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The Week That Was

05-05-17

1. AM-off-TRAK

Our Spin:

There have been mounting delays at Penn Station and promises of even more in July and August. As a result, a group of Capital Region lawmakers, Senator Neil Breslin, Assemblyman John McDonald and Assemblywoman Patricia Fahy penned a letter to Amtrak CEO Wick Moorman, requesting a change of venue to Grand Central Station. The upscale restaurants and shops, as well as the iconic architecture would certainly be a welcome change... Not to mention arriving and departing on time.

The Story:

Amtrak officials met this week to devise a final schedule for extensive repairs at New York's Penn Station this summer, the nation's busiest rail station. The plan calls for the closing of tracks for two long stretches that would last for nearly three weeks in July and almost the entire month of August. Amtrak has shared the plan with the two commuter railroads with which it shares Penn Station with, New Jersey Transit and the Long Island Rail Road. "Obviously, it will have some impact on folks this summer," Amtrak CEO Wick Moorman said last Thursday morning in a telephone call with reporters. In the plan, Amtrak outlined 21 repairs and described their locations, but it did not explain how the work would affect train schedules during the track closings. The work plan appeared to indicate that at least two tracks at a time would be closed off during the

periods in July and August. In recent weeks, Penn Station and the tunnels that service it, have been plagued by derailments and disabled trains, faulty electrical systems and even a stampede. Some of the failures are Amtrak's fault. At least one—Amtrak contends—is not. All of these incidents take place in a region whose infrastructure appears to be entering a state of advanced disrepair. "All groups are working with the common goal of creating service schedules that minimize impact on the traveling public when we do the necessary upgrades to Penn Station," Amtrak said in statement this week. "We will jointly communicate this information once a unified approach has been agreed to, potentially next week."

[Politico](#)
[Times Union](#)

2. Honey, Oh Sugar Sugar

Our Spin:

Although New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has not been as aggressive as his predecessor, Nanny Bloomberg, he has begun to take a page out of the former Mayor's playbook. Mayor de Blasio has announced initiatives to reduce tobacco use but he's backing off any efforts on sugar consumption. The lack of interest in such measures on the New York State level and the disastrous economic impacts of the tax on soft drinks in Philadelphia, may have dampened his enthusiasm.

The Story:

A few weeks ago New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio pledged his support to a series of initiatives to cut tobacco use, proposing to raise the minimum price of a pack of cigarettes in New York City to \$13 and vowing to sharply reduce, over time, the number of stores that may sell tobacco products. De Blasio's public announcements came months after The New York Times criticized the mayor for being soft on tobacco, calling him out for failing to live up to Bloomberg's legacy. Bloomberg constantly made the three S's — sugar, salt and smoke — a constant topic of discussion in New York City communities. In pushing the anti-tobacco measures, de Blasio, more than three years into his term, has come to embrace a public health movement that was closely associated with his predecessor. However, on sugar, the Mayor's administration has not held as firm a stance, not wanting to risk political capital in the City Council by pushing legislation, or good will with the public through a series of public service announcements. Christopher Miller, a spokesman for the city's health department, said that the de Blasio administration has no plans to introduce legislation regarding sugar consumption. "However," he said, "we will continue to work with the Council and advocates to look at all options to protect the health and well-being of New Yorkers."

Reports indicate the percentage of adults who consume one or more sugar-sweetened beverages increased this past year to 23.7, up from 22.5 the year before. Political approaches to curb sugary drink consumption have frequently been through a tax, but that would need approval from the state Legislature and Governor Andrew Cuomo, whose deputy secretary of health recently said it would not happen.

[New York Times](#)
[Politico](#)

3. The Boyz Are Back in Town

Our Spin:

Not since 1955, when they finally beat the Yankees, has Brooklyn been praised for glory of this magnitude. NYTHA member, Brooklyn Boyz Stable, has the favorite in the Derby and our motto is "Go yous bums!"

The Story:

The 3-year-old colt that's considered one of the favorites to win the Kentucky Derby has deep ties to Brooklyn. The horse, named Always Dreaming, is a member of Brooklyn Boyz Stable, which is owned and operated by two men whose friendship stretches 51 years back to their early days growing up in Williamsburg. As part-owner Anthony Bonomo tells it, he and his racing partner "Vinnie" are just two boys from Brooklyn living out their sports fantasy. "In those days in Williamsburg, people loved sports, no matter what, baseball, basketball, hockey, whatever season," Bonomo said. "But we'd sneak into Aqueduct, Belmont and just watch racing. It was something you looked at, but truthfully when you saw a horse in Brooklyn, it was pulling a fruit cart." Besides deep ties to Brooklyn, Bonomo also has deep ties to New York State politics. He is a New York political mega-donor who ran one of the state's largest medical malpractice insurance companies and is also tied to the corruption scandal that brought down former state Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos last year. Bonomo testified that he gave Skelos' son a no-show job out of fear of political retribution. Skelos is appealing a five-year prison sentence.

[New York Post](#)
[USA Today](#)