

A Golden Opportunity to Re-invest in Historic Union Station



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Prepared by the Union Station Preservation Coalition:



Capitol Hill Restoration Society: For more than 50 years, the Capitol Hill Restoration Society has championed the interests of residential Capitol Hill by working to preserve its historic character and enhance its livability through efforts in planning, zoning, traffic management, and public safety.



Committee of 100 on the Federal City: The Committee of 100 advocates responsible planning and land use in Washington, D.C. Our work is guided by the values inherited from the L'Enfant Plan and McMillan Commission, which give Washington its historic distinction and natural beauty, while responding to the special challenges of 21st century development. We pursue these goals through public education, research and civic action, and we celebrate the city's unique role as both the home of the District's citizens and the capital of our nation.



DC Preservation League: Founded in 1971 as "Don't Tear It Down," the DC Preservation League is a nonprofit membership-supported organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing Washington's historic buildings and open spaces for future generations to enjoy. As Washington's citywide preservation advocacy organization, DCPL identifies significant buildings and neighborhoods, monitors threats to them, and increases public awareness of historic resources.



National Trust for Historic Preservation: The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a privately funded nonprofit organization, works to save America's historic places. We are the cause that inspires Americans to save the places where history happened. The cause that connects us to our diverse pasts, weaving a multi-cultural nation together. The cause that transforms communities from places where we live into places that we love. As the leading voice for preservation, we are the cause for people saving places.

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Executive Summary

Union Station stands at a crucial junction.

Over the past 35 years, this landmark has changed from a deteriorating, depressing white elephant to a beautiful, inspiring illustration of how historic buildings are central to a livable community. The station, which opened in 1907, is one of Washington's most popular tourist attractions and a gateway for millions of travelers each year. It now provides a remarkable collection of benefits to visitors and residents alike: a beautiful structure, multi-modal transportation, opportunities for shopping and dining, jobs, and tax revenues.

The question facing us now is clear: **how do we ensure Union Station remains a beautiful, vibrant center of urban life in the nation's capital?**

Several groups have recently proposed major developments that would expand and change this station. These projects create unparalleled opportunities to ensure that our community protects—and even restores—Union Station's historic character while making it a world-class, mixed-use development and multi-modal transportation center.

The new Union Station Preservation Coalition is dedicated to ensuring that planning for these projects recognizes the importance of the historic resource and serves the building's most important stakeholder: the public. Not only is Union Station publicly owned (by the federal government), but passing through it each day are approximately 100,000 members of the public. Today's users follow in the footsteps of millions of people over the past century. Residents and visitors alike must be able to enjoy this remarkable building far into the future. For those reasons, the public must both be informed about redevelopment plans and have the ability to shape them.

This report introduces the current proposals for the terminal, documents the importance of Union Station, and explains how its past and future can be balanced by following eight recommendations. Primary among those recommendations are:

- (1) planning at and around the station must be integrated and comprehensive
- (2) preservation of the station must be a top priority
- (3) transportation must be the station's primary use.

A renewed Union Station can continue to meet the expectations of its users for generations to come.

Achieving that crucial goal will require a deep commitment from many people.



Big Changes Are Coming to Union Station

In 1978 then-U.S. Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams accurately labeled Union Station “a mess.” The station was falling apart, with problems that included a leaky roof, aging mechanical systems, and exterior walls with holes. Just as bad was the lack of a clear purpose for the station. Over the previous two decades, people had recommended making the building a visitor center, a transportation museum, a performing arts center, a shopping mall, or even demolishing it.

Thanks to the efforts of thousands of people and the investment of millions of dollars since the 1980s, the station is now a thriving hub of transportation and commercial activity. On a typical day, nearly 100,000 people pass through its doors via 14 modes of transportation. More than 200,000 square feet of commercial space in the station command some of the highest rents in the District, serve travelers and residents alike, and generate jobs.

It is precisely this success that has attracted new proposals to Union Station. Several stakeholders want to make dramatic changes that could improve the station—or undermine an architectural and community icon.

These proposals have inspired a clear call to action for the Union Station Preservation Coalition and the public: **we must ensure that Union Station remains an awe-inspiring, highly functional, and vibrant center of urban life for Washington’s residents and visitors.**

Complicating the work of protecting Union Station’s legacy are the multiple, potentially competing plans now under consideration. Not only must the community determine whether each individual project is truly an improvement or a detriment, but it is just as necessary to analyze how—or even if—the plans fit together. Because the plans will be competing for the same space, setting priorities will be crucial.



