

# Cummings presses Amtrak on Penn Station redevelopment



Baltimore, MD -- Amtrak has received information from nine firms interested in serving as master developer for redeveloping Penn Station and its land around the station, including this parking lot.

(Gene Sweeney Jr. / Baltimore Sun)



**Natalie Sherman** Contact Reporter The Baltimore Sun

Cummings presses Amtrak on Penn Station: "We need that station to be an economic engine."

About nine firms are interested in redeveloping Baltimore's Penn Station with **Amtrak**, but no timeline to complete the project has been set, Amtrak

CEO Joseph Boardman testified Friday, as Rep. Elijah E. Cummings pressed him for progress on the project, which has languished for years.

While Amtrak previously tapped Baltimore's Beatty Development to create a master plan for Penn Station and nearby land owned by Amtrak, it issued a new call in January for firms interested in serving as a master developer for the project.

Amtrak wants the project to include redeveloping unused upper floors of the 1911 Beaux-Arts station as well as nearby land owned by Amtrak and other improvements.

Boardman said the passenger rail company is reviewing the information submitted by the nine firms. A spokeswoman for the agency declined to respond to questions asking about the firms involved and their proposals.

Cummings told Boardman he is concerned about Amtrak's progress, pointing to the skepticism expressed by Amtrak's inspector general about the company's ability to pursue the redevelopment in a timely manner.



Transit-oriented development concept proposed for Penn Station

"We need that station to be an economic engine," Cummings said Friday at a hearing of the House of Representatives' Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. "For nearly a decade there have been many fits around

the station without any actual starts. ... In no way does it serve as the anchor point for Baltimore that it could and should be."

After Amtrak selected Beatty Development in 2012, the firm presented its proposal in March 2013. It called for the construction of up to 1.5 million square feet of new residences and commercial space in the area at a cost of about \$500 million over the next decade.



New West Baltimore rail tunnel could shake homes, displace people, study says

But Beatty Development is also the lead developer of Harbor Point, where it is building a tower for Exelon and planning other buildings. Meanwhile, Amtrak launched a new study for redeveloping its stations in Baltimore, Washington, New York, Chicago and Philadelphia.

Beatty Development chief operating officer Jody Clark said last June the firm remained excited about the project but was waiting for Amtrak to decide whether it would renew the firm's negotiating privileges. She could not be reached for comment Friday.

"There is an ability to do a tremendous amount of improvement because you have people who have a larger view of what could be done," Boardman said Friday. "There's tremendous interest in developing Baltimore's station."

Amtrak has spent \$22 million on improvements at Penn Station since 2010 and expects to spend about \$3 million this year, including upgrades to the platform, station Wi-Fi and lighting in the Baltimore & Potomac Tunnel, Boardman said. It also includes money related to hiring a master developer.

Cummings said the money so far has been spent on improvements "to the most basic amenities, like the bathrooms, and I note that it required significant persistence before these improvements were made."

Amtrak also is examining alternatives for replacing the 142-year-old B&P Tunnel under West Baltimore. The tunnel's narrow, twisting track is considered a major chokepoint on the Northeast Corridor, but drilling a new tunnel to replace it could cost as much as \$4 billion and faces community opposition.

Ellen Janes, executive director of the Central Baltimore Partnership, said redeveloping Penn Station offers an opportunity to link different parts of the city's transit system, while improving perceptions of Baltimore for people arriving through the station.

"It's their first impression of Baltimore, and we really want it to reflect well on the city and improve the quality of life for this whole city," she said.

In 2008, the Central Baltimore Partnership issued a plan for the area that called for a hotel and shopping arcade north of the train tracks; residential towers and a park along the Jones Falls Valley.

With improvements elsewhere in Station North and Greenmount West, the economy recovering and interest rates still low, Janes said she is optimistic about the project's prospects.

"It's a long process, and each step is longer than what any of us expected," she said. "But we are in motion."

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