

# Convention Center

The Regional Plan Association is correct in saying that new construction could turn Times Square around, but a convention center is the wrong construction. The long-planned Portman Hotel is the kind of new building the area needs, not a three-square-block monolith, which is what even the best-designed convention center will be. The variety of shops, restaurants and new theaters in the hotel plan would infuse the right mixed activities into the area, in the kind of lively building complex that would enhance rather than deaden the street and its surroundings. The idea is to upgrade Times Square, not destroy it.

The second site suggested, in the Forties from Seventh Avenue to the Avenue of the Americas, is much too close to Fifth Avenue, which needs nothing of this ponderous, oversized lifelessness only a block away from the pedestrian scale and elegance that are its salient features. Convenience, in this case, could be sabotage. At best, a convention center is an inert blockbuster, with traffic. That is why a convention center scheme for London's Covent Garden—also its theater district—was wisely abandoned.

The two things wrong with the present proposals are their surprising insensitivity to urban design and the expense and trouble of condemnation proceedings that would be required. City officials have already scored the cost and impracticality of clearing the sites. A rival proposal for the 34th Street railyards on the Hudson River would use open, available land, with space for a waterfront plaza, expansion, or commercial construction. That site is close enough to midtown to benefit from its existing facilities, with potential revitalizing activity over a twenty-block area. It is still the best convention center area in Manhattan.