1980's Restoration of Union Station

Changes That Could Affect Union Station

Among the projects under consideration:

Substantially bigger railroad facilities. Amtrak is anticipating major increases above its current 15,000 passengers per day. Present traffic, plus regional commuters riding MARC (30,000 people per weekday) and VRE (20,000), already stretches the station's capacity on a regular basis. Ending or reducing lines of people that snake through the station and choke circulation will demand more interior space. Amtrak has released its preliminary vision for the station, but there remains much to be determined.

Major interior rebuilding. Ashkenazy Acquisitions, which manages the commercial spaces in the station, wants to add more retail. Especially important to the firm is the lower area that formerly housed movie theaters. To attract customers to the lower area, Ashkenazy has proposed cutting two major holes in the floor of the Great Hall. Also, commercial expansion has the potential to undercut transportation-related uses, as well as to block pedestrian flow.

Expanded transit facilities. People who have fought their way through Union Station at rush hour won't be surprised that it is the busiest stop on the Metro system. The building also is a major part of the Metrobus and Circulator bus systems, and in the future will serve as the western end of the H Street trolley line. It is crucial that people be able to move easily between the trains and other transportation modes.

Major buildings over the tracks. Akridge, a real estate development firm, is developing plans to construct more than 3 million square feet of office, residential, retail, and hotel space on platforms above the railroad tracks behind Union Station—almost as much space as the Pentagon! Mixed-use development would produce jobs and tax revenue, but the new buildings could loom over the station and neighborhood, and flood an already crowded facility with more people.



Currently, the Union Station Redevelopment Corporation (USRC) has overall responsibility for Union Station. Created by Congress in the 1980s to manage the last major changes to the building, USRC may not have sufficient authority and organizational capacity to oversee all the upcoming developments while simultaneously protecting the landmark station.

Large-scale, uncoordinated changes risk harm to the terminal. The plans described above, both individually and collectively, present the danger of overwhelming Union Station's historic character, cutting off key historic features, inserting new, incompatible elements, and undermining the beauty and functionality of the building.

Historic Union Station: This Place Matters

Union Station has been at the heart of life in the nation's capital since its opening in 1907, and remains one of the world's most admired railroad terminals. Its monumental Main Hall and the adjacent areas have enabled thousands of people to move effortlessly to their destinations. The station has handled more than 200,000 people in a single day, efficiently connecting the capital to the rest of the country and the world.

Timeline of Key Dates in the History of Union Station



1901: The McMillan Commission determined that further development of the L'Enfant Plan necessitated removing existing railroad facilities from the National Mall.



1903: Congress approved the union terminal site on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue, with D.H. Burnham & Co. as the building's architects. Burnham and chief designer Peirce Anderson employed the elegant Beaux-Arts style and drew on Rome's Baths of Diocletian and triumphal arches for the building's inspiration. The glorious result helped set the tone for Washington's monumental architecture for the next forty years.



1907: Union Station opened with the arrival of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad's Pittsburgh Express. The rail station went into full service the following year.



1917-8: The station became a center of American efforts during World War I, moving deploying soldiers to ships bound for Europe and civilians to the capital to manage tremendous logistical demands.



1939: President Franklin Roosevelt welcomed King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to Washington in the station's State Reception Room.



1942 – 1945: The all-out effort for World War II meant the station handled as many as 200,000 people in twenty-four hours. *Parade* magazine said that the building held the "pulse of a nation at war."

Union Station's elegant Beaux-Arts design and finely chosen materials helped define the architectural experience of visitors and residents. They also embodied the wealth and power of both the station's railroad owners and of the country whose capital it served. By allowing the Pennsylvania Railroad to vacate its 19th century station and tracks on the National Mall, it also made possible key features of the McMillan Plan, particularly the creation of the Mall in its current form.

Facts and figures about Union Station

- 213,000 square feet of retail space
- 109,700 square feet of office
- 63,800 square feet of concourse
- 4,000 parking spaces
- 1.8 Miles to the White House; .4 Miles to the US Capital;
2.7 Miles to the Lincoln Memorial
- 90,000 visitors and commuters utilize Union Station each day



1945 – 1965: Non-commuter train travel declined by 84 percent.



1964: The Beatles arrived at Union Station from New York City to perform their first North American concert at Uline Arena, just east of the station.



1976: Union Station became the National Visitor Center, an attempt to create a central place for tourists to orient themselves to the capital. It closed in 1981 after failing to draw sufficient crowds.



1981: Congress passed legislation to convert the station into a festival mall and transportation center, including the addition of a new railroad terminal to the north of the original concourse. The nonprofit Union Station Redevelopment Corporation oversaw the restoration of Union Station, ensured its return as a functioning rail station, and created a retail/entertainment destination.



