

## Grand Central Is More Than a Building

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# Grand Central Is More Than a Building

The Supreme Court decision upholding the landmark status of Grand Central Terminal was a happy ending to a decade of litigation and uncertainty. But the assurance that New York will keep its handsome Beaux Arts monument only emphasizes the need to revitalize the Grand Central neighborhood.

The importance of the terminal goes far beyond its architectural features. For the 45 years of midtown's greatest growth, Grand Central's multilevel system of underground concourses and pedestrian passages connecting streets, subways, shops, hotels and offices has been an outstanding example of coordinated transportation, circulation and land use. Later structures, like the Chrysler Building, plugged into this pedestrian circulation network and increased its usefulness. As much or more than the terminal building itself, this extraordinary linked complex of Penn Central properties is the real New York City landmark.

But that unique linkage, which can be one of midtown's prime assets, is now threatened. The sale of the bankrupt Penn Central's real estate is putting the railroad's once-unified holdings into a number of new hands. It is much more difficult to maintain the original underground connections with multiple ownership. The refurbishing and improvement of these public facilities, yielding no commercial return, have a low priority with the new developers — despite generous tax abatements offered with the development packages.

It is therefore urgent that a New York City propos-

al, stalled by the Supreme Court case, now be aggressively pursued. This comprehensive plan would strengthen and revitalize much of the 42d Street neighborhood by using the existing framework that joins so many blocks and buildings.

The first step would be to seek a Federal grant for major land-use projects dependent on mass transit. Cancellation of the \$2 million in sales taxes on materials used for the remodeling of the Commodore Hotel and earmarked for Grand Central improvements could be counted as the city's contribution. Washington has indicated an interest in the proposal. It would include improved subway shuttle connections, stairs and escalators and increased access from remodeled buildings like the Commodore.

A second phase would develop retail space and understreet passages of other nearby buildings, such as the Chrysler Building. Unfortunately, the city has not yet gained the support of that building's owners and managers, although they have been doing a fine job of restoring the structure to its former glory.

New York has in mind an underground development plan for the entire Grand Central area that would be put together with the marketing and design skills that went into the Citicorp Center or the World Trade Center Concourse. The alternative would be piecemeal redevelopment accompanied by the destruction or sabotage of a unique urban asset. A landmark won can still be a landmark lost were that allowed to happen.

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