November 16, 2019

The Honorable Muriel Bowser  
Executive Office of the Mayor  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004

The Honorable Phil Mendelson  
And Members of the Council  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Re: Union Station Expansion Project

Dear Mayor Bowser and Councilmembers:

We are writing to express our urgent concerns regarding the Union Station Expansion Project and to call upon you to provide the leadership necessary to ensure this project succeeds in providing a world-class transportation center worthy of the nation’s capital and the residents of the District of Columbia.¹

As you are aware, the Union Station Redevelopment Corporation (USRC) and Amtrak are proposing an expansion of Union Station. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is the lead agency and has been coordinating the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Section 106 process for over four years.

The stated goals of this proposed multi-billion dollar project are to improve the station’s functionality, enhance the customer experience, and meet increased demand for transportation services. In addition, the project is supposed to include preservation and maintenance of the historic building as well as sustain the station’s economic viability and its integration with adjacent neighborhoods, businesses and planned development.

We have grave concerns that the Action Alternatives developed by the FRA to date in the EIS process would significantly and needlessly harm the station and the surrounding neighborhoods.² We do not see any Action Alternative to date that meets the goal of a successful integration of the expanded station with either the adjacent neighborhoods or the planned development of the Railroad Air Rights known as the Burnham Place project. Union Station is a multimodal transportation hub located in the center of the District in a vibrant and growing neighborhood, yet the Action Alternatives to date prioritize private automobile usage and parking over mass

¹ On November 13, 2019 at a regularly scheduled, duly noticed monthly meeting of ANC 6C, with a quorum of 6 out of 6 commissioners and the public present, the above-mentioned item came before us. The commissioners voted unanimously, 6:0:0, to send this letter to express our urgent concerns regarding the Union Station Expansion Project.
² See ANC 6C letters to the Federal Railroad Administration, May 14, 2018 and May 9, 2019.
transit, walking and biking. These alternatives are contrary to the proposed DC Comp Plan. We believe there is little need to accommodate private parking at the station, especially where doing so would sacrifice the opportunity for the development of vibrant public spaces, as would occur if a massive above-ground parking garage were constructed.

Furthermore, we believe the Action Alternatives to date include poorly planned station access and circulation for private cars, for-hire vehicles, and local and intercity buses. As currently envisioned, the expanded Union Station would be surrounded by a snarl of cars and buses, creating a barrier to access for the residents of the surrounding neighborhoods and leading to an increase in traffic on the narrow streets of the Capitol Hill historic district.

There is still time to influence this project. The FRA has announced a meeting on November 19, 2019, to share information on a new alternative as part of the Section 106 process. ANC 6C believes that the senior leadership of the Office of Planning and the District Department of Transportation should be actively involved making clear the District's priorities in reducing dependencies on car traffic, creating active street life and well-designed public spaces, and enhancing one of the crown jewels among the District’s historic landmarks.

As we approach a critical inflection point for this massive and critically important project, we have grave concerns that the interests of community members and District residents are being given short shrift in the planning process. The result threatens to be not just a major missed opportunity, but a costly investment in infrastructure that undermines rather than enhances the District of Columbia’s efforts to increase resilience, equity and livability in our built environment.

Union Station is and should be a national gateway to the District of Columbia. This is an opportunity to create both a great public space that people will want to visit as well as a world class transportation center that can be a model for the country and the world. We urge you to recognize the potential for this project and to guide its development at this crucial time.

Thank you for giving great weight to the recommendations of ANC 6C.

On behalf of ANC 6C,

Karen Wirt
ANC 6C Chair

Cc: The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton
    Andrew Trueblood, OP
    Jeff Marootian, DDOT
    David Valenstein, FRA
    Beverly Swaim-Staley, USRC
    Johnette Davies, Amtrak