My name is Dan Rodriguez, and I am before you as the representative of both Coach USA its subsidiary Megabus and the Bus Association of New Jersey of which I am President of. I would like to thank the National Capital Planning Commission for the opportunity to state our position on the expansion of the Washington Union Station project.

By way of background, Coach USA is one of the largest transportation operators in North America. We operate more than 2,500 buses and coaches and employ thousands across the nation and Canada. We provide critical local and intercity transport services for communities throughout the United States and Canada. We bring service to financially insecure diverse families, who depend on our services for fast and affordable transportation to their jobs and other important destinations.

Coach USA operates more than 25 bus carriers in North America that operate scheduled bus routes, motorcoach tours, airport shuttles, charters and/or city sightseeing tours. Since its launch in April 2006, Megabus is one of the leading intercity motorcoach services with a central focus on the northeast, offering daily express service for as low as $1.

Megabus has served more than 55 million customers throughout more than 100 cities across North America including Washington, DC. Megabus’s relationship with the Washington Union Station is vital to this service and most importantly, to our passengers who rely on an economical and efficient transportation to the DC metropolitan area.

We want to stress and make clear from the start, that we value and support the needs to evolve while preserving the historical Washington Union Station. We are very much part of the community that comprises all that is offered at Washington Union Station and look forward to our future together.

We have carefully and fully reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Study (DEIS) and find it disconnected between the alternatives provided and the motorcoach traveler needs. To displace and/or significantly reduce the bus capacity of Megabus and that of the other carriers would rupture the very specific intent of what the Washington Union Station set out to achieve in the Union Station Redevelopment Act of 1981(USRA), specifically it empowers the Secretary of Transportation to, and I quote, “Provide for the rehabilitation of and redevelopment of the Union Station complex primarily as a multiple use transportation terminal service for the nation’s capital and secondarily as a commercial complex”, end of quote.

As stated, the primary purpose of the Washington Union Station is to provide a “multiple use transportation terminal service.” While the Union Station Redevelopment Act was enacted in 1981, a bus deck was not offered to the public at the Washington Union Station until 2012.
The popularity was instantaneous as it increased over the years which now provides Megabus and the other carriers 61 bus slips to use on a regular basis for the loading and unloading of passengers. These bus slips offer a safe way for customers to avoid traffic and protects them from the elements of weather.

Given the current environment, where airline cancellations and high gas prices have become commonplace. The communities we serve are more than ever in need of the affordable transportation, mass transportation such as ours that takes thousands of cars off the roads. Just this past holiday weekend there were over 42 million Americans that took to the roads. A record.

In its No Action Alternative, the DEIS provides that intercity bus service is projected to increase from 2.5 million passengers annually to 3.175 million passengers annually or a 27% increase from the current daily numbers. Moreover, the DEIS also notes an increase in the rail service to grow 24%. The increase for rail service is similar to the bus service with a notably sightly less increase.

The increases for both rail and bus are necessary to point out for this insofar as they are not only projecting a similar rate increase, but also reflects the need to provide multiple use options for travel. The DEIS provides a variety of the alternatives, but in every instance, there is a reduction to the bus facility area and a significant increase to the rail tracks and platforms. Our concern lies with the ability to meet the same increased demand and still continue to have a fully operational and functional home at Union Station that is satisfactorily equipped to achieve this purpose. A reduction of bus slips would create a disparity of choice for those who depend on us the most. This disparity does not serve USRA’s purpose, but rather falls back to a time where there was no multiple use terminal, one that will affect financially insecure diverse families the most. The data as provided in the DEIS shows that there is a clear need for a less costly efficient and reliable transportation option.

Our goal today, is to engage this commission and others in a dialogue and conversation that will allow us the opportunity to continue to serve the public need for bus transportation services. Bus transportation provides a myriad of opportunities that will only increase over time. To stifle and protract those opportunities would be a disservice to the public, especially the underserved. Our preference would be to preserve the current levels of bus slips.

The alternatives as proposed in the DEIS are woefully lacking in meeting our and other carriers’ operational needs. The proposed reduction to 40 bus slips capacity is a reduction from the July 7, 2016 memorandum which originally provided an allowance of 47 bus slips. In fact, the 2016 memo states that, and I quote, “the estimated current demand for intercity bus services alone in 19 spaces.” This was based on data from 2013 to 2015. Between 2016 and 2019, Megabus increased its trips to Union Station by 22%. The 2016 memo was revised in February 2017, and again in May 2020 that continues to support 47 slips as it notes that any of the alternatives that reduces the bus slips at a range from 17 to 27 would not be conducive for either the bus
passenger, operating carrier or the surrounding area of Union Station as it will dramatically decrease economic activity generated by tourism and business travel.

I would like to note, events that draw large numbers of people, a majority of which use bus service for events such as the Cherry Blossom Festival, Jazzfest, Capital Pride, inauguration, and marches.

For Thanksgiving in 2019, Megabus added 40 extra buses to ensure we met demand for Union Station as a final destination. Seventeen or even forty bus slips could not handle these events in any practical or efficient manner.

Simply put, the reduction of slips does not address or acknowledge how a much-reduced bus facility would accommodate the influx of bus travelers to these events.

Coach USA considers itself part of the mosaic of Washington Union Station and are optimistic and enthusiastic to help bring the project to fruition.

But it must be done in a preserving and retaining a sufficient number of bus slips to accommodate the increasing volume and provide a satisfactory alternative to rail.

I thank the Commission for the opportunity to address it and this issue of importance. I look forward to its work in this regard. Thank you.

Dan Rodriguez
Vice President, Public Affairs.