

MR. AKCHIN: My name is Don Akchin. I am the chair of N40, Inc., which is a nonprofit created by Beth Thompson in Reservoir Hill to work for the betterment of Reservoir Hill. N40 has several serious concerns about the proposed rail tunnel and what could be negative impacts on the physical integrity of the neighborhood and the health and safety of the residents.

First of all, the proposal started out as two tunnels exclusively for passenger rail. The current proposal has grown to four, carrying both passengers and freight, including freight in double-stacked cars. This is a dramatic alteration of the proposal and it raises doubt in the community as to whether the proposal we are commenting on today will be radically altered again in the future. The change does not speak well of the transparency or credibility of the title proponents.

Second, we have legitimate concerns about how burrowing under our neighborhood will impact one of our defining assets and magnificent stock of historic houses built more than a century ago. Many millions of dollars have been invested by the City, the State, foundations, private investors, and the federal government. Can we be certain these investments will be not ruined by the latest and shiny engineering technology? We have heard assurances before, but as I noted, the community has grounds to question the credibility of these assurances.

Third, we strongly object to the plan to place a huge industrial strength ventilation building in the center of our neighborhood on land that has been carefully groomed into a public park. We would not expect the City of Baltimore to allow any other industrial use in the middle of a residential neighborhood because it doesn't belong. The community has received no information on the potential environmental impact of this structure in the community in normal operation, as well as in case of an emergency. We are not convinced that an emergency is unlikely. We watched the downtown Baltimore tunnel fire of 2005. We have seen derailments of hazardous tunnels in other communities. We want to see an honest and thorough assessment of the health and safety risks for this community.

Finally, we are extremely concerned about the issue of freight, particularly, hazardous cargo moving below our beds. The first proposal we were shown was for passenger rail only and that made sense. The tunnel connects a passenger rail terminal at Penn Station with a passenger commuter rail station in West Baltimore. Freight does not make sense. Somehow, freight is moving north and south now on other tracks. Why would it be re-routed to go through the passenger rail stations where it never unloads? It makes the community suspicious that the proposal places disproportionate environment dangers and burdens on communities of color. We do not oppose progress, but many hundreds of people of put their lives and investments on the line for this community. We are not prepared to go quietly for a proposal that places all of our hard work and love in jeopardy. Thank you.