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November 23, 2016

Dr. Robert Shibley

Lead Facilitator

Ad-Hoc Committee on the Location of Buffalo's New Intercity Passenger Rail Station

c/o University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning

114 Diefendorf Hall

Buffalo, NY 14260

Re: The Committee's Deliberations/The Case for the Central Terminal

Dear Dean Shibley:

Thank you very much for once again answering the call of your community and leading a public deliberation about the important decision before us. In the context of that deliberation, I write today to add my voice to those who believe that a portion of the Buffalo Central Terminal complex should be developed into a highly functional "station-within-a-station" to facilitate intercity passenger rail. Below are the main arguments commending the Central Terminal, as I see them:

1) CanalSide has no access to Chicago, Cleveland and the West. Eight intercity passenger trains pass through the City of Buffalo daily. Given the configuration of trackage in and around the City of Buffalo, six of those pass CanalSide, and all eight pass the Central Terminal. There is no feasible way to correct this shortcoming.

2) The CanalSide site poses specific challenges to ADA compliance. Passengers step onto trains from two different types of facilities: raised platforms which are on the same level as the floor of the passenger cabins, and track-level boarding areas. Buffalo's new train station needs to comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Compliance, in this context, requires a raised platform long enough to accommodate all of the train doors which will open at that station stop. The tracks through CanalSide are on a curve (see photo).



Platforms along curved tracks are necessarily problematic from the perspective of safety and ADA-compliance, as there will be considerable gaps between the platform and the train. Relatively expensive and complicated technology does exist to provide retractable bridges from

the platform to the train doors, but these have ongoing maintenance costs, and even if they were feasible in this context, they require the train engineer to stop the train at precisely the same position every time under all weather conditions, which may not be practical using the trainsets which currently service Buffalo.

- 3) **Facilitating buses and cars.** Buffalo's new train station does not need to be Buffalo's principal bus station, but it does need to be able to accommodate a few buses for connectivity and the car traffic associated with picking up and dropping off train passengers. It is not apparent to me that there is sufficient space at the CanalSide site to accommodate bus berths and spaces for cars for people as they wait to pick up train passengers. The notion of driving to this site to pick up a student returning home from college while a hockey game or a major concert is letting out is not appealing.
- 4) **Dealing with Depew.** In 2015, on an average day, 314 passengers used the Depew station, while 113 used the Exchange Street Station. If we keep the status quo by building a new station at or near CanalSide, the need for the Depew station will remain, and because of its access to Chicago and its better parking, it will continue to draw the vast majority (74% of passenger departures and arrivals in 2015) to a location nearly four miles outside the city limits.
- 5) **What do we want CanalSide to be?** CanalSide has been wildly successful as a collection of attractions which draw Buffalonians and visitors to our downtown waterfront. There is a tension, however, between these uses and some of the uses envisioned in the hard-fought 2004 master plan, which called for these types of uses but also called for a sustainable mixed-use neighborhood south of Marine Drive. As it seeks for CanalSide to be more financially sustainable, ECHDC needs to have an open public dialogue about what we as a community want CanalSide to mature into. That process should drive future development of the North Aud block and the other development parcels, and we should not be filling up parcels on an ad-hoc basis as ideas get publicly proposed.
- 6) **What does the condition of the Central Terminal say about us?** The efforts of the Central Terminal Restoration Corporation have been nothing short of heroic. I commend them without reservation. It is not their fault, but rather the result of neglect and indifference on the part of most of the rest of us, that the current condition of the station is an abject embarrassment. At present, it is a beacon of failure and decay, visible from points far and wide. Buffalo's turn-around has been impressive, but it will not be meaningful until it reaches into all of our neighborhoods. Re-establishing intercity passenger rail service at the Central Terminal alone is not sufficient for the redevelopment of the terminal complex specifically or the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood generally. But, coupled with other public and private efforts, it can be a catalyst to turn the tide so that this neighborhood can see some of the positive changes manifest in downtown, in parts of the West Side, in Larkinville and elsewhere.

Having discussed some of the arguments which commend the Central Terminal as the location for Buffalo's intercity passenger rail station, I wish to address some more technical questions which I would like to see posed to the outside consulting engineers who are assisting the committee in its work. They are these:

- 1) Presently, the Lake Shore Limited which runs from Chicago to Boston and New York is sometimes dispatched over the CSX bridge over the Buffalo River and sometimes over the Norfolk Southern bridge over the Buffalo River. If the station were positioned in Larkinville, this train could be limited to only using the



CSX bridge over the Buffalo River and not the Norfolk Southern Bridge. If this happens, is it reasonable to anticipate that, at times, this decreased flexibility will lead to increased delays as a result of conflicts with freight movements? Can the incidence and the extent of these anticipated delays be quantified?

- 2) How long must a platform be to provide ADA-compliant service to the Lake Shore Limited, Maple Leaf and Empire Service trains which come through Buffalo?
- 3) If it is possible to construct extending bridges from the platform to the train at the CanalSide site, can the train sets currently in use stop precisely enough to take advantage of this technology?

Again, thank you very much for your role in leading and coordinating this deliberation. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress

Cc: Members of the Committee