

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

June 26, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is conducting oversight into Amtrak's use of heavy-handed tactics, including eminent domain, to assert control over Washington, D.C.'s Union Station.¹ The Committee is concerned about Amtrak's willingness to use eminent domain—an extraordinary power—not out of necessity, but apparently out of mere convenience.

Union Station has operated as a public-private partnership since the *Union Station Redevelopment Act of 1981*. Amtrak's attempts to exert powers such as eminent domain are in opposition to the law.² The *Union Station Redevelopment Act of 1981* recognized the importance that private sector partnerships must play in maintaining and revitalizing the historic Union Station. Amtrak's recent efforts to remove such partners causes concern.³ These actions come after Amtrak's Chief Executive Officer stated the goal is to “take away th[e] interference and distraction between us [and the private sector sublessor].”⁴

Amtrak CEO's comments indicate a disregard for the law and the key role that private-sector partnerships have played throughout Union Station's history. Further, removing these private-sector partners will only serve to increase the amount of costs for which Amtrak is responsible. These actions are yet another attempt by this Administration to consolidate federal power at the expense of the taxpayers, and the Committee is committed to understanding why these actions are necessary.

Eminent domain is a power reserved for only the rarest of occasions, and removing a sublessor due to convenience does not meet that high bar. The complete overhaul of Union Station planned by Amtrak appears to be in direct conflict with existing law and appears to be little more than another example of abusive government overreach at Americans' expense.

¹ Neal Augenstein, *Amtrak seeks to take DC's Union Station in eminent domain case*, WTOPNEWS (Nov. 28, 2023).

² Pub. L. No. 97-125, 95 Stat. 1667.

³ *Id.* at Sec. 112(d).

⁴ The Editorial Board, *Amtrak Tries to Take Union Station*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (Nov. 26, 2023).

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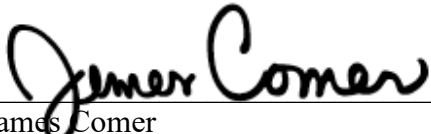
To enable oversight of Union Station, Amtrak, and the Department of Transportation, please provide the following documents and information no later than July 10, 2024:

1. All documents and communications between Amtrak and/or Department of Transportation personnel pertaining to the planned renovations of Union Station,
2. All documents and communications between Amtrak and/or Department of Transportation personnel and the White House regarding the planned renovations of Union Station and the use of eminent domain at Union Station, and
3. All documents and communications between Amtrak and/or Department of Transportation personnel containing proposed justifications for the use of eminent domain at Union Station.

Attached are instructions for producing the documents and information to the Committee. If you have any questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority staff at 202-225-5074.

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Additionally, the Committee on Oversight and Accountability has specific oversight and legislative jurisdiction over the “[m]unicipal affairs of the District of Columbia in general” under House Rule X. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "J" and "C".

James Comer

Chairman

Committee on Oversight and Accountability

cc: The Honorable Jamie B. Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability