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Support for 'Preferred Alternative Option' for Station Entrances at East 72nd and 86th Streets

Testimony of Assembly Member Micah Z. Kellner

Before the Metropolitan Transit Authority

At the DoubleTree Metropolitan Hotel, Metro Ballroom, 569 Lexington Avenue
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My name is Assembly Member Micah Z. Kellner and I represent the 65th Assembly District in Manhattan, including the neighborhoods in the Upper East Side affected by construction of the Second Avenue Subway. Thank you to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority for the opportunity to testify today.

I am here tonight to voice my support for the MTA's 'preferred alternative options' for Second Avenue Subway entrances at East 72nd and East 86th Streets as outlined in the Supplemental Environmental Assessment.

In late 2007, the MTA announced major changes to the design and placement of these entrances – changes that were met with strong opposition in the community. Hundreds of residents contacted me to express their concerns about the impact of the design to their quality of life. In June 2008, I along with other East Side elected officials wrote to the Federal Transit Administration, asking that they require the MTA to perform a full environmental review of the design changes according to the requirements of both the National Environmental Policy Act and the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act, and to provide opportunities for public comment.

The following month, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney and I met with the MTA to discuss the need for a full environmental review of the new designs. At that meeting, the MTA pledged to conduct a full review of the plans, and agreed to provide an opportunity for public comment. Tonight's hearing is the result of that decision, and I applaud the MTA for its responsiveness.

The 'preferred alternative options' outlined in the Supplemental Environmental Assessment adequately address the concerns expressed by the community. Indeed, last week I received a letter from ten building associations on East 72nd Street expressing support for the new preferred alternative for that subway entrance, and I am pleased to add my voice to theirs. These were the same residents who over a year ago contacted me in distress about the original plans.

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While I support the implementation of the preferred alternatives at 72nd and 86th Streets, I do have some reservations about the heavy reliance on elevator service to transport passengers from street level, particularly at East 72nd Street where there will be a five-elevator bank.

I am pleased that the planned elevators will have smaller footprints than escalators would; this is appropriate to the location while still complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act. While I believe that elevators should be included at *every* subway station to provide better accommodations to wheelchair customers, wheelchair users can be crowded out when elevators are the primary means of entry to and from a subway station for *all* users. Also, heavy utilization of elevators in MTA facilities creates an unacceptably high level of outages.

The MTA has a dismal record when it comes to conducting timely maintenance of existing elevators in its system. As elevators are to be the primary means of access to the East 72nd Street station in particular, continual service outages could become a serious and ongoing issue there.

I have introduced legislation (A.3952/S.1387) along with Senator Tom Duane to require the MTA to perform daily inspections of elevators and make their maintenance a priority. I call on the MTA to make a clear and credible commitment that it will do what is necessary to keep these elevators in good working order.

Finally, while I am pleased that the ‘preferred alternative option’ displaces a minimal number of residential tenants, I would urge the MTA to be as considerate as possible to commercial tenants, particularly at the East 86th Street location. East 86th Street is a critical commercial corridor that is essential to the economic health of the neighborhood. Working with commercial tenants early and establishing a back and forth dialogue around construction schedules and potential impacts with business owners is critical at this stage.

Once again, I am pleased that the MTA has demonstrated a genuine willingness to respond to community concerns throughout this process. I have great faith that this commitment will continue during the construction phase ahead.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.