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January 11, 2017

Robert G. Shibley  
City of Buffalo Train Station Site Selection Committee  
c/o School of Architecture and Planning  
Hayes Hall 121, University at Buffalo  
Buffalo, NY 14214

Dear Dean Shibley,

Twenty years ago, while Principal Architect at Hamilton Houston Lownie, I directed and authored the "Buffalo Central Terminal Engineering Feasibility Study." This study contained a very detailed cost estimate for the rebuilding of the landmark we all love. We based our projection on reuse of the building for commercial or light industrial activity, essentially office and manufacturing. We compared these renovation costs to the total cost of preparing the site for new construction through demolition and replacement with a conventional building of the same 450,000 sf area. The cost of renovation proved substantially less than site preparation and new construction. That fact helped convince the Buffalo City Council to secure the building from its negligent owner and help deliver the property to a not-for-profit restoration corporation to oversee and help direct its rebuilding.

I personally have a strong, emotional tie to the Central Terminal. It is an extraordinary piece of architecture, one that I termed "the epitome of landmark" in the narrative for the study. It cannot be lost to us. However, I must say that I believe the Amtrak Station does not belong at the Central Terminal. There are several interrelated reasons for this, including a better alternative.

Current annual ridership is about 120,000 passengers with 8 trains per day, for which Amtrak standards recommend a Category 2, Medium Station. The area required, not including platforms, is only about 15,000 sf which amounts to 3% of the 450,000 sf area of the Central Terminal. At this size the station is unable to affect reconstruction of a large portion of the existing building or contribute significantly to the restoration budget.

The social benefits of the redevelopment of the Central Terminal can best be achieved with the entire site being completed, and it is not clear that an intercity train station is a necessary part of the plan. This Committee should obtain the Market Analysis from any developer studying this project and prepare an independent assessment of feasibility. Certainly, a station can always be added to the Central Terminal once redevelopment is done or nearing completion.

Amtrak passengers who live in Buffalo can use a station no matter where it is located, as can travelers visiting Buffalo residents. These users will most likely drive a car to the station and park,

or be dropped off and picked up by their hosts. However, there are business travelers and tourists who are affected by the location, and those we need to address. Arriving at the Central Terminal may be shock for many travelers since there are no hotels or restaurants located nearby at present, which is what we have at the existing Depew site. The image we are able to leave with visitors is very important in the short term future. We have been subject to abuse in the past and it takes decades to change the image people retain.

Fortunately, we have a ready alternative. In 1999, I directed and substantially authored the “Downtown Buffalo Strategic Plan.” This was essentially a compilation of stakeholder concerns and ideas regarding the role of Downtown Buffalo as the Regional Center for Western New York. It was written as an essay with a summary that presented a 17-Point Action Plan for Downtown, most importantly identifying the need to promote housing and hotel development. The Strategic Plan informed the “Downtown Buffalo 2002!” report which incorporated public comment, as you know well. That was followed by an R/UDAT program on housing development, a new building code, and historic tax credits. Together these have created the lively development environment we are currently enjoying downtown, and it is extending from there into nearby neighborhoods. Like all large developments this involves incremental change – it takes time and continued effort from many quarters and many participants.

One of the 17 Points in the Action Plan for downtown was this: *“Plan and construct a new Intermodal Transit Station at the Aud site with a turnaround for the Lakeshore route.”* This envisioned an intercity passenger rail station with connection to local transit including Metro, buses, and parking. We have made significant progress on the other 17 points of the Strategic Plan, but not this. It remains a necessary component of the strategy to return the role of Regional Center to Downtown Buffalo.

The “turnaround” mentioned in the strategy action plan needs to be explained. It has been pointed out that the Exchange Street Station in downtown Buffalo does not currently handle the Amtrak Lakeshore route for east/west train traffic. The topological condition that creates this condition is that there are three directions for travel from Buffalo – north, east, and southwest – due to the position of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Whenever there are three directions from a location a station can easily accommodate two of them but the third can only be served by either terminating one of the routes there, reversing train direction, or by construction of a turnaround. This will be necessary no matter where the station is located, including the proposed Central Terminal and Larkinville locations, and is the reason a turnaround was proposed in the Downtown Buffalo Strategic Plan.

Ample land and opportunity exist immediately northwest of Canalside to construct a turnaround with an adequate radius. Trains from the east or southwest and continuing to the southwest or east will utilize the turnaround. Upon leaving a station a train will take time to achieve speed, even on a straight way, so travel time is unaffected. In lieu of a turnaround the train could reverse direction by bringing the locomotives to the other end of the train while stopped at the station. Future equipment may include self-propelled cars which can easily change direction.

The new station should be located at the southwest corner of Main and Lower Terrace, where the Aud used to be. This location has several advantages over any other possible site:

1. It is firmly located in downtown Buffalo, a vibrant area undergoing regeneration right now, with two new hotels and restaurants directly adjacent as well as governmental and business offices a short walk away.
2. It is served by an existing Metro station outside the front door on Main Street with potential public transit links throughout the region, right now.
3. There is opportunity for dedicated, covered parking for Amtrak passengers under the Niagara Thruway and for local buses.
4. Site topography on the Terrace allows a station to be built over the existing depressed rail line with direct access from grade to the station level and a raised platform area below.
5. The potential architectural expression of the station, even for a small building, is endearing. It fits in with the scale of buildings anticipated for Canalside. It is prominently seen from the south, which means it is flooded in daylight. It is elevated to sit in the foreground against a backdrop of the central business district. From the interior, the waiting areas in the station offer panoramic views of the reconstructed Erie Canal and the Commercial Wharf.

As a result, unlike claims made to the contrary, this location offers direct access to Chicago, Cleveland and the West; it offers complete and direct wheelchair access to the station, platform and trains for full ADA compliance; it facilitates buses and cars; it allows closing of the Depew and Exchange Street stations; it reinforces Downtown Buffalo as the Regional Center and introduces visitors directly to Canalside with a view of the Erie Canal and the Commercial Wharf; and it retains the Central Terminal as a major potential development site unencumbered with a 15,000 sf station in a 450,000 sf building, and as a Metro stop on a future Airport Line.

The Canalside site is ready and offers a real opportunity to address all concerns. However socially well-meaning and emotionally attached to the Central Terminal we may all be, I urge this Committee to set that aside in order to complete the long-standing strategy for reestablishing Downtown Buffalo as the Regional Center as has been our vision. Construction of a new Amtrak Station at Lower Terrace and Main, including a turnaround or not, is a necessary part of what needs to be done.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul L. Battaglia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul L. Battaglia, AIA, ASA, INCE