1988: Union Station reopened its doors with a gala celebration. A public-private partnership funded the \$160 million effort to preserve the station as a national treasure. It was one of the largest, most complex public-private restoration projects ever attempted in the United States.



1980's Restoration of Union Station

A Golden Opportunity to Re-invest in Historic Union Station

People who love Union Station agree that now is the moment to recommit to the careful stewardship of the historic building.

The Union Station Preservation Coalition recommends these guiding principles:

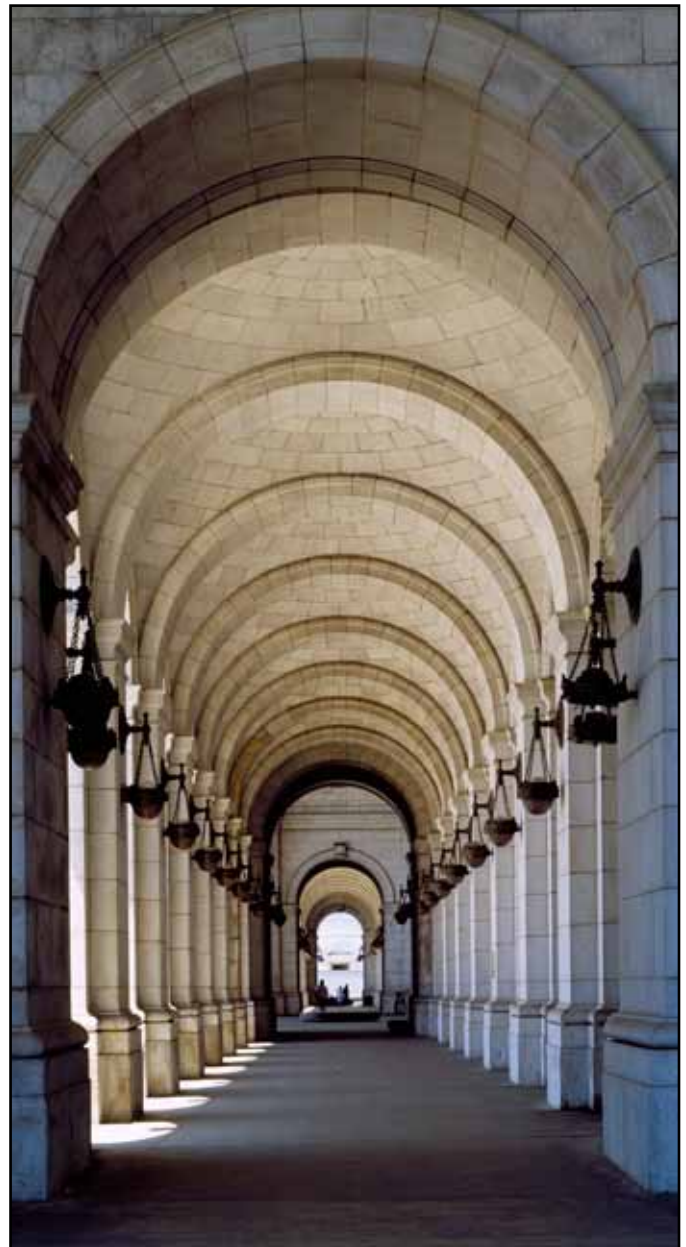
- 1. Restoration of Union Station must go hand-in-hand with its expansion.** Union Station is a national architectural icon and an irreplaceable Washington landmark. As hundreds of millions of dollars are spent to expand it as a transportation center, the historic station should be restored to its original grandeur and protected from harmful future changes.
- 2. A preservation plan must guide the expansion of Union Station.** Union Station merits first-rate preservation planning that will assess and guide these capital projects affecting the historic structure. The plan must demonstrate best practices of historic preservation, walkable urbanism, and sustainable architectural design.
- 3. The public must participate in Union Station's master planning.** Union Station is a beloved historic place owned and used by the public, and its redevelopment is a momentous public works project. Complete and timely information about any project should be readily available to all, and the public should have a meaningful role in the planning process.
- 4. Transportation must remain Union Station's primary function.** The station should serve travelers, commuters, and visitors in an efficient and positive way. Shops and restaurants will always be important, but they should be distributed throughout the expanded complex to avoid congesting or overwhelming the majestic historic interiors.

