned businesses. And we've expanded that goal. It used to be highly focused on construction only. It now extends to also include professional services: engineering, architecture, legal services, across the board. And, again, it's a numbers game. Proud to say in terms of our three airports we have already surpassed five billion dollars' worth of contracts to minority and women-owned businesses. Obviously, JFK is in full swing, so we're going to wind up significantly north of that. Bottom line, our focus is world class airports. Unprecedented, I would say, across many of those criteria I listed to start out. But we're moving those forward.

So now a quick shift to the Bus Terminal. I'm not sure that everyone recognizes what terrible shape the Bus Terminal is in. It's seventy-five years old. These are actually pictures. This is actually standing in the middle of the West Side of Manhattan. This is the 41st Street entrance today. This is the subway entrance. There are these low ceilings, dark corridors every place in the building. This is the corner of Eighth Avenue and 40th Street, directly across from the New York Times building, which is a gleaming new office building. And this is what we have as a public building. This is looking down 40th Street. Again, you look at this, this looks as if, I won't say it, it looks as if it were built as a fortress against the community. There is no life that the building offers to the community. And in terms of the inner working of it, it is just way, way, past its design life.

So, what we've said, it was for many years a huge subject of controversy between New York and New Jersey as to how it would be built, what would be built, where it would be built. We said big picture we would have two priorities: we're going to satisfy the commuters and we're going to satisfy the community. Internal design like the airport. Same set of ambitions. What did the community want? This is a super-block in the middle of the West Side of Manhattan. No taking of private property. Committed to getting buses off the street. There are many reasons why there are many buses that pick up and drop off on the street as opposed to within the bus terminal itself.

There are virtually no outward facing concessions. The point is to have the building contribute to the revitalization of Midtown, not be an albatross around its neck the way it was. We've committed to actually decking over for those of you who are familiar with this area, Dyer Ave. is a below-grade cut that runs from two of the Lincoln Tunnel exits for about eight blocks. Below grade. We are going to deck over, so-called, a good portion of that. We will use it for temporary bus operations and for construction laydown while this project is under construction, but then we are going to turn it back to the community as green space of which there is precious little in that part of Manhattan. This is what we want to build. This would be the main entrance to the Bus Terminal. Beyond it would have an atrium right behind the entrance. This would be the inside of the atrium. This would be the street-facing corner of Eighth Avenue and 40th Street as opposed to the dismal corner you saw just a few moments ago. There would be cafes, what you would expect in terms of outward facing to the community. We have to build what is a so-called storing and staging facility which means that we can get buses more easily off of the street, into and out of the bus terminal itself.

Final chart: this just tries to explain what we are doing. Instead of just rebuilding the main terminal. This is Eighth Avenue through Eleventh Avenue. This is a ten-billion-dollar construction project. But it is what it takes in terms of these additional two structures, to meet what the community asked for. So, we've almost doubled the cost of what we're about. But we are committed to it. We're in the final stages of the pre-construction phase. This is the permitting phase. It tests your patience. Let's put it that way. But we are now within either days or weeks of getting both the final, final, final Federal approval from the Federal review process. We have voluntarily gone through the local review process, called ULURP. And hopefully before the end of the year we will have gotten the green light from both. We then need the Federal government to approve a loan, and that will launch us on the first phase of construction, and what the first phase of construction will be building the support structures, staging and storage facilities, the ramps. We will build them in a way that we can use them as a temporary bus terminal while we tear down the main terminal and rebuild it. So, it's ambitious. In fact, it's staggeringly ambitious.

One of the reporters who regularly covers the bus terminal, every time he sees me, he asks will the bus terminal be your Waterloo? So, I'll leave that question hanging in the air. And thank you for listening and thank you for the award

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Q&A

Marcos Díaz-González: Thank you so much. If you still have a little bit of time, we can open it up for Q&A

Rick Cotton: We can certainly do that.

Marcos Díaz-González: Do we have any questions from the audience?

Question:: About the Bus Terminal, and the green space on that rendering.

Rick Cotton: The rendering that had the large green area was a rendering of the staging and storing building. We will have to the maximum degree we can That is a very large structure. have a lot of street-facing opportunities to have concessions. We will definitely try to do that. In fact, we've made that commitment to the community. That was one of their asks. What you saw in terms of the green space. You're looking across a large area. We will also have three and a half acres of green space, so you really can't see from that rendering, But the plan is at street level we'll have concessions and cafes, whatever will commercially work. What it should have, and we've made the case strongly to the City, the green space and having that building evolve from the terrible building that is sitting there to one that is community friendly and that actually is a modern and well-design we believe should have a significantly uplifting, and will have a revitalizing impact on the Hell's Kitchen area which can use it.

Greg Kelly: Congratulations on the award. As I was listening to your presentation, I was stepping back and thinking about New York City. I think what you have demonstrated here in New York and with the team you've built at the Port Authority is that we can still do big things, and we can do them in a community-centric and a commuter-experience way. A lot of times people say things can't be done. They always find the reasons that it can't happen. You quietly continue to progress and improve the infrastructure of the region. There is no stopping you.

