

**Statement
on
The Proposed Renovation of Gare du Nord, Paris**

Society of Architectural Historians
Heritage Conservation Committee

Background

As Paris prepares for the 2024 Summer Olympics, Gare du Nord is slated to become a major conduit of visitors travelling from the Charles de Gaulle airport to the city of Paris. As well, the station serves as the terminus of the international high-speed Eurostar rail service. The station strains under the burden of its current passenger load, and that load will increase substantially during the Olympics. An expansion and modernization of this essential Parisian transportation hub is certainly in order. Work is scheduled to begin in 2020.

Issue

Gare du Nord is also one of the most significant rail stations in the Western world. Designed by Jacques I. Hittorff and constructed between 1861 and 1864, Gare du Nord serves rail destinations in northern France and Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Some 222 million passengers pass through Gare du Nord in a given year, over 700,000 passengers daily, making it the busiest rail station in Europe. While functional improvements are necessary, its preservation is essential.

The current renovation proposal, designed by S.N.C.F. Gares & Connexions, goes far beyond functional improvements. S.N.C.F. proposes an additional 164,000 square feet of space, and reimagines Gare du Nord as a commercial center, including a co-working space, fitness amenities, and an abundance of retail facilities. The proposed renovation focuses on R.E.R commuters, and creates a mall-like commercial development that threatens to overwhelm the historic rail station. As Bernard Landau, former deputy director of urban planning for the City of Paris, voiced to the New York Times: "it all goes into one question. Should we transform all train stations into shopping malls?"

Recommendation

In the name of creating a more efficient rail station, the proposal both disfigures the historic rail station and creates obstacles to passenger movement even more tangled than those experienced by travelers at present. Under the current proposal, passengers will face a daunting series of level changes in the shopping center, requiring them to weave through a series of footbridges, stairs, and elevators to reach the rail platforms. The station itself is already a traffic-saturated area. The inclusion of additional shops and activities within the station will result in an even more congested traveler experience, and one that seriously diminishes the historic character Gare du Nord.

Adopted 11 December 2019

*Society of Architectural Historians
Heritage Conservation Committee*

Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., LEED AP BD+C
Chair, Society of Architectural Historians Heritage Conservation Committee

Mr. Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Mr. Jeffrey Cody, Ph.D.; Mr. Anthony Cohn, AIA; Ms. Phyllis Ellin; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA; Mr. Sandy Isenstadt, Ph.D.; Mr. Theodore H. Prudon, Ph.D., FAIA, Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton; Members SAH Heritage Conservation Committee.