I am a licensed DC tour guide who, like my colleagues, meet tour groups regularly at Union Station. These groups arrive by motorcoach from out of state, often in convoys of several buses that bring hundreds of tourists at a time to Washington. During our busy spring tourist season, there may be thousands of tourists – mostly students – using Union Station at the same time for lunch or dinner.

I am a Board member of the Guild of Professional Tour Guides of Washington DC, an association of about 500 local guides and affiliated tour operators, and co-chair of its Government & Tourism committee, which has been liaising for the last few years with USRC on the redevelopment plans. Tour guides are a major stakeholder in this project and our business will be greatly impacted by the proposed changes to Union Station, so I welcome this opportunity. We had profound objections to the plans in the 2020 DEIS, which would have routed tour buses into local neighborhoods, increased congestion and pollution, and, at best, greatly inconvenienced tour groups trying to access the station and at worst put them into dangerous situations.

So, I’d like to express thanks to USRC for taking our comments seriously in this new plan. My co-chair and I are pleased to see that there will now be enough space for tour groups to unload and move safely through the station and that motorcoach operators will be able to park their buses safely and for the amount of time necessary for tour groups to shop and eat, which is the main reason they come to Union Station. We also appreciate the analysis of the data on usage and the projections for increased usage in deciding on the number of parking slips for buses.

However, we do continue to worry that there will not be enough parking space, especially during our busy season during meal times, so I would like to again emphasize the need for space to safely drop off and pick up groups within the parking area. We certainly would not support any future plans to reduce the amount of parking, if anything would prefer to see more slips or perhaps slips dedicated specifically to drop off and pick up. But at this point, it seems that our main concerns will be operational, rather than with the design. For example, tour groups usually arrive without reservations and cannot realistically hold to specific drop off and pick up times. I look forward to continuing to work with USRC as they move into the next planning stage.