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Roger Harris
President



August 13, 2024

Hon. Brandon Johnson, Mayor
Hon. Thomas Carney, Transportation Commissioner
City of Chicago
VIA EMAIL

Dear Mayor Johnson and Commissioner Carney,

Amtrak is keenly interested in the ongoing conversation regarding the need for a permanent intercity bus transit center in the City of Chicago. Amtrak and Chicago Union Station are proud parts of the extensive transportation network that helps make Chicago such a great city and, as a partner and provider of access to Greyhound buses connecting to Amtrak trains, we are committed to participating in discussions exploring options for Flix/Greyhound.

However, our recent discussions with Flix/Greyhound officials and media coverage all suggest that a section of Jackson Boulevard immediately adjacent to Chicago Union Station is the only location being considered in Downtown Chicago for a temporary intercity bus hub. While proximity to transit is crucial, we believe the challenges of this location raise significant safety, operational, and financial concerns for the users of Chicago Union Station, tenants, and the surrounding neighborhood. We have significant concerns with this potential location.

As the owner and operator of Chicago Union station, we run the facility for the benefit of our customers and tenants. Of particular concern to us regarding a future bus facility are the significant security and facility costs that likely accompany the use of our station by hundreds of new daily intercity bus customers. Without an agreement to appropriately compensate us and mitigate any impacts, these costs and impacts would be borne by Amtrak and our customers -- and indirectly by Metra and our other tenants who share in our expenses at the facility.

Therefore, before any decision is made by the city on this important matter, we ask that your administration engage with us to discuss this proposal and take into consideration our property rights and the effect on our station, our Amtrak and Metra customers, commercial tenants, and other local landowners for the reasons stated below.

Safety and Security Concerns

As you likely know, Jackson Boulevard between Canal and Clinton Streets is already highly congested at it serves Amtrak's National Network Hub and Metra's busiest station. The situation is worsened by the loss of Canal Street access due to a major city street reconstruction project.



The proposition of adding dozens of intercity buses to Jackson Boulevard—potentially as many as 50 or more—will exacerbate existing issues, creating dangerous conditions for both pedestrians and drivers. That section of Jackson Boulevard has a taxi stand in one lane, buses in the other lane, and drivers vying for the middle lane. There is significant risk to pedestrians and bus users, especially in inclement weather. Police already report many conflicts on what has become a one-lane thoroughfare. This proposal to add these buses and hundreds of daily riders to Jackson Boulevard would easily overwhelm the current infrastructure, further compromising safety and security.

Economic and Customer Impact

Any fiscal and customer impact on Chicago Union Station and partners Amtrak and Metra needs to be understood and fully addressed as part of any plan. The cost of increased security, maintenance, and customer service to accommodate these new passengers will be significant and this financial burden cannot be shouldered by Amtrak, Metra, or the tenants of Chicago Union Station without direct and full compensation or support from the City of Chicago and Flix/Greyhound.

Capacity Limitations and Investment Contribution

Looking to the future, we have numerous major construction projects that are designed to accommodate existing rail passenger volumes more safely and effectively and provide the capacity we need for our ambitious plans for expanded intercity rail service to Chicago. During construction, these projects will temporarily exacerbate these challenges by reducing station capacity and impeding circulation. When completed, the enhancements these projects provide will be needed to handle the significant growth in passenger rail expected by both Amtrak and Metra and any additional parties that stand to benefit from these investments should become contributors to the capital necessary to fund this work.

Community and Stakeholder Impact

The increased congestion and safety risks associated with this concept could negatively impact local businesses and residents. Feedback from other stakeholders and community members has highlighted concerns about the potential impacts and disruption to the area—crime, traffic congestion, and increased demand for services.

We, therefore, encourage the city to consider locations that are better suited in the Central Business District, including some next to vacant retail or commercial space that could also provide waiting space and amenities for intercity bus riders. In recognition of the pressing need, I've asked our Chicago team to identify other locations they believe to be superior options at two other nearby train stations with transit access. These are detailed below, but Flix/Greyhound told our team they were not presented to them by CDOT.

- The pair of protected CTA bus lanes under the Ogilvie Transportation Center on Washington Boulevard offers more protection from the weather, access to a food court (on the Accenture Tower side), and vacant space inside for intercity bus ticketing.

The Honorable Brandon Johnson

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- The CTA bus lane with a partial canopy on Financial Place is used by only one CTA bus route, is closer to a CTA Blue Line stop and I-290, and is next to the LaSalle Street Station with accessible lavatories, a waiting room, unused ticket windows, and available parking.

These locations—and others—would certainly provide a safer experience and improved accommodations for intercity bus riders than that block of Jackson Boulevard.

The Municipal Code of Chicago covers the loading and unloading of buses and empowers CDOT to specifically control curb use around Union Station. Passed in 2008 and amended as conditions warrant, §9-48-050 states that intercity buses shall not use any designated bus stop, bus stand, or passenger loading/unloading zone, or any other location, for loading or unloading of passengers, luggage, or other goods without first obtaining the approval of the city commissioner of transportation. Prior to any decisions on this matters, we request that your administration engage together with the bus operators, Amtrak team, and other stakeholders to discuss alternatives and undertake a transparent and collaborative planning process regarding the development of both a future temporary and permanent intercity bus facility solution that prioritizes safety, operational efficiency, and the needs of all travelers.

We look forward to our continued partnership with you and the City of Chicago.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roger Harris", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Roger Harris
President

CC:

Congressional Offices

FRA Administrator Amit Bose

IDOT Secretary Omer Osman

RTA Chairman Kirk Dillard

CTA President Dorval Carter

Metra CEO/Executive Director Jim Derwinski

Flix/Greyhound North America CEO Kai Boysan

Metropolitan Planning Council Senior Director Audrey Wennink

RPA President Jim Mathews