

The Committee of 100

on the Federal City



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Committee on Transportation and the Environment

Performance Oversight Hearing

District Department of Transportation

Statement of
Monte Edwards

Friday, February 26, 2021

I'm here today to talk about what DDOT needs to do in the reopened Union Station DEIS.¹ While public attention has focused almost exclusively on the need to downsize the proposed Union Station parking garage, the real concern is much more complex: **the impact of separating freight and passenger/commuter rail operations south of Union Station.**

The September 2020 Long Bridge FEIS will add a fourth track to the trackage south of Union Station and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation will build, own and operate the new two-track Long Bridge river-crossing dedicated to passenger and commuter rail. These decisions will result in separation of passenger and freight rail operations south of Union Station. But if not taken into account in the reopened Union Station DEIS a major benefit to rail operations will not be achieved.

Passenger trains are shorter and lighter and can accelerate faster and stop more quickly than freight trains. For these reasons, many more passenger trains can operate if they are under passenger control and scheduling than if their operations are intermixed with freight trains and controlled and scheduled based on freight requirements. An example of this is New York's Penn Station, served by two tunnels (the North River Tunnels) under the Hudson River, analogous to the two tunnels that serve Union Station from the south (the First Street Tunnels). The North River Tunnels accommodate up to 24 passenger and commuter trains per hour in each direction.

In contrast, the tracks south of Union Station are controlled and scheduled by CSX and accommodate only 6 peak-hour trains, and only in one direction.² The fourth track in SW and new rail bridge will be able to separate passenger and freight operations and thereby transform our rail system into a more modern, efficient and inclusive rail network that will more than

¹ <https://railroads.dot.gov/environmental-reviews/washington-union-station-expansion-project/draft-environmental-impact>

² *DC State Rail Plan*, page 3-35.

quadruple the passenger/commuter rail capacity south of Union Station. But this dramatic change in rail operations is completely ignored in the Union Station DEIS.³

The ability of the trackage south of Union Station to accommodate this greatly increased number of commuter and passenger trains needs to be recognized and taken into account in the reopened Union Station DEIS. It is imperative that the reopened Union Station DEIS provide a comprehensive perspective of rail operations within the District of Columbia. DDOT, as the agency responsible for the DC State Rail Plan, is in the best position to understand these two rail plans and how they affect each other. The Committee of 100 is urging more coordination and assertive planning of commuter and passenger rail operations in the reopened Union Station DEIS. The Council needs to urge DDOT to assume a more proactive role in achieving a truly integrated commuter and passenger rail system.

DDOT needs to take a more active role in the reopened Union Station DEIS to maximize the benefits of commuter and passenger rail in DC.

Thank you.

³ In fact the DEIS clearly states the contrary – that passenger and commuter rail operations south of Union Station will continue to be controlled by CSX (Appendix B, page 23):
“The 2040 simulation retains operating variability for trains arriving from the south, given assumed continued ownership and dispatch by freight railroads in the future [emphasis added].”