

The importance of revitalized Springfield Union Station: Guest commentary

Loading Photo Gallery

The Republican Editorials By The Republican Editorials

on December 08, 2014 at 2:34 PM

Eighteen months from now, in fall 2016, I am confident that Union Station will be ready to open its doors once again.

By Congressman Richard E. Neal

Union Station has always been an important component in the history of the City of Springfield since it opened its doors in 1926. In its heyday, families, students, professionals and travelers would come and go through its majestic atrium filled with vendors, bustle, and excitement. In those days, Union Station also served as the hub for soldiers going to and returning from war. Parades were hosted on Frank B. Murray Street to welcome our brave veteran's home. But the building has sat unused and vacant since train travel declined and more people moved into the suburbs forcing Union Station to close its doors in the 1970s.

As the third largest city in the Commonwealth and fourth largest in all of New England, Springfield's ability to keep up with these growing metropolises is anchored in transportation. As the central point of north-south travel, as well as east-west transit, the rehabilitation of Springfield's Union Station will undoubtedly reestablish our foothold as the crossroad of New England.

During FY 2013, Amtrak saw a huge growth in the number of passengers it welcomed aboard with 31.6 million. This was the largest annual total in Amtrak's history. Amtrak states that every day, more than 86,000 passengers ride over 300 trains nationwide. Imagine what will happen to those numbers once Union Station is complete.

Currently, the north-south lines through Connecticut, Massachusetts and Vermont are using \$73 million in federal stimulus money to update the track. Tim Brennan, executive director of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, believes that work should be done

later this month with the inaugural train ride on the newer, faster tracks taking place on December 29. There is the potential for as many as 25 trains a day to run **from New Haven to Springfield**, and state and federal planners are examining how to expand this from east to west.

View full size

07/23/12 Springfield- Republican Photo by Mark M.Murray- Artist view of what the new Union Station Transportation Center will look like.

Mark M.Murray

Last week, I was delighted to take part in a press conference highlighting the demolition of the baggage area adjacent to the main station. While work has been going on inside the structure for some time now, it is encouraging to see progress

on the outside as well. This phase will be completed by the end of the year and will make way for the remaining reconstruction projects to continue, including renovating the terminal building and central concourse, reopening and restoring the central tunnel from the terminal building to the platform, and installing new stairs and an elevator

connecting these two points. Eighteen months from now, in fall 2016, I am confident that Union Station will be ready to open its doors once again.

I have been committed to this project since I first entered public office. I held my first campaign announcement for Springfield City Council at Union Station in 1977. This building and project has a hold on our nostalgia. A grand Union Station has always been part of the plan for Springfield. And in a few years, it is going to be here for everyone.

© 2014 masslive.com. All rights reserved.