



# Regional Plan Association

... a research and planning agency supported by voluntary membership to promote the coordinated development of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Metropolitan Region.

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### SUBWAY STATION IMPROVEMENTS ON 53rd AND LEXINGTON ASKED BY REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION

Regional Plan Association today endorsed a proposed connection between the Lexington Avenue IRT and the Queens IND line at 53rd Street that would be open to light and air along with an "ample landscaped plaza" at the sidewalk level. The issue is before the City Planning Commission in connection with an office construction proposal of Cadillac-Fairview Urban Northeast, Inc.

The Association's Executive Vice President, Richard T. Anderson, testified before the City Planning Commission, Tuesday, March 2, that the new working of the proposed Special Midtown Zoning District Regulation's provide a permit process that will allow the Commission to encourage the project.

Regional Plan Association's 1969 publication, Urban Design Manhattan (Viking Press) called for just such a connection.

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Testimony  
of  
Richard T. Anderson  
Executive Vice President  
Regional Plan Association  
to  
New York City Planning Commission  
on  
Special Midtown District Zoning Regulations as Related to  
Proposed Subway Station Improvements at  
53rd Street and Lexington Avenue

City Hall  
March 2, 1982

I am Richard T. Anderson, Executive Vice President of Regional Plan Association. Regional Plan Association's Board of Directors has asked me to reiterate our support for the proposed Special Midtown District and to emphasize the importance of proposed subway station improvements at 53rd Street and Lexington Avenue. This site is proposed for development by Cadillac Fairview Urban Northeast, Inc.

At that site, the most heavily used east-west subway line in the City intersects the most heavily used north-south line. As you know, the two adjacent subway stations are not connected. This creates a major impediment to circulation in the Manhattan Central Business District. A link between the two stations by means of a sunken plaza open to light and air was advocated by Regional Plan Association in Urban Design Manhattan (1969, p. 107), and we discussed the issue informally with Commissioners and staff and the Transit Authority last summer.

The latest proposal developed by Cadillac Fairview addresses four important principles espoused by Regional Plan:

- 1) A pedestrian passageway between both platforms of the 51st Street Lexington station and the 53rd Street IND station mezzanine.
2. An easement providing for the possibility of a free transfer between the two stations at a lower level to be exercised at the MTA's discretion.
3. An ample landscaped plaza providing for commodious surface circulation and pedestrian amenities at the sidewalk level in this heavily congested part of the City.
4. Openings providing for light and air to the upper level pedestrian passageway.

It would be an irreparable loss to the City not to seize this opportunity to provide public improvements, on the importance of which there is wide agreement. While the pedestrian space proposed by the developer at the sidewalk level originally was not within the framework of the Special Midtown District, the new Section 81-66, allowing special permit modifications, which Regional Plan supports, makes it possible to provide the needed public improvements under the new Midtown zoning as under present zoning.

We urge you to take all the necessary steps to insure that the public improvements are indeed generously provided. In particular, we are concerned that the openings providing daylight to the pedestrian passageway are amply dimensioned, that the two stairways are of adequate width, and that the tread-riser relationship on the steps is a comfortable one.

With respect to these improvements, we note that the latest Cadillac Fairview design omits the large opening to the underground that was initially planned as a part of a covered pedestrian space. Our previous research has shown that added stairway width of over 30 feet is desirable on the site--as opposed to the 20 feet now proposed--and that the steps should have at least a 6 on 12 inch dimension, rather than the 7 on 11 traditionally specified by the Transit Authority.

Also, in lieu of the covered pedestrian space initially planned by the developer, the daylight openings into the pedestrian passageway should be made much larger. Daylighting the lower-level free passageway at such time as it is opened, should be provided for.

The Association believes these station improvements represent a unique one-time opportunity. We urge the Commission's fullest attention and response.

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