

## Convening on 34th Street

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New York City's selection of the 34th Street site for the new convention center is welcome news after years of seesawing uptown and downtown in search of the perfect location. Yes, we have seesawed with the best of them. There is no perfect location; each proposal has been a study in compromise. But the under-used land of the Pennsylvania railyards adjacent to the Hudson River has many advantages in flexibility, cost and speed that the original platform site in the river at 44th Street lacked.

The question of the center's optimum size and future expansion virtually dictated the shift to 34th Street. The last recommendation of the Beame administration's convention center committee was for a study to determine whether the size should be increased to 750,000 square feet. That study, commissioned by the Koch administration, found that there is enough potential business to support the larger structure—which means more tax revenues for the city and state.

The only way to get 750,000 square feet of exhibition space at 44th Street would be to double-deck the building, losing the rooftop park that was to be its single ameliorating feature. There could never be room for

contiguous expansion. Moreover, by the latest reckoning, the 44th Street building would be more expensive—\$283.82 million versus \$256.64 million—and slower to construct—about five years, four months against four years, ten months.

While previous estimates and arguments have had a way of crumbling, there is enough evidence to indicate that the city should get the project moving at 34th Street with dispatch. There are still obstacles: a Conrail spur line that must be "deactivated," the Clinton community that needs assurance it will not lose by the move, and traffic problems that have to be solved, including the design of Westway at 34th Street so that it will work well with the convention center.

The site selection is just the beginning of a long process. Two years of legislative, financial and environmental activity lie ahead. Still, in characteristic fashion, New York may have bumbled through to salvation, avoiding at least a monumental mistake in which a too-small building would have been locked into a dead-end site. We can now build a facility that will be competitive with the best international convention centers. As a world capital, New York can afford no less.

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