

**Statement by the National Mall Coalition  
on the  
National Mall Underground USACE Technical Review**

September 18, 2018

The National Mall Coalition believes that the public, members of Congress, and government entities responsible for managing flood threats in Washington, DC, will be interested in reviewing the National Mall Underground USACE Technical Review. This report, recently completed by the US Army Corps of Engineers in partnership with the DC-based nonprofit National Mall Coalition, concludes that the proposed National Mall Underground flood reservoir project could fill a significant gap in Washington's flood protection system. The Corps of Engineers prepared this review of the Underground in response to a May 2018 request by the Council of the District of Columbia.

While the National Park Service's new 17<sup>th</sup> Street levee helps protect the center city and downtown DC from Potomac River flooding and tidal surges, it does not address a third threat – stormwater flooding from heavy rains that overflow storm sewers. It was such flooding that inundated the Federal Triangle and Mall area in June 2006, causing millions of dollars in damage to Smithsonian museums and federal buildings. Hurricane Florence recently threatened a repeat of that disaster. The only comprehensive solution that's been developed is the National Mall Underground, which now has been reviewed by the Corps.

The multi-purpose National Mall Underground concept offers the following:

- A 30 million gallon emergency floodwater reservoir (the targeted 200-year flood requires a 24 million gallon capacity) constructed under the grass, between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Street tunnels.
- Parking for tour buses and cars, removing 150 buses and 1072 cars from city streets; during storm events, the lower, bus level would be evacuated and floodwaters would be allowed to fill that lower level.
- On the upper level, which would not be flooded, car parking and a Mall visitors center with restrooms and food service.
- Cisterns at each end to collect rainwater and groundwater for irrigation.
- A field of geothermal wells to provide clean heating and cooling to nearby museums and government buildings.

Revenue from parking, water credits, irrigation, and geothermal make the Underground substantially self-funding.

The Corps review finds that “Flood risk from a storm of the intensity that flooded the Federal Triangle area in 2006 could be reduced significantly during a flood event by implementation of the Underground.” Also, “revenue potential from parking fees and water credits may offer self-financing opportunities that attracts a public-private partnership.” The Underground is still an early stage concept so “further study is needed,

particularly on the conceptual systems related to phased floodwater intake and evacuation of buses to minimize risk to life safety during a flash flood.” Because of the multiple jurisdictions involved, there will be a need to “(c)ontinue to coordinate with stakeholders.”

The next step is to identify a temporary task force that can act on the urgent stormwater flooding threat that is predicted to worsen considerably as climate change continues. Tasks would include following up on the Corps’ recommendations for further study and coordinating with the interagency DC Silver Jackets team (federal and DC flood threat managers), which is considering some alternative stormwater approaches, to decide the best solutions for the stormwater flooding threat.

There is true urgency to this task. We were lucky with Hurricane Florence this time. But sooner or later the predicted repeat of 2006 is coming.

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