

4.3.1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter considers the effects of the Project on the visual character and aesthetic conditions of the project site and surrounding area. It has been prepared in accordance with the guidelines for visual analyses contained in federal documents prepared by the FHWA, including *Guidance for Preparing and Processing Environmental and 4(f) Documents* (1987), *Environmental Impact Statement Visual Impact Discussion* (undated), and *Guidance Material on the Preparation of Visual Impact Assessments* (1986), which is the standard USDOT methodology for assessing potential impacts to visual and aesthetic resources.

The proposed project would redevelop the existing Farley Complex with a new train station and related commercial development, and it would construct a new mixed-use building on the Development Transfer Site. This analysis considers the effects of the proposed project on locations from which it would be visible. The study area for visual resources has been delineated as the area within approximately 400 feet of the project site, which is the same as the study area for historic properties as shown on Figure 4.2-1. Where there are substantial views to the project site in locations outside of the 400-foot study area, these locations have also been taken into account. To prepare this analysis, information was collected through field visits. Visually sensitive locations and viewer groups were identified, and duration of views were assessed to determine any potential effects.

4.3.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER

FARLEY COMPLEX

The Farley Complex (consisting of both the James A. Farley Building and the attached Western Annex) is located on a superblock over the Penn Station Rail Yard between Eighth and Ninth Avenues from West 31st to 33rd Streets. The James A. Farley Building fronts on Eighth Avenue and covers the eastern half of the block; the Western Annex, which was built in 1934, covers the western half of the block to Ninth Avenue. The two Classical Revival-style buildings are five stories (or approximately 120 feet) tall and clad in granite. The Farley Complex creates a strong streetwall along Ninth Avenue; however, on West 31st and 33rd Streets a perimeter moat surrounded by a stone wall separates the building from these streets by approximately 30 feet. On Eighth Avenue, the Farley Building is set back approximately 35 feet from the streetline behind a wide flight of stairs. Truck entrances are located on the Ninth Avenue end of the Western Annex off of a service driveway with exits on West 33rd Street. Back-in loading docks are located along the West 31st Street façade of the Western Annex near Ninth Avenue. The Empire State Development Corporation and the Moynihan Station Development Corporation recently completed a full restoration of the Eighth Avenue façade of the Farley Building.

DEVELOPMENT TRANSFER SITE

The Development Transfer Site is located on the east side of Eighth Avenue between West 33rd and 34th Streets. This site is the western portion of the block that contains One Penn Plaza, a 57-story office tower. The Development Transfer Site contain a one-story retail building along the length of Eighth Avenue with two small, one-story restaurants wings on West 33rd and West 34th Streets, and an elevated public open space east of the retail building. The public open space, which extends between West 33rd and 34th Streets, is well planted with flowerbeds and trees and includes shaded areas and a sculptural water feature. There are subway entrances at the northwest and southwest corners of the Development Transfer Site, marked by the typical green and red globe lamps and green metal stair enclosures. An enclosure for a subway entrance elevator is also located at the northwest corner of the site.

STUDY AREA

The study area is developed in the typical Manhattan grid street pattern, with wide avenues running north-south and narrow streets running east-west, creating short, wide, rectangular blocks. The superblocks spanning West 31st and West 33rd Streets occupied by the Farley Complex, the former Westyard Distribution Center building and the open rail cut, and Madison Square Garden and 2 Penn Plaza (and, below them, Penn Station) are exceptions to this pattern. The topography of the area is relatively flat; however, there is a slight rise in grade from south to north on Eighth and Ninth Avenues and from east to west between the avenues. Lampposts in the study area include the standard cobra-head design, a dark green lamppost with a central pole and two teardrop lamps, and the Bishop's Crook design. Street furniture includes concrete bollard planters, bus shelters, newspaper bins, and garbage cans; there are few street trees in the study area. Billboards are located on Ninth Avenue at West 30th and 33rd Streets and vertical advertising banners hang from the façades of Madison Square Garden. The sidewalks within the study area are generally wide, but are particularly so along West 34th Street and Eighth and Ninth Avenues.

The study area is densely developed. Buildings mainly occupy their full lots, date from a variety of time periods, and are diverse in style and material. Nearly all buildings in the study area are built to the street line and create strong street walls. The buildings to the north of the Farley Complex on West 33rd Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues include mixed-use office and residential buildings ranging in height from 14 to 35 stories. West of Ninth Avenue, West 33rd Street includes the Gothic and Romanesque Revival-style St. Michael's Catholic Church and its adjacent brick and stone school, convent, and vestry. The buildings along the north side of West 34th Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues include a series of three- to six-story tenements with ground-floor retail uses and a large amount of signage obscuring their facades and the Pennsylvania Building, a 22-story, Byzantine-style brick office building. Between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, the buildings along the north side of West 34th Street include a five-story parking garage, the New Yorker Hotel, the Renaissance Revival-style West Side Jewish Center, and a parking lot.

