



Testimony before the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee  
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings & Emergency Management  
by Thomas Wilbur  
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Madame Chairwoman and members of the Committee, my name is Tom Wilbur and I am a Senior Vice President with Akridge, the Washington, DC-based company that purchased the air rights adjacent to Union Station above the rail yards for development. Thank you very much for this opportunity to discuss our plans and ideas for this “crown jewel” in the nation’s inventory of grand historic buildings.

Today, I will provide an update on our project and describe some of the exciting improvements for the station and adjacent areas we are studying.

However, let me begin by expressing our enthusiasm and commitment to the long-term success of Union Station. As a local development firm with more than 30 years of experience here, we have participated in the redevelopment of the City. From The Homer Building, which we completed in 1990, to Gallery Place in 2003 and now the Southeast, Southwest and Northeast quadrants where we have projects in the pipeline totaling more than seven million square feet, we have seen the District of Columbia become a world class city—a place with outstanding architecture and mixed-use, 24/7 neighborhoods rivaling any major city in the world. Our company’s commitment to the civic, cultural and environmental health of our City is long-standing. In fact, our firm’s founder, Chip Akridge, regrets that he is unable to be here today, but commitments in his capacity as Chairman of the Trust for the National Mall have taken him to the west coast.

Union Station is a unique resource which is representative of the renaissance of Washington, D.C.. Because it is located at the intersection of the Central Business District, Capitol Hill, the Capitol Complex and emerging NoMa and Near Northeast neighborhoods, our development, called Burnham Place, and Union Station serve as critical anchors for the development of the eastern portion of downtown Washington.

Union Station is the entry to the city for every walk of life. From the Wall Street banker arriving from New York to the legislator working on Capitol Hill; The Metro-rider from Silver Spring, tourist from Phoenix, commuter from Baltimore or student riding from Gallaudet by bicycle – all of these people converge at and rely upon Union Station.

Our project, named after Daniel Burnham, the architect who designed Union Station, provides an opportunity to reclaim the property over the tracks—currently a void which divides several important neighborhoods—and turn it into another great, mixed use neighborhood bringing vibrant activity and economic benefits to the City. As a model, think of the Park Avenue air rights development at Grand Central Station in New York.

A little history: as you know, in 1997, Congress mandated the fair market sale of the 15-acre Amtrak air rights parcel, with the proceeds to be deposited into the Federal treasury. In 2002, the General Services Administration conducted a competitive bid process and accepted our proposal. We closed on the property in 2006 and since that time have been planning for a three-million-square-foot mixed use development. We have also been working closely with the District Department of Transportation on plans to modernize and expand the intermodal transportation facilities at Union Station, as well as to preserve options for future transportation modes.

Early this year, we engaged the architectural firm, Shalom Baranes Associates, to begin the planning and design of Burnham Place. Like Akridge, Shalom Baranes has played an integral role in shaping the development of the National Capital Region. Its list of newly-designed and redeveloped buildings include the Warner Theater, American Red Cross National Headquarters, the John A. Wilson Building, International Spy Museum, and the Homer Building atop Metro Center, which houses Akridge's offices. The firm is also currently working on the redevelopment of the Waterside Mall, the Southeast Federal Center, the Old Convention Center site, and the expansion and redevelopment of GSA's National Headquarters.

Our early plans for Burnham Place indicate a number of potential uses such as first class office, hotel, retail, entertainment, cultural and residential buildings. This project presents a rare opportunity for substantial downtown redevelopment without any displacement in a land-constrained city. These developments will also leverage significant public investments already committed to this area such as the construction of the New York Avenue Metro Station and DC's Great Streets Initiative which includes planned streetcar service on H Street NE.

The strategic importance of Union Station is what attracted our firm to this development opportunity. Its centrality to the success of Washington is also what has motivated our partnership with DDOT and our desire to help facilitate public improvements for the station. A more efficient, pleasant and safe intermodal facility is critical for the City, the region and, indeed, the entire nation. And the station has no shortage of critical needs and opportunities for improvements.

Originally used solely for intercity rail service, Union Station now serves over 100,000 passengers per day via 14 modes of transportation in addition to thousands of visitors and shoppers. Many station spaces are crowded, uncomfortable, and inefficient and pose conflicts for those utilizing the station for different purposes. Akridge's development of the air rights presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address these challenges. The construction of our concrete deck and connection to the north end of the station provide an ideal time to concurrently undertake many important forms of modernization for this ITC.

Some of the ideas we are studying along with DDOT to improve and enhance the station include:

- A newly expanded Amtrak and VRE passenger concourse with upgrades to the existing waiting areas
- A new pedestrian connection between H Street and the Station to disperse the flow of people entering and leaving the building

- A new emergency evacuation roadway between Columbus Circle and H Street
- The creation of a facility to accommodate Greyhound Buses
- A northern extension of the Metro tunnel pedestrian walkway to H Street
- A pedestrian connection between NoMa and Burnham Place near First and Eye Streets NE
- And, expanded parking facilities for tour and commuter buses

Executing many of these ambitious ideas will require intensive collaboration and support from the stakeholders who have a vested interest in the operation and future of the station. Akridge is glad to have Amtrak, WMATA, MARC, VRE, DDOT, USRC, the Ashkenazy Acquisition Corporation and many others as key allies in this process, and we look forward to continuing these partnerships to study and execute these important projects.

Thank you once again for this opportunity. That concludes my remarks, and I would be glad to answer any questions the Committee might have.