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TESTIMONY
of
JULIETTE MICHAELSON, SENIOR PLANNER,
REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION
before the
EMPIRE STATE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
hearing on
SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE PROPOSED
MOYNIHAN STATION
December 6, 2007
Farley Building, 380 West 33rd Street, Room 4500, New York, New York

Thank you for this opportunity to address the scope of the environmental assessment for the proposed Moynihan Station and accompanying development. My name is Juliette Michaelson, I am a senior planner with Regional Plan Association.

We at RPA believe that Moynihan Station is the single most critical transportation and civic project in New York City this decade. Moynihan Station will not only greatly improve the lives of the 450,000 people who use the station daily, but it will also act as the critical stepping stone toward the redevelopment of the Far West Side. Without Moynihan Station, the Far West Side as we have all begun to imagine it in recent years, will not happen. We must build Moynihan Station well and we must build it now.

One key issue to be addressed is the projected cost and likely sources of revenue for the train station. As I mentioned earlier, Moynihan Station is one of the most important public works project in the city right now, and the city and state ought to prioritize it as they write their capital budgets. In addition, every effort ought to be made to obtain funding from the federal government, including the Historic Preservation Tax Credits available for the Farley Building if it is renovated in a way that is consistent with historic preservation guidelines. Finally, because Moynihan Station is also a major private project, we expect that the Venture and Madison Square Garden contribute their fair share to the cost of the station.

Another key issue that will need to be addressed in the upcoming environmental approvals process is the design of the complex. We're building for the next 100 years or more, and it's imperative that the station design reflects that it is first and foremost a public building and a transportation facility. Retail and Madison Square Garden are compatible – and even complementary – uses, but the needs of commuters and Amtrak patrons need to be considered first.

With regard to the two alternatives described in the scoping document, RPA supports the “Moynihan Station Subdistrict” alternative. Moving development rights off-site will reduce major train disruptions during construction, result in a better train station, and help to jump-start the revitalization of the district around the station. RPA, however, is concerned that the amount of retail planned for Moynihan East – 1.1 MSF – is excessive and could detract from the sense that it is a public transportation facility. For this reason, we ask that the ESDC include another alternative in the EIS that disperses more development rights throughout the neighborhood.

RPA also requests that the EIS focus on the issue of construction management for Moynihan Station in light of the fact that many other mega-projects will be in progress in midtown at the same time. Construction materials and equipment will be in high demand and expensive. Enormous amounts of materials will have to be transported to, and waste from, the various construction sites. A large number of workers will also need to travel to and from the sites every day. Shipments by barge and rail, shared staging areas and 24-hour construction schedules may become necessary given all of the concurrent mega-projects planned for the area. The EIS should investigate these and other innovative construction management options.

With regard to the Borough President’s suggestion of pedestrianizing 33rd Street, we think it is a very good idea, as it would provide a strong pedestrian and visual connection between Herald Square and the Hudson River.

Finally, RPA urges ESDC and Amtrak to retain ownership of Moynihan Station. The Scoping Document mentions that “ESDC intends to retain ownership of the Farley Complex” but makes no mention of what will happen to Penn Station.

**For more information, contact:
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