The intersections of Eighth Avenue and West 31st and 33rd Streets are unusually open because the 150-foot-tall, drum-shaped Madison Square Garden is set far back from the street, and its circular form allows for large pedestrian circulation areas on the east side of the avenue. Immediately south of the Farley Complex, the south side of West 31st Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues contains a utilitarian brick four-story parking garage, a brick loft building, and a bulky 15-story brick office building with a wide 250-foot frontage. South of the superblocks,

Eighth Avenue mainly includes tenement buildings, a parking lot, a modern 12-story brick apartment building, and an eight-story brick office building.

Ninth Avenue is dominated by the Farley Complex on the east side, and the tall brick wall overlooking Penn Station's lead tracks to the Hudson River Tunnel and the Empire Connection Tunnel, as well as portions of the Long Island Rail Road's approach tracks to the rail yard located on the west side of Ninth Avenue between West 31st and 33rd Streets and extending west along West 31st Street west of Ninth Avenue. South of West 31st Street, the buildings along Ninth Avenue include: a modern six-story stone-clad office building; the full-block, ten-story USPS Morgan Facility; 12- and 16-story modern brick apartment buildings; tenements; and surface parking lots. The north side of West 30th Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues is occupied by three-story brick row houses, some with their cornices remaining; modern nine- and eleven-story brick apartment buildings, and a few four-story tenement buildings. The south side of the street also includes three- and four-story brick row houses, tenement buildings, and six-, ten-, and twelve-story brick apartment buildings.

VISUALLY SENSITIVE RESOURCES

FHWA's *Guidance Material on the Preparation of Visual Impact Assessments* defines visual resources as those physical features that make up the visible landscape, including land, water, vegetation, and man-made elements to which viewers attach visual value. Visual resources may include historic buildings, open spaces such as parks and landscaped plazas, and views to natural resources such as water features and natural vegetation.

The visual resources on the project site and in (or visible from) the study area, and views to them, are as follows:

- The Farley Complex itself, although it is not prominent in most views because of its relatively low scale and light color. The building's façade is set well back (approximately 35 feet) from the streetline and its bulk cannot be easily perceived except from immediately adjacent streets;
- St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church, a Romanesque Revival-style church that spans the midblock between West 33rd and 34th Streets west of Ninth Avenue. The West 33rd Street façade of the church can be seen from Ninth Avenue over the rail yard and parking lot between West 31st and 33rd Streets;
- One Penn Plaza, which can be seen from Eighth Avenue and West 33rd and 34th Streets;
- Empire State Building, which can be seen in views east along West 33rd and 34th Streets;
- Westyard Distribution Center building, a bulky 15-story Neo-Brutalist-style concrete building that slopes outward at its lower floors and is located directly above the rail yard between Ninth and Tenth Avenues and West 31st and 33rd Streets, which can be seen in views west from Ninth Avenue;
- The High Line, an elevated former rail line that runs mostly along Tenth Avenue from Gansevoort Street outside the study area to West 34th Street and is being converted to public open space use, which can be seen in limited views west from Ninth Avenue and West 30th Street;
- New Yorker Hotel, a 43-story Art Deco building at the intersection of West 34th Street and Eighth Avenue, which is visible along those streets;

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- West Side Jewish Center, a Romanesque Revival-style three-story building on the north side of West 34th Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, which is visible from this street; and
- St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church, a Gothic-style church located on the north side of West 30th between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, which is visible along that street.

VIEWER GROUPS AND VIEW DURATIONS

Viewer groups in the area consist of pedestrians, motorists, rail passengers, and occupants of buildings in the surrounding area. In terms of visual resources, viewer groups may be divided into two categories: those that have views of visual resources and those that have views from visual resources or visually sensitive locations.

The majority of pedestrian traffic in the study area is found along Eighth and Ninth Avenues and West 34th Street. Pedestrian views to visual resources in the study area are described above. In addition, pedestrians who utilize the Eighth Avenue steps of the Farley Building as a place to sit, eat, read, or people-watch also enjoy views to surrounding visual resources from this vantage point. Views at this location are of longer duration than those of pedestrians passing through the area. Motorists traveling on the various roadways that pass through the study area, which include Eighth and Ninth Avenues and West 30th, 31st, 33rd, and 34th Streets, have views of typically shorter duration than those of pedestrians, except when traveling under congested conditions. Rail passengers are afforded brief views of the study area as they pass through the rail approaches to Penn Station, which as described above lie in a large open cut on the west side of Ninth Avenue. These views are limited by the tall brick walls surrounding the rail cut. Buildings surrounding the project site provide views for occupants to the project site that vary within individual buildings and between buildings.

4.3.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

FARLEY COMPLEX

In the No Action Alternative, the Farley Complex would be redeveloped for commercial and USPS uses. The new and continuing uses of the Farley Complex in the No Action Alternative would not involve any changes to block form; street pattern or hierarchy; building arrangement, bulk, or type; topography; or natural features. Some alterations to the exterior of the Western Annex would be required, including new entrances, windows, and signage for the new commercial uses. The uses of the complex would change from solely USPS uses to a mix of retail, office, and USPS, but, as described above, retail and office uses are prevalent in the area surrounding the complex. The proposed new uses and alterations to the Farley Complex would not be expected to change its status as an important visual resource, nor would they be expected to alter views to visual resources in the surrounding area from any viewer groups.

