



MGM Resorts, Penn National say casino plans will boost entertainment, create traffic that can be managed in Springfield



By [Peter Goonan, The Republican](#)

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SPRINGFIELD – Executives from [MGM Resorts International](#) and [Penn National Gaming](#), in new public presentations on Monday, said their competing casino projects [in Springfield](#) will bring in crowds of people and great entertainment opportunities, but with increased traffic that is beneficial and manageable.

Approximately 200 people attended the presentations at CityStage at One Columbus Center, in which the two companies gave summaries of how their projects will deal with issues related to traffic and entertainment.

Mayor Domenic J. Sarno, among those in attendance, said the city is ultimately interested in the project that will be the “best deal” and strongest plan for the city, region and state.

MGM officials spoke of their South End project’s proximity and tie-in to the MassMutual Center for its entertainment venue, and promised to strongly promote downtown venues such as Symphony Hall, CityStage and the Basketball Hall of Fame.

Penn National officials spoke of their North End project’s close proximity and planned direct tie-ins to Union Station and its planned lease and use of the Paramount Theater, both slated for rehabilitation. The company also pledged to work closely with the downtown entertainment venues and organizations.

Both companies said their casinos are designed to encourage patrons to go outside the walls of the casinos and into the downtown and regional attractions. Each company plans to promote a trolley system in conjunction with the regional transit system and to provide information directly to their patrons about local attractions and events, they said.

Regarding traffic, both companies stressed that traffic will be spread out over the day and evening, and that they will use some modifications such as new traffic lights, adjusted lights and widened lanes to deal with traffic.

In addition to the two Springfield proposals, Mohegan Sun is proposing a casino in Palmer off the Massachusetts Turnpike and Hard Rock International is proposing a casino in West Springfield on the grounds of the Eastern States Exposition.

Monday’s presentation included Penn and MGM providing computer-simulated videos and PowerPoint presentations to show off their traffic plans and entertainment plans.

Penn National, for example, showed a simulated view of a car traveling on Interstate 291 westbound and exiting on Dwight Street toward its planned casino. A video also showed the stretch of Main Street that would front its casino and hotel and parking area.

MGM showed a video of the various traffic patterns around its proposed casino and hotel in the South End, and highlighted the various exits along Interstate 91. It also showed a video of entertainment at its various entertainment arenas in the United States.

Top casino executives who attended the CityStage presentation included Peter M. Carlino, chief executive officer of Penn National, and James J. Murren, chief executive officer of MGM Resorts. The event lasted more than two hours and included questions from a panel consisting of local and regional officials in the traffic, entertainment and tourism fields.

"The simple fact is we need to bring people back to your city," Murren said. "We need to pedestrians back into the streets, we need to bring cars back into the city."

Springfield was once a "mecca" for entertainment with concerts that drew thousands of people, Murren said. For MGM, "entertainment is in our DNA," and the company has the reputation and connections to bring shows to Springfield that no other company can, he said.

"Happy crowds are a good thing; busy streets are a good thing," Murren said. "MGM Springfield, we hope, will bring millions of people to the city and cars back into the city."

Carlino said Penn National has a track record of bringing quality casino projects to similar sized communities and markets as Springfield. Penn National is the only company in North America to have opened six casinos in the past five years, he said.

"Simply put, we are the only company in the process who knows how to build a successful project in markets just like Springfield," Carlino said, citing its last three project in Kansas City, Kan., and in Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio.

Jay Snowden, another representative of Penn, said the company will work with local entertainment venues so as not to compete with, nor cannibalize those venues.

Under Penn National's project, it will purchase the properties where Peter Pan Bus Lines and The Republican operate, and move those businesses to new sites if awarded the casino, Carlino said. The casino will be designed to be "much more outward focused," than traditional casinos, encouraging people to visit other downtown venues, he said.

The two casino companies also took part in a public forum at CityStage in December, in which they presented their plans and took part in a question and answer session. An estimated 300 people attended the event.

This story has been changed to reflect Penn National Gaming's options to purchase the properties where Peter Pan Bus Lines and The Republican are currently located. The story initially did not accurately reflect those agreements.

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