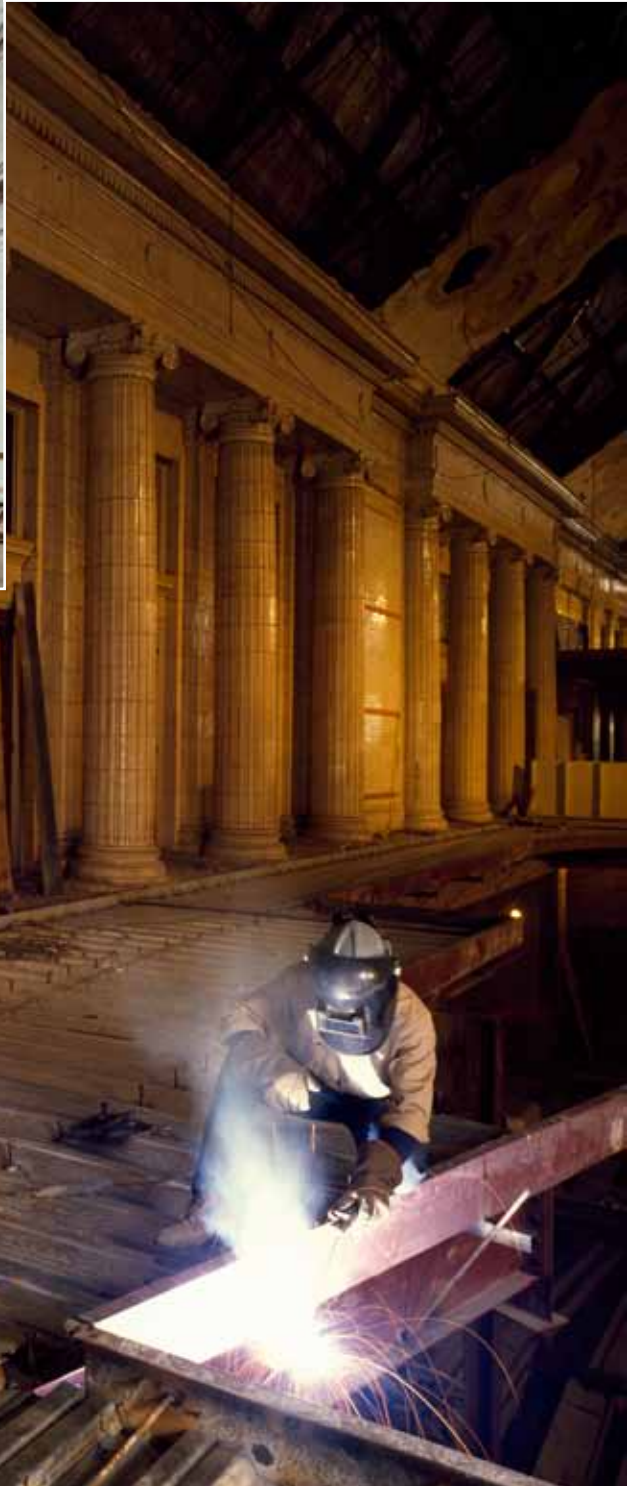
5. Future work must restore Union Station's original pedestrian circulation pattern. Union Station was expertly designed to handle and orient large crowds of travelers with ease. Modern-day impediments to convenient circulation should be removed, and any new concourses and facilities should be seamlessly integrated with the historic circulation pattern.

6. Union Station must provide visitors an exceptional experience. The station is an internationally renowned gateway and tourist destination. Special care should be taken to enhance the visitor's experience, including wayfinding and interpretive signs. Security measures should protect the public without unduly limiting public access or undermining the station's beauty.

7. Development adjoining Union Station must embody exemplary architectural design. The placement and design of new buildings near Union Station should be compatible with and enhance the historic station. They should strive to become respectful landmarks of our own time.

8. Union Station must become a splendid neighborhood anchor. The expansion of Union Station is an unprecedented opportunity for the surrounding neighborhoods. The project should support community revitalization and create new connections that benefit both travelers and neighbors.





1980's Restoration of Union Station

Contact Information and Links

Union Station Redevelopment Corporation:

Union Station is currently managed by the Union Station Redevelopment Corporation. Created in 1982, the USRC is a privately-owned nonprofit organization created to oversee restoration of Union Station, ensure its return to a functioning rail station, and create a retail/entertainment destination. USRC offers more information about its work at www.usrcdc.com.

Union Station Preservation Coalition:

Visit the websites below to learn more about developments at Union Station, including how you can help keep this national treasure thriving for future generations.

Capitol Hill Restoration Society

www.chrs.org
info@chrs.org
202.543.0425

Committee of 100 on the Federal City

www.committeeof100.net
info@committeeof100.net
202.681.0225

DC Preservation League

www.dcpreservation.org
info@dcpreservation.org
202.783.5144

National Trust for Historic Preservation

<http://savingplaces.org>
info@savingplaces.org
202.588.6000