DEVELOPMENT TRANSFER SITE

Prior to the Preferred Alternative's Build year of 2015, work will have begun on relocating the subway entrance at the northwest corner of the Development Transfer Site from the street to an off-street location on the site and the construction of a large bank of escalators on West 34th Street leading down to the station below. This subway entrance relocation and construction is part of the Access to the Region's Core project and will affect the retail and restaurant building

on the site and a portion of the public plaza. This project is not related to or caused by the Preferred Alternative.

4.3.4 POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

FARLEY COMPLEX

The form of the Farley Complex would not be altered in the future with the Preferred Alternative. The new glass and metal roofs to be created above the Intermodal Hall and the train concourse would not be visible in surrounding views by pedestrians, motorists and rail passengers. They could have limited visibility to occupants of surrounding buildings, but they would not substantially change the overall visual appearance of the Farley Complex as seen by that viewer group. The creation of the Intermodal Hall and the midblock entrances to the Farley Complex at West 31st and 33rd Streets would alter the Complex's relationship to the adjacent portions of these streets by creating new pedestrian entrances to the building. The new entrance on West 31st Street would have a staircase that would connect existing elevated window openings in the façade to the street. In addition, sections of the moats adjacent to West 31st Street and West 33rd Street entrances would be removed. However, these changes would not result in adverse effects, because the midblock facades of the Farley Complex would be preserved and the new entrances would create additional pedestrian activity, enlivening the sidewalks adjacent to the north and south facades of the Farley Complex. Further, the enclosure of the north and south moats adjacent to the Farley Complex would not have adverse visual effects, because the moat walls would be retained and the glass enclosures would not be much taller than the moat walls. The proposed restoration plan for the Farley Complex would be expected to enhance the overall exterior appearance of the building. The streetscapes of Ninth and Eighth Avenues adjacent to the Farley Complex would be expected to change considerably with the proposed project due to new pedestrian entrances through existing building openings, moat and wall removal, and additional pedestrian activity. While there would be new exterior signage on the Farley Complex for the new station and the non-station commercial users within the Farley Complex, the signage program would be designed to avoid adverse effects on the Farley Complex, as described in Chapter 4.2, "Historic Properties." Within the 400-foot study area surrounding the Farley Complex, the Preferred Alternative would not involve any changes to block form, street pattern or hierarchy, building arrangement, bulk, use or type, topography, natural features, or streetscape elements. The proposed new uses and alterations to the Farley Complex would not be expected to change its status as an important visual resource, nor would they be expected to significantly alter views to visual resources in the surrounding area from any viewer groups.

DEVELOPMENT TRANSFER SITE

Under the Preferred Alternative, the utilization of the Farley Complex's unused development rights would involve changes to the bulk, type, and arrangements of buildings on the Development Transfer Site. The proposed approximately 700-foot-tall mixed-use building would be considerably taller and bulkier than the existing one-story commercial buildings that are currently located on the site. Along with One Penn Plaza, the building would be among the tallest buildings in the 400-foot study area. The uses proposed for the Development Transfer Site would be consistent with existing uses in the area. The streetscapes surrounding the Development Transfer Site would also be expected to change, as the development would eliminate the elevated pedestrian circulation space that currently exists on the site, would form

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stronger streetwalls at this location, and would bring greater pedestrian and vehicular activity to the area; however, the streetscape of the remainder of the study area would not be expected to be altered by the project.

Constructing a 700-foot-tall building on a site currently occupied by a one-story building and a public plaza would alter the view corridors along Eighth Avenue and West 33rd and West 34th Streets. The new building would become a notable element in views eastward to the Empire State Building and One Penn Plaza, and the context of views to the New Yorker Hotel would change with the addition of the tall new development on the opposite corner of West 34th Street and Eighth Avenue. The proposed building would partially block eastward views of the Empire State Building on West 33rd and West 34th Streets from Ninth Avenue and farther west. Closer to Eighth Avenue and the Development Transfer Site, the Empire State Building would be more visible along the West 33rd and 34th Streets view corridors. At Eighth Avenue and to the east, views of the Empire State Building would be largely unobstructed by the new building. Views from the Development Transfer Site to the other surrounding visual resources would not be expected to change, with the exception of views from the former elevated pedestrian circulation space, which would be eliminated. Motorists and pedestrians, especially along Eighth Avenue and West 34th and 33rd Streets, would have views of the building on the Development Transfer Site but most of these views would be brief, passing views. Viewers passively using the stairs in front of the Farley Complex would have lengthy and unobstructed views of the proposed building. To these viewers, as well as to viewers within surrounding buildings, the building on the Development Transfer Site would be one of many tall buildings in the densely developed area around Penn Station. *