Rick Cotton: We'll find out.

Greg Kelly: I did write that Waterloo comment down And, we hope not. And again, thank you for the leadership that proves we can still do big things,

Rick Cotton: I will come back to the community point. A community's natural instinct is NIMBY, because they are thinking quite properly of the pain. This is a ten-year construction project. And so we said at the beginning of it to the elected leaders and to the community boards, be careful what you wish for. They had their list of demands, perfectly reasonable ultimately. And without getting into the details, we actually did a 180 as part of the environmental review and consultation thought we came up with a beautiful design for just redoing the bus terminal. But they were looking at the whole area and they were looking at the buses that didn't use the bus terminal, coming into the bus terminal, the buses that were running around the city streets and the buses idling on the street. The bus terminal depends on every gate in the terminal during the rush hour turning three, four even five times. Buses coming in. Unloading. The next bus has to be able to come in. That means the next bus has to be ready to go, and a lot of what ready to go means today is that buses are on the curbside waiting and idling. We did a 180 but it bought the support of the community. The extraordinary thing about the bus terminal project is that there are five locally elected in terms of city council, state assembly, state senate, the borough president, different elected officials who regard what happens in their district as their domain. Every single one is supporting the project. In the world of big projects this doesn't frequently happen. Part of what you are saying in terms of getting things done is that you need the community behind you if you are really going to get it done, you will waste a lot of resources if you are in the position of fighting the community. You need the community. It can make the project more expensive. If you really want a chance to get it done you need to have paid attention to the community. And I think that people don't do that sometimes.

Jan Tuchman: How was your design team looking at the resilience issues that we face with all the climate change, things that are going on, wildfires in New Jersey. We don't know what is going to happen next. It has been twenty years. There are so many things. Both the airports and the bus terminal are vital links that need to be able to be there when we need them

Rick Cotton: Well said. A lot of effort has gone into establishing standards. The City has a number of its recent Local Laws. But it's a discussion. In order to build the airports on the edge of water. They all sit on the edge of water, so there's going to be sea-level rise. You have to build every single building at the airport with resiliency standards that take account of sea level rise and as storms get more intense the storm surges that come along with them. And the City mandates. And we have our internal standards of safety on top of that. And the buildings going to be able to adapt to the storms that are clearly coming. And that exists. We need to be more efficient. The Bus Terminal, by the way, is designed to handle all electric buses. We need the bus carriers to buy the electric buses. New Jersey Transit, certainly under Governor Murphy, has embraced the notion of all electric buses. Now there will certainly be a phase-out period, but within the next ten years. So you have to think about all aspects of operations, It has to move towards efficiency, it has to move to resiliency. We've tried to do the best we can articulate internally standards and hopefully they'll be strong enough.

Rick Bell: I also want to thank you for an excellent presentation walking us through places that many of us have seen changing and that many of us could only imagine could ever change. So, thank you for that. Knowing that you have a time constraint conclude with a question. The question that grows out of your response to what Greg Kelly was asking about things taking time, taking ten years or more for some projects. You mentioned various elected officials, some of whom will still be in office in a few years and some of whom won't. The first of our survey questions which we will be getting into in a little bit, I hope, deals with the duration of capital projects, how does the Port Authority with its revenue stream, but still linked to federal funding relate to changes that have happened recently and changes that might happen in the future. What's the continuity?

Rick Cotton: So, I believe in government, I believe in the power, the necessary power of government to sponsor large projects and to make positive things happen. But one of the great handicaps that government has is what you are talking about. Elections mean there is going to be turnover at the top. It is extremely debilitating. Debilitating not only because Someone could come into office and say I don't like what the last Administration did. But I would say that's the instinct for those who have been in government. That's the instinct when there is a change in individual executives or certainly when there is a change in Administration. The absolute instinct is to come in and say the last person had no idea what they were doing. Thank God for me. I've now arrived. Well, that's a very difficult challenge when you're talking about a multi-year project, number one. And it's a huge challenge to the staff, the continuing staff of the agency, in terms of how do they know whether what they've been doing will be celebrated or castigated in the future. That's one of the big challenges, trying over the long term to something done in government. You need to embrace it. You need to face it. And indeed, the other aspect of this is what's in it for someone in it for someone to spend a lot of money. What benefit is it to spend a lot of money when if you are not going to be in office when it actually materializes, when the ribbon cutting takes place. It's a big challenge. But I think it does tie in some ways to the community. Which is the community will continue. The elected official may change. But if you have built in real support for an infrastructure project in terms of the community that surrounds where you are building or if you have brought in a broad enough array of community leaders, you can at least insulate to some extent that there may be an instinct to make the project yesterday's newspaper. But it's a big challenge.

Marcos Díaz-González: Again, thank you so much. We're going to move into the roundtable portion of the program next.



Rick Bell and Rick Cotton



Melanie LaRocca and Rick Cotton