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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

Leaks and Lights Get Attention in Infrastructure Deal Between Metro-North Railroad and New York City

Pedestrian safety on Park Avenue will improve with the installation of Walk/Don't Walk signals and pedestrian ramps for wheelchairs from 46th to 56th streets under a new infrastructure improvement agreement announced today by the New York City Department of Transportation and MTA Metro-North Railroad.

The agreement also calls for rehabilitation of the elevated section of Park Avenue that encircles Grand Central Terminal and the streets and sidewalks around the Terminal to reduce the amount of water leaking into the terminal, which is operated by Metro-North.

Installation of the Walk/Don't Walk signals on Park Avenue, the only avenue in midtown that doesn't have the signals, is being expedited and award of a construction contract is expected by September 2008. Additional traffic poles also will be installed to improve signal visibility. This and all construction work will be contracted and managed by Metro-North with the city sharing some costs.

"The infrastructure of the railroad and the city are closely intertwined as the streets and sidewalks of midtown are, in essence, the roof of Grand Central Terminal's vast trainshed. It is critical that we work together to maintain it," said Metro-North President Peter A. Cannito. "This historic agreement replaces a 1924 document that was essentially abandoned by both parties decades ago and it outlines the railroad's 21st century partnership with the city."

"Park Avenue is about to become a whole lot safer for the thousands of pedestrians who cross what is one of midtown's busiest corridors," said City Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan. "Intersections along Park Avenue will have new pedestrian ramps, Walk/Don't Walk signals and higher visibility traffic signals. I want to thank our partners at Metro-North for working with us to reach this important agreement."

Installation of the Walk/Don't Walk signs has been complicated by the fact that Park Avenue forms part of the roof of the 47-acre underground train yard that is Grand Central Terminal. Electrical conduit for the new pedestrian warning lights must be hung from the ceiling of the train shed.

The Park Avenue Viaduct, also known as the circumferential roadway, was built in 1926 and needs some work. From the ramp beginning at 40th Street to its emergence at 46th Street, Park Avenue is elevated and split. The northbound lanes run along the eastern facade of the terminal, then along the east side of the Met Life Building, on a bridge over 45th Street, then descend through the Helmsley Building (formerly the New York Central Building) and emerge at street level at 46th Street, where plant-filled islands create the familiar, broad boulevard that makes Park Avenue so lovely. The southbound lanes make the opposite trip along the western side of the three buildings.

The portion of the Viaduct covered by this agreement begins at 42nd Street and extends north to 45th Street. The two bridges over 45th Street also are included in the agreement and will be rehabilitated and reinforced. The granite balustrades of the viaduct will be repaired and regouted as will the stone work under the viaduct.

Breaches in the waterproofing layer underlying the roadway have allowed water to infiltrate the interior of the terminal and trainshed. In addition to waterproofing, the Viaduct will get new pavement and new expansion joints that will allow pavement to shrink in cold weather and expand in warm weather without buckling and causing leaks below.

Along the length of Vanderbilt Avenue and along 42nd Street from Vanderbilt Avenue to Lexington Avenue, Metro-North will waterproof and repair the sidewalks, including replacement of old expansion joints.

Under the agreement, which is expected to be approved by the MTA Board when it meets September 26, the city has agreed to perform maintenance for certain elements of the viaduct after Metro-North's contract work is completed. This agreement replaces a 1924 maintenance agreement between the city and a predecessor railroad that had become outdated.

The total project cost is estimated at \$35 million. Metro-North's share is approximately 36% and the city's share is about 64%.

In a sidebar agreement between Metro-North and the Grand Central Partnership, a business improvement district, the Partnership has agreed to provide \$350,000 toward the estimated \$2.1 million cost of replacing 22 historic streetlights on the viaduct, if Metro-North elects to perform this work. The decorative bronze lights were removed during a previous paving project decades ago.

