

Jumbo Atop Grand Central

The advent of a new \$100-million, 55-story building to be called 175 Park Avenue would ordinarily cause no more than a surface ripple on the sea of expensive New York real estate. But when the new structure is to be another Pan Am building, only 221 feet from the first one and 150 feet higher, and is to sit on top of Grand Central Terminal, the impact is devastating.

The project for a Grand Central tower announced yesterday by the Penn Central Railroad and English developer Morris Saady is already causing tidal waves of unhappiness for some municipal officials. That in itself is news, since the motto of New York has always been Real Estate Rampant, and there was a kind of scriptural ring to the habitual definition of the "highest and best use of land" as the biggest buildings with the greatest density for the highest profit. As long as the tax assessor was happy, no one at City Hall cared.

They care at City Hall now, and there are mixed feelings about a project that can do little to help midtown's creeping physical paralysis and may vastly aggravate it, in spite of commendable attempts by the builder to improve circulation patterns in and around the new skyscraper. Mr. Saady is a more enlightened developer and his architect, Marcel Breuer, is a more creative talent than New York usually sees combined for a speculative venture. They share an awareness of the urban problems involved in putting another blockbuster next to Pan Am at a focal transportation point in one of the city's most congested areas. But the problems are bigger than both of them, and even bigger than the building.

Objections to the project are both urbanistic and esthetic. The City Planning Commission has called it "the wrong building in the wrong place at the wrong time." That is about all it can say, because the building is designed within the legal limits of the present zoning. The ball really bounces to the Landmarks Commission, which has a flexible law giving it jurisdiction over the suitability not only of remodeling but of adjoining construction.

As architecture, the new tower soaring from the classical Beaux Arts terminal like a skyscraper on a base of French pastry has the bizarre quality of a nightmare. The job defies the architect's notable taste and talent. Even he has said of the result, "It must be the dada in me." As a distinguished artist who has been through dada, surrealism, Bauhaus, brutalism and other twentieth century styles, he should know. Fun City into Dada City now? There must be a better way to plan a city—and to stop it from being choked to death.