

# The Committee of 100

on the Federal City



May 20, 2020

The Honorable Phil Mendelson  
Chair, Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 504  
Washington, DC 20004

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Re: Union Station/Burnham Place Project Requires FRA Input

Dear Chairman Mendelson:

First and foremost, Union Station is a train station and a critical component of the transportation infrastructure of Washington, DC. Yet the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has refused to make public the fundamental underlying design for the reconfiguration of the rail tracks and passenger platforms until issuance of the draft EIS.

The January 9 and May 7, 2020 NCPC meetings focused on the parking garage and the bus facility. Progress on these and other elements of the redesigned Union Station and Burnham Place must await track design solutions from FRA. The reconfigured rail tracks will determine the location of the columns that will support the deck for Burnham Place and the expanded Union Station and what structures can be supported by those columns. Thus, the design of neither the expanded Union Station nor Burnham Place can proceed without that information.

Amtrak's Union Station Master Plan was issued in 2012. But since then, Amtrak, VRE and MARC have developed expansion plans that would greatly increase the number of trains and the number of rail passengers using Union Station, including plans for High Speed Rail south of Union Station. VRE has approved funding to thru-run its trains through Union Station into Maryland, and MARC hopes to run its trains into Virginia. *The plans for reconfiguring the tracks and passenger platforms, and how that reconfiguration will accommodate the needs of rail operations and rail passengers, must be provided for public review and comment before the expansion of Union Station and design of Burnham Place can move forward. This critical information must be considered by all parties before issuance of the draft EIS. And the District of Columbia needs to take an active role in that review and planning:*

DC Office of Planning: The District has a unique relationship with rail-related investments that occur within its borders. As an important stakeholder, the District can help plan and coordinate key aspects of this mammoth project. Funding and project management will primarily fall to other governmental or

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The Honorable Phil Mendelson

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private entities. The two commuter rail systems that operate into the District are sponsored and funded by the neighboring states. Several state-supported intercity Amtrak routes originate and terminate in the District but are supported by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Commuter and passenger rail are essential and prominent elements in the City's transportation portfolio that require no investment beyond coordination and planning on the part of the City and thus deserve prominent discussion and support by the DC Office of Planning.

DC Office of Energy and the Environment: Under the *Rail Safety and Security Amendment Act of 2016*, DC Code §8-151, DOEE is to "implement and administer safety and security programs and initiatives for rail systems within the District," and "conduct inspection, investigative, enforcement, and surveillance activities related to the safety and security of railroad operations within the District." Union Station's expanded rail operations will impose two very significant safety-related issues:

1. Union Station's interface with the two-track First Street Tunnel that provides rail access south of Union Station will require signaling and scheduling controls to accommodate the increased rail traffic. Penn Station in New York is served by two tunnels (the North River Tunnels) under the Hudson River that accommodate up to 24 trains per hour in each direction, requiring very precise scheduling and control. DOEE needs to investigate the safety and security of how the Union Station/First Street Tunnel will implement operational scheduling and control for these higher train volumes.
2. North of Union Station, only the NE Corridor tracks that serve the Penn Line align with the tracks that connect to the First Street Tunnel tracks. Thus, for VRE to thru-run into Maryland on the Brunswick and Camden Lines, the interconnections between Union Station and tracks north of Union Station will need to be reconfigured to provide turnouts and crossovers to connect these rail lines and facilities will require switching and control systems. The safety and security of these changes need to be reviewed by DOEE.

At the May 7th NCPC meeting, Akridge challenged the need for the above-ground parking and bus facility now planned for the 5.2 acre federally-owned parcel, and questioned whether the amount of parking proposed is excessive and could better be accommodated below-ground. The Committee of 100 commends your direction that DC OP work with FRA and Akridge on this issue. We recommend that effort also address the question of what should be done with the 5.2-acre parcel if parking and the bus facility are relocated, i.e., should all or part of that parcel be used for rail track re-configuration or other uses directly related to rail operations.

Union Station is a nationally critical rail hub with complex challenges as it expands to serve both our regional and national rail needs more efficiently. The C100 welcomes the opportunity to work with your office on these issues.

Sincerely,



Monte Edwards

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