

# **CITIZENS FOR A SAFE EAST FIFTIETH STREET**

**c/o George Arzt Communications, Inc.**

**123 William Street**

**22<sup>nd</sup> Floor**

**New York, N.Y. 10038**

October 1, 2004

Hon. Thomas Ridge  
Secretary  
United States Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Hon. Mike Leavitt  
Administrator  
United States Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20460

**Re: Environmental and Homeland Security Problems Associated with N.Y. Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Proposed East Side Access Project to be Funded in Large Part by Federal Transit Administration**

Dear Secretary Ridge and Administrator Leavitt:

As concerned citizens of New York City whose places of business are located in the vicinity of East 50th Street in Manhattan, we write to express our dire concern over plans by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to construct a massive, 166-foot tall utility building that poses not only grave environmental threats, but a genuine homeland security threat to the neighborhood and thousands of pedestrians who visit it daily.

The industrial elements now planned to be centralized in this utility building – including back-up fuel tanks and generators, pollution-spewing ventilation discharge and intake vents, three mammoth cooling towers, and traffic-choking streetside truck loading docks – were originally slated to be spread around the East Side as part of the support systems for the underground concourse that is part of the MTA's East Side Access project, designed to bring Long Island Railroad trains into Grand Central Terminal.

But the MTA, in secrecy and with disregard for established environmental review procedures, moved to centralize all of those elements into a narrow corridor along East 50<sup>th</sup> Street between Madison and Park Avenues. The location is directly across from the Palace Hotel and around the corner from St. Patrick's Cathedral, and between two large modern office buildings (one over 25 stories high, the other over 40 stories) that are used by several thousand workers daily.

The proposed structure is an environmental calamity from several standpoints:

- The three cooling towers, generating 1.2 million cubic feet of mist per minute generated by air conditioning chillers, will emit heavily polluted and health-damaging effluent into a canyon formed by the surrounding buildings, directly impacting the air intake systems

Demolition is supposed to begin for the proposed East 50th Street structure in 2005, with excavation of East 50th Street to occur in 2006-07, construction of the building in 2007-09, and what the MTA calls "vent plant construction and fit out" in 2009-11.

Thus far, the MTA and FTA have insisted that the environmental impacts of this proposed building—which they describe as a "Vent building"—and associated construction are so small or non-existent that no Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement under the National Environmental Policy Act is required. Given the project's inexplicable placement in a heavily populated area with huge air quality and safety ramifications, this refusal is impossible to understand.

It may be necessary for the MTA to create structures to handle the exhaust from the concourse, to provide cooling tower capacity for its air conditioning, to provide a staging area for construction activities, and to provide emergency generation in the event of an electricity outage.

But it is incomprehensible that the MTA continues to insist on combining all these functions in a single building in the heart of one of Manhattan's most heavily populated and visitor-oriented areas. Putting a multi-functional industrial building designed to spew waste air exhaust from a huge underground railroad concourse and waste mist from massive air cooling towers, to receive dozens of trucks hauling construction materials, and to store huge quantities of highly flammable emergency fuel oil in this area is simply irresponsible, if not downright perverse.

The MTA's plan for this structure rides roughshod over numerous public interests: the interest in preventing further air quality, noise and health degradation in the heart of Manhattan, the interest in mitigating the effects of heavy traffic, and the interest in preventing the creation of new magnets for terrorist attacks.

Surely there are better means to accomplish the goals of the East Side Access than to concentrate its most severe burdens in such a heavily populated, environmentally sensitive site.

We urgently request that you use your authority to require the MTA and its funding agency, the FTA, to modify this project and eliminate these hazards that the MTA proposes to visit upon us.

For further information, please feel free to contact George Arzt or Bob Liff at George Arzt Communications, Inc., a firm working with us on this project. They can be reached at 212-608-0333. Via e-mail, Mr. Arzt can be reached at [chief@arztcomm.com](mailto:chief@arztcomm.com) and Mr. Liff at [bliff@arztcomm.com](mailto:bliff@arztcomm.com).

Sincerely,

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