

STATEMENT OF BROCK ADAMS, SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION,
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC
WORKS CONCERNING UNION STATION/NATIONAL VISITOR CENTER,
THURSDAY, MAY 25, 1978.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be able to appear before you today with our proposal to complete and improve the Washington Union Station/National Visitor Center complex and to put an end to a very vexing problem.

Back in 1968, when the Congress passed the Visitor Center Act, Union Station appeared to be nearing the end of its useful life as a railway passenger terminal. Since the late 1940's, train travel had decreased significantly. However, as the need for a railway terminal seemed to be waning, the need for improved accommodations for visitors to the Nation's Capital was becoming more and more urgent. The Congress recognized the trend of the times by designating the Union Station building as the National Visitor Center.

Nevertheless, since the inception of the National Visitor Center, transportation trends have changed while the Visitor Center has been underutilized. In view of the environmental and energy-related benefits of rail transportation, the Congress in 1974 authorized the Northeast Corridor Improvement Project. This is a \$1.75 billion

Federal commitment to the preservation and enhancement of intercity rail passenger service in the heavily populated Atlantic Seaboard region. As a direct and desired result of this Federal commitment, Amtrak patronage at Union Station is expected to increase significantly from its current level. Also, with the completion of the Metro Red Line from Dupont Circle to Silver Spring, and the corresponding rerouting of Metrobuses, Union Station has already become an important link in Washington's public transit network. In view of these changes, the Secretary of the Interior and I have agreed on the need for a more rational allocation and application of Federal resources.

The practical problems at Union Station today are serious and require immediate attention. The Interior Department, through the National Park Service, is saddled with a facility which is too large for its needs. Train passengers must walk long distances, approximately one-third of a mile from the front door on Columbus Plaza to the train loading platforms.

In addition, work has been suspended on the parking garage and improvements to the main building. For this reason, there is no place for potential rail passengers or Visitor Center users to park-- a further obstacle to increased use of the facility. Exposed structural

elements in the unfinished facilities are physically deteriorating. Conditions in the buildings have become hazardous for employees, visitors and rail passengers. Repairs are essential even if the present use of the building is to continue. In other words, the present facilities are less than adequate for current and future needs.

For more than a year now, Secretary Andrus and I have been discussing this problem, and have agreed that the Department of Transportation should assume control of Union Station and should quickly complete and reconfigure this facility as a transportation and visitor center.

We have also agreed on the necessity to complete the near-term repairs expeditiously, the nature of the long-term work and the timing for completion, the general allocation of space in the building, and who will own and operate the station.

What we present for your consideration is a coordinated proposal that we believe will meet the needs of all of the potential users of the complex: tourists, commuters and long distance travelers. I must emphasize that it will cost money and is going to take some time to complete. However, our best judgment is that our proposal is a workable plan which everyone can live with and which can be performed within the proposed funding and time schedules.

Now, I would like to explain what we propose to do and give you the basic facts and figures. (You may wish to follow along in the reference books we have supplied for your information.)

First of all, immediate repairs are essential to the parking garage, the southeast ramp, and the main building. These structural supports and fire protection measures are needed immediately to insure the integrity of the garage, ramp, and the Station itself, and to stop the deterioration which every day adds to the ultimate cost of completing these facilities. These urgent remedial efforts will help to preserve the National Visitor Center and rail terminal alike. (Note pictures in reference book.)

Second, the completion of the parking garage will include minor changes in design to expand the planned parking capacity from 1,200 to 1,400 cars for rail travelers and visitors to the National Visitor Center.

Third, our program includes railway station improvements which will expedite passenger processing, provide appropriate waiting areas, upgrade public services and other amenities, and allow for revenue-producing concessions. Under our proposal the upgraded rail terminal will provide the elderly and handicapped and all other rail passengers with direct and expeditious access from Columbus Plaza to the trains by reducing the physical distances by approximately

50% to 60%. Making the station accessible to elderly and handicapped persons is consistent with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, Section 16 of the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Our program also provides for rail use of the Station's west wing and concourse.

Fourth, on-site roadway improvements will include completing the partially constructed southeast ramp which provides a local bus access to the garage. A taxi queuing ramp will be constructed on the east side of the Station to reduce congestion in Columbus Plaza and adjacent city streets. Again, these roadway improvements will benefit all users of the facility.

Fifth, long-term repairs to the main building would include a modernized electrical distribution and branch circuit system; a new roof and roof drainage system; a new heating system; and long-term structural system repairs. (Note pictures of exposed wiring which creates a safety hazard.)'

Sixth, non-construction costs would pay for the Government's possible acquisition of certain property interests at the Station to carry out our recommended program.

As you can see from the attached summary of costs for the recommended construction program, the price tag is not a small one. We estimate that approximately \$30 million in new authority will be required to rehabilitate the old Station building, complete construction, and provide a usable facility for rail passengers and visitors. I am not particularly pleased with this figure, but I think it is a realistic one. It would be our intention to put the contract out for competitive bids, with fixed price requirements, to protect as much as possible against cost escalation and inflation. The cost estimate assumes that construction begins in January 1979. Of course, there will be cost increases if that date is not met.

The Department of Transportation is willing to contribute an additional \$22 million from funds already authorized for the Northeast Corridor Project bringing the total project cost to \$52 million. Given the troubled history of the complex, I see no possibility of collecting the capital funds required from the variety of other Federal and local entities involved with the complex. Any attempt to do so would only further delay an already much delayed project.

If the plan is approved, Secretary Andrus and I are prepared to implement this program immediately.

This concludes my prepared statement Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions you or any of the members of the Committee may have at this time.

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