

Statement by Regional Plan Association to CB 5 on the proposed development of 15 Penn Plaza

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Regional Plan Association (RPA) has been committed to the success of Penn Station and West Midtown since the 1920s, and particularly since the destruction of the great old station nearly 50 years ago. Today's unattractive and confusing Penn Station, with its lack of a real presence at the street level has, in combination with other factors, prevented West Midtown from experiencing the same level of revitalization in recent years that has been achieved in the rest of Midtown, including Bryant Park, Times Square and Columbus Circle.

For several years, RPA has co-chaired the Friends of Moynihan Station, a coalition of civic organizations, business groups and elected officials that has consistently and effectively advocated expanding and renovating Penn Station, as well as building a "Moynihan Station District" of dense new commercial development that takes advantage of the station's unparalleled access to the region's workforce. Density belongs around transit hubs, and, while twice as many people travel through Penn Station every day than Grand Central, you wouldn't know it from looking at the skyline. In RPA's view, 15 Penn Plaza will bring us a step closer to building a new transit-oriented, economically efficient and, by virtue of its future dependence on mass transit, environmentally sustainable district.

The proposed project should also be considered as an integral part of the 32nd-34th Street corridor, a corridor that will guide the redevelopment of the district from Herald Square, to Moynihan Station, and finally to the Far West Side – development, after all, proceeds incrementally. Three buildings of more than 2 million square feet already exist nearby (Macy's, Two Penn Plaza and the Empire State Building), and many more very large buildings are planned for the Hudson Railyards. In this context, a large building at the site of 15 Penn is precisely what is needed.

That the applicants have also committed to rebuilding and re-opening the Gimbels Passageway, providing real-time train information for travelers, and improving access to subway platforms will, in addition, be of great and immediate benefit to Penn Station's current 400,000 daily users and the 300,000 people who use the 34th Street stops on the Broadway, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Avenue subway lines. It is unlikely that most of these improvements would occur without the transit bonus associated with the site.

RPA supports dense new development around Penn Station that takes advantage of the district's unparalleled access to transit. We also support improving the existing transit infrastructure in the area. The proposed project at 15 Penn Plaza, in our view, contributes to both goals.