

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT PENNSYLVANIA STATION REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The Pennsylvania Station Redevelopment Corporation (PSRC) has proposed a comprehensive program of improvements to convert portions of the James A. Farley Post Office Building (Farley Building) into a new intermodal passenger transportation facility that would serve as the National Railroad Passenger Corporation's (Amtrak) primary rail passenger station in New York City. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has prepared a detailed environmental assessment (EA) of PSRC's proposal in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) which was distributed for public and agency comment on August 10, 1999. PSRC's proposal followed an earlier Amtrak proposal that also contemplated the use of the Farley Building for Amtrak passenger rail functions. FRA had analyzed the environmental impacts of the Amtrak proposal in a December 1995 environmental assessment and the 1995 EA served as the foundation for the August 1999 EA. Based on the analysis summarized in the environmental assessments and the public comments received on these reports, the FRA has concluded that PSRC's proposed project will not have a significant impact on the human or natural environment within the meaning of section 102(c) of NEPA.

Background

Amtrak has recognized for a number of years that its aging New York City rail passenger terminal is inadequate to meet the present and future needs of intercity and commuter rail passengers. Amtrak's intercity rail passenger service is growing as electrification improvements are completed between New Haven and Boston and new high speed rail equipment comes into service. Commuter rail traffic is also experiencing significant growth at Penn Station both for the Long Island Rail Road and New Jersey Transit. Amtrak has explored several options to remedy the inadequacies of the current facilities. The options for improving the existing Penn Station are limited due to the bedrock in which the station was constructed and the level of development in place above and around the terminal. Amtrak focused its efforts on the possible use of the Farley Building when it learned that space might be available in this facility. The Farley Building, which is located directly across Eighth Avenue from the existing underground Penn Station, has direct access to the station platforms and tracks. Amtrak developed an initial proposal to accommodate rail passenger uses within the Farley Building. For several reasons, this proposal was not advanced to final design. PSRC was formed in 1995 by the Federal Government and the City and State of New York to lead a combined effort to develop a project that would meet the transportation needs of the New York City region. In addition to participation on the PSRC Board of Directors, these three entities have each committed funding to the project.

Federal Funding

In its role as a funding partner for the project, FRA has certain responsibilities under the NEPA and related environmental and historic preservation laws and regulations. No Federal funds for project construction can be made available to PSRC until appropriate NEPA findings have been made. FRA prepared the two EA's to meet these responsibilities. The 1999 EA has also been prepared in accordance with the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

Project Description

PSRC's proposal for the Farley Building is described in detail in section 1.3 of the August 1999 EA and summarized in section ES.3. Essentially, the Project involves modifications to the Farley Building for use as Amtrak's New York City terminal. All transportation and postal functions would be located within and beneath the Farley Building including a midblock at-grade intermodal hall, train concourse with ancillary retail facilities, postal loading dock facility below grade, a commuter concourse, Eighth Avenue subway connection improvements, and traffic and pedestrian improvements.

Environmental Considerations

The EA discusses potential impacts in ten general categories: rail transportation, vehicular traffic, parking and pedestrian conditions, noise, ground-borne vibration, air quality, natural environment, land use, community facilities, and socioeconomics, including environmental justice, historic and archeological resources, environmental risk sites, and energy and utilities. The detailed analysis for each category is included in Chapter 3 of the EA and summarized in the Executive Summary. In all instances, project impacts would be minor and would be below established thresholds. No significant impacts are projected for any of the impact assessment categories. In compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the FRA has concluded that the proposed project will not have an adverse effect on any properties on or eligible for the National Register. FRA has consulted with the New York State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) in accordance with section 106 and has notified the SHPO of FRA's determination (36 C.F.R. §800.5(b)). The SHPO has not objected to FRA's determination and is deemed to have concurred in it. (36 C.F.R. §800.5(c)(1)). In light of this determination, FRA has also concluded that the PSRC proposal does not involve the use of land of an historic site of national, State, or local significance under section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 (49 U.S.C. §303(c)).

Public/Agency Comments

The EA was made available for a thirty day public comment period beginning on August 10, 1999. Approximately 280 copies of Volume I (the main EA) and 90 copies of Volume II (Appendices) were distributed to the public. In addition, a notice of availability of the EA was published in the Federal Register on August 13, 1999. Finally, FRA placed information about the Pennsylvania Station Redevelopment Project and a copy of Volume I of the EA on the agency's Internet website. As noted above, the 1995 EA was also issued for public and agency comment in December 1995. The comments received on the 1995 EA were considered in developing the updated 1999 EA.

Six comments were received on the 1999 EA and a separate paper addressing each comment has been prepared and is attached to this Finding of No Significant Impact. In summary, two of the comments supported the project without reservation. Two comments supported the project but expressed concerns in one or more areas. One comment indicated that the project was too expensive and diverted resources from other transportation needs in the New York region. The

final comment requested the inclusion of a discussion of Amtrak's plans for service to Albany, NY. The agency has thoroughly reviewed the six comments and concluded that the public comments do not provide a basis for the agency to reconsider its preliminary determination that the Project will not have a significant impact on the environment (see page 5 of the 1999 EA).

Summary and Conclusion

The FRA has concluded that PSRC's proposed Pennsylvania Station Redevelopment Project will, if implemented as proposed, not have a significant adverse impact on the human or natural environment. The Project will have significant transportation benefits and will once again provide New York City with an appropriate rail passenger gateway reminiscent of the original 1910 Pennsylvania Station.


