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Keeping Moynihan Station on Track

Testimony by Richard N. Gottfried

Before the Empire State Development Corporation, Moynihan Station Development Corporation
and the Port Authority of New York/New Jersey

Farley Post Office

Wednesday, April 28, 2010

My name is Richard N. Gottfried. I represent the 75th Assembly District, which includes Pennsylvania Station and the Farley Post Office. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today.

Turning the Farley Post Office into a train station worthy of entering the City of New York is long overdue. This civic project will be a catalyst to development and economic growth in the area, while promoting historic preservation and improving transportation access in the region. This project will help transform Hell's Kitchen South and Midtown Manhattan. I commend the Moynihan Station Development Corporation (MSDC) and the Port Authority of New York/New Jersey for their work.

I support the project and am very pleased that it has emerged as a realistic development. However, I do have some serious concerns that I hope MSDC and the Port Authority will consider.

While I would prefer to have this entire project go through the City's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure, I understand that time is of the essence.

The TIGER grant received from the federal stimulus package must be spent quickly, and delaying Phase I would jeopardize this funding.

The proposed General Project Plan for Phase I is an improvement over previous proposals. The importance of catenary work, vertical access into Farley, platform extensions, and additional entrances are essential to both short- and long-term development. The current Penn Station is beyond capacity and does not work well. Widening the access platform on the western concourse will help mitigate overcrowding and layover time for the LIRR and NJT right away, while acting as a stepping-stone to transforming Farley into Moynihan.

Phase I is not easy. Most of the work for Phase I occurs in close quarters in a busy operating train shed, and must be done with cooperation by Amtrak, MSDC, and the Port Authority. Therefore, we must work to ensure the project moves forward in a timely fashion and prevent it from being bogged down by federal bureaucracy.

Regarding the street level entrances on 31st and 33rd Streets at Eighth Avenue: although no designs have been released, it is important to make sure that the changes to the building's moat walls and widening of windows will be respectful to the building's current aesthetic. MSDC and the Port Authority have both acknowledged how closely they intend to work with the State Historic Preservation Office and preservation advocates around the City to ensure that the alterations do not affect the integrity of the building. Knowing federal tax credits are at stake if alterations go awry reinforces the effort by MSDC and the Port Authority to do the right thing. Nonetheless, when designs are released for the entrances, public input must be heard. Preservation advocates and many of us have

concerns about how signage and other possible elements will affect the façade below the monumental steps.

Also of community concern are the ventilation shafts that will be installed along 31st and 33rd Streets. While essential to the function of a train station, consideration must be made for the neighborhood, both environmentally and visually. It is disconcerting that there is no mention in the GPP of the type or size of the vents, nor a specific location. Though the vents would only be used during an emergency, their design should respect, and not scar, the building. Considering the scope and detail of the plans, it is difficult to believe that MSDC and the Port Authority are unsure of where these vents will be.

It is important that Phase II go through the City's ULURP process. Time is not an obstacle to this. The funding for Phase II is not contingent on timing, and construction will hinge on private interest, a better economic market, and a quality plan. Considering the millions of square feet of development that will be awarded through air rights transfers and re-zoning, MSDC and the Port Authority should be required to comply with ULURP. We have recent precedent for public authority projects going through ULURP and being greatly improved because of it. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority put the West Side Rail Yards project through ULURP and thus will one day be a more inclusive community while respecting the surrounding neighborhoods. The Access to the Region's Core project has also improved during the review process and will help decrease congestion at Penn Station. Putting Phase II through ULURP would improve the result and ultimately strengthen public support.

I am a regular traveler on Amtrak for my trips to and from Albany, and also for trips to Washington, Boston, Philadelphia and other cities. I look forward to the day when I can use a station worthy of our city, much like the grand stations of Philadelphia, Washington, and Chicago. The time for this project is long overdue. Let's get it back on track.

Thank you for allowing me to comment on this issue.