Good Evening,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am Public Advocate for the City of New York. Thank you for calling (again) this much needed hearing on the General Project Plan. Before I begin my testimony, I want to first acknowledge that this is the second iteration of this hearing, as December’s hearing was not in compliance with ADA laws, and for a crucial plan that will impact community members and residents, accessibility for all New Yorkers must be the norm. Civic engagement, especially in response to development, must be accessible on all fronts, from disability to language access.

Efforts to improve and renovate Penn Station are not only welcome by community members, but should be beneficial towards residents around the area proposed in the General Project Plan (GPP). However, this particular plan raises a few concerns around transparency and community involvement, and as written does not sufficiently plan for the much needed infrastructure and transit improvements the area needs. As such, I am concerned the proposed GPP is not in the best interest of New Yorkers.

Although community members would collectively agree that Penn Station needs much repair and renovation, the GPP’s omission to include the upgrades and expansion of Penn Station in the Scope of Work, as well as the lack of transparency disallows community support. The lack of transparency in these much needed revisions remains a cause for concern despite community efforts to gain transparency from ESD and the Governor’s office. Moving forward, this plan should happen only after we have transit and infrastructure updates planned and funded, only then should we be talking about finalizing any real estate development plans that would be associated with this new Penn Station footprint.

The City’s uniformed land use review process has been widely ignored in the making of the GPP, which raises more concerns for community members and residents whose lives the GPP would impact for years to come. No development should bypass the opportunity for community members and residents to negotiate developments that include increased office spaces but little affordable housing.
Penn Station should undergo the much needed transformation to make our public transportation more accessible, frequent and accommodating. These plans should not come second to the real estate development opportunities that provide more office space, and small pockets of affordable housing, to the area.

As the Public Advocate, I implore this body to further these plans by first going through the city’s ULURP process to provide community members the opportunity to express their concerns, and work with the Empire State Developers to establish a plan that puts both community and transit and infrastructural needs first. No land development plan should be finalized until after we know what the footprint of the new Penn Station will look like. Once the land development plan has been made, with increased transparency as well as the cost to the taxpayers, close contact with community residents will be crucial. Thank you for the time to testify here today.