Jolene M. Molitoris
Administrator

9/22/99
Date

Attachments:

- Summary of Public Comments on the Environmental Assessment and Federal Railroad Administration's Responses
- Copies of the Public Comments on the Environmental Assessment Environmental Assessment, August 1999, Volumes I and II

**PENNSYLVANIA STATION REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT
SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
AND THE FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION'S RESPONSES**

Arnold Reinhold

Supports the project. The Pennsylvania Station Redevelopment Project has the potential to change public attitudes about rail transportation and have a major positive impact on cities throughout the Northeast.	Comment noted.
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Association for a Better New York

The Association fully supports the redevelopment project. Projects such as the Penn Station Redevelopment Project are vital to the continued economic strength of New York. The Project also provides continued employment for city residents and improved means of transportation for the northeast corridor.	Comment noted.
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Belknap Freeman

Use of the Farley Building as Amtrak's terminal would increase the length of access from or to 6 th and 7 th Avenues and Long Island Rail Road facilities.	Comment noted. Implementation of the Farley Project would increase walking distances for some passengers and shorten walking distances for other passengers. The goal of the project is to reduce congestion for current and future rail passengers and provide facilities to meet projected growth.
Airport access projects should be analyzed to insure that the Farley project does not build itself into a corner.	An airport access project is not within the Farley Project scope. Since little track-level work is proposed as part of the project, the project would not preclude any of the potential options. If a project is developed, passenger handling could be met within the Farley Building.
The track layout at Penn Station is on a grade (slope) in the Farley area which adds to the task of operating a train and even more so at slow speeds.	Comment noted.
The situation involving the presence of homeless in transportation centers must be addressed.	Amtrak and PSRC will be responsible for implementing measures to address the presence of the homeless in the new Pennsylvania Station as Amtrak is in existing Penn Station and the other stations it owns or operates across the country.

Offers an expanded description of the functions of the Penn Station Service Building.	Comment noted. The Penn Station Service Building is not a part of the current proposal.
Suggests further clarifications to the description of the track layout at Penn Station.	Comment noted. Additional detail is not relevant to the consideration of environmental impacts from the proposed project.
Notes that the figure 1-6 on page 24 is not completely up to date.	Comment noted. The graphic was included in the environmental assessment (EA) for illustrative purposes only. The differences noted in the comment would not affect the EA's conclusions.
Suggests the addition of additional discussion regarding the operation of trains in Penn Station.	The issues raised regarding the operation of trains in the station would not be affected by the Farley Project and are not relevant to the EA.
Suggests the need for additional discussion in the EA of how passengers will access trains from the Farley Building and the need to avoid platform congestion.	Comment noted. Amtrak will be responsible for operating its services in a manner that maximizes the efficiency of the new station and minimizes conflicts between passengers in obtaining access to and from the trains.
Comment suggests the need to make arrangements for airport access trains.	The current project does not include an airport access project nor does it preclude such a project in the future.
Suggests that Amtrak's life safety improvement project should address the "flipper" arrangements in the catenary system which preclude the lowering of the flood gates at the entrances to the North River Tunnels.	Comment noted. Amtrak projects that would address the North River Tunnels are not a part of the Farley Project and are not addressed in the EA. Amtrak plans a series of projects in the tunnels that are not related to or dependent on the Farley Project.
EA does not address details about certain Long Island Rail Road improvements.	Comment noted. Outside the scope of the EA.
Expresses concern with respect to various operating scenarios within Penn Station that might delay the operation of trains within the station.	Amtrak and the commuter rail operators will be responsible for addressing operational needs within Penn Station. The issues raised do not affect the conclusions drawn in the EA.

George Haikalis and Committee for Better Transit

<p>The substantial cost of this project greatly exceeds the modest benefit to public transit users in the region. Funding for this project will be diverted from sources (such as the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)) that would otherwise be available for much needed improvements in the region's basic public transit system.</p>	<p>Comment noted. The Federal, State and local funding partners supporting the Farley Project have concluded that the project has substantial benefits and that these benefits justify the investment of public funds. Decisions regarding the expenditure of funds from specific programs, such as CMAQ, will be made by the entities charged with implementing those programs.</p>
<p>Many aspects of the project design pose serious negative impacts for Amtrak's current riders, especially those who use local or regional rail as an access mode.</p>	<p>The project is designed to address serious operating difficulties existing in the current Penn Station and to address substantial passenger growth in intercity and commuter rail passenger usage over the next several years. While use of the Farley Building will increase the distances some passengers will have to traverse to access the regional transit systems, substantial overall benefits will be derived for the great majority of station patrons.</p>
<p>The EA does not describe the increased vehicle-miles of travel that will occur because of the project's design which tends to favor car and taxi travel over public transit for access to Amtrak's trains.</p>	<p>Several sections of the EA, including section 3.2 (Vehicular Traffic, Parking, and Pedestrian Conditions), section 3.3 (Noise Impacts), and section 3.5 (Air Quality), address anticipated impacts associated with the move of Amtrak's rail passenger terminal facilities from existing Penn Station to the Farley Building. No significant impacts are expected in any of these areas. Incremental changes associated with the Build Alternative would not create any exceedances of accepted thresholds to the area's traffic, pedestrian movements or parking supply, provided the Project's traffic and pedestrian improvements are implemented.</p>

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