Testimony of Greyhound Lines, Inc. before the National Capital Planning Commission
re: Washington Union Station Expansion Project (NCPC File Number: 7746)

July 7, 2022

Thank you for providing this forum to receive input from intercity bus carriers and other stakeholders on the future of Washington Union Station. I am Greg Cohen, representing Greyhound Lines. Greyhound provides the backbone of intercity bus transportation across the country, serving more than 2000 communities – 4 to 5 times the number served by passenger rail. Intercity bus is the greenest mode of intercity transportation and the mode of choice for cost-conscious customers seeking the most affordable transportation. Personally, I want to mention that I was a bus driver in college and then become a transportation planner for the State of Maryland upon graduation. So these issues are close to my heart.

The Union Station Redevelopment Act created a new vision for Union Station. What was once just a train station was to become – quote “a complex primarily as a multiple use transportation terminal serving the Nation’s Capital and secondarily as a commercial complex”. The law specifically recognizes the importance of intercity buses in the redeveloped complex. We strongly supported this vision and worked for decades to relocate Greyhound into Union Station. That has been a great success for us and for the economy of the station. Without the support of Congresswoman Norton, we might still be 3 blocks away with our passengers rolling their luggage over cracked sidewalks to get to the Metro station.

Today, we support implementation of a fully-funded, world-class redevelopment that provides a welcoming gateway to the Nation’s Capital for all. Washington is the southern terminus of the most well-traveled bus corridor in America. At the northern terminus, Boston is building a major expansion of its intercity bus facility at South Station while New York is planning to do the same at a new Port Authority terminal. The goal in these cities is to get away from inadequate facilities that push intercity bus pickups onto local city streets.

However, in Washington, all of the DEIS action alternatives call for bus slip capacity to be substantially reduced from the current level of 61 while rail capacity and commercial development is dramatically increased. This suggests the transportation needs of bus customers are of secondary importance. I am here to ask the NCPC to make sure the intercity bus mode is treated equitably and with dignity by increasing capacity for intercity buses.

The DEIS recognizes that “minorities and low-income persons rely on the bus for intercity travel much more than other demographics.” That is certainly the case with Greyhound, which is a majority minority bus service provider. Greyhound’s 2019 nationwide survey of its passengers found that 56% were minorities (35% Black, 14% Hispanic, 7% Asian). The survey also found that 43% of Greyhound passengers had annual household income of less than $35,000 and 57% had annual household income of less than $50,000.

Throughout the planning process, Greyhound has worked with planners and stakeholders to increase bus capacity and maintain a close connection to Metro. This included providing plans from one of the
world’s most experienced intercity bus facility architects showing how with minor modifications, bus slip capacity could be increased from 35 bus slips to 56. We have made some progress in that the latest design from the project architects includes 39 bus slips on the bus deck and room for 12 spots for “staging” buses on the level above, with direct access to the loading and unloading areas on the bus deck.

While Greyhound strongly prefers growth in capacity rather than reduction, we are open to a compromise based on FRA plans, but only under some key conditions:

(1) We request that the 56-slip plan proposed by the bus deck carriers receive detailed analysis and more thoughtful consideration.

(2) If the 56-slip plan is ultimately rejected, we request that the latest 39+12 slip plan preferred by FRA include a written commitment that the 12 “staging” area spots be guaranteed to be available on demand.

(3) Bus companies pass on their facility costs to their customers. As the provider of the lowest-cost intercity service, the plan should recognize and commit to keeping access costs at current levels plus inflation.

(4) Scheduled service open to the public must have priority access to the bus deck. Greyhound does not oppose reserved and pre-paid access for charter and tour operators provided that it does not limit peak period scheduled services.

Again, we have developed a positive working relationship with the planners, but we do not yet support the latest plans. If we can reach an agreement that meets the conditions I discussed, that would help to keep the project moving quickly. If we can’t come to an agreement, we owe it to our customers to seek a fully equitable solution, even if it delays the process. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Greyhound.