



PLANNING & ANALYSIS

GRAND CENTRAL DISTRICT

This master plan for more than 50 blocks surrounding New York's Grand Central Terminal represents an unprecedented revitalization effort, encompassing the redesign of the district streetscape, including paving, light, graphics, signage, street furnishing and street tree planting, as well as the implementation of a variety of "people programs"—sanitation, security, special maintenance, public art, tourist greeters, a drop-in center and retail/merchandising guidelines—that support the proposed physical improvements.

The master plan, by architects Benjamin Thompson & Associates, was inspired by the potential of this bypassed heart of New York's CBD. It envisions the district as the "hub" of Manhattan, with the crossroads of Park Avenue, the "Avenue of Green," and 42nd Street, the "Boulevard of Light," and the civic monuments of the U.N. to the east and the New York Public Library to the west. Through detailed design recommendations, the plan seeks to raise the standard of urban vitality within the district and thereby attract visitors, as well as benefit the millions of New Yorkers working, shopping and strolling through the area.

In seeking a streetscape image that expresses the inherent spirit of the district, Benjamin Thompson & Associates began with extensive analysis of the district's 14 miles of sidewalk. Surveys of underground utilities and surface conditions for each district block and photo surveys of every building facade and sidewalk were completed. Special places were identified as opportunities for positive intervention: 41st Street from Fifth Avenue to Park Avenue, designated as "Library Way"; 43rd Street from Lexington Avenue to Tudor City as "United Nations Way"; and Vanderbilt Avenue as a "Street of Cafes."

To streamline the approvals process and to test the systems proposed by the districtwide master plans, a demonstration street (43rd Street) was conceived as a tool that would allow

for the study of design alternatives for the various master-plan elements in an actual three-dimensional environment. Upon city approval of the demonstration street, 84 design-development drawings will be completed, with phased construction documentation to follow.

Construction on the illumination of the exterior of Grand Central, one of the improvements proposed in the plan, is already underway, and the historic restoration of the viaduct has been approved and should be in progress at presstime. The demonstration district at 43rd Street is still under review by the city. The "greeters" program, public entertainments and social services programs have already been implemented throughout the district and are visible signs of the plan's intent.

The Grand Central District is an ambitious plan that represents a massive undertaking on the part of the people and businesses the 50-block area. To revitalize one of the busiest, most diverse districts in the world presented a challenge to the design team equalled only by the scale of the district's physical dimensions.

Location: New York City

Architects: Benjamin Thompson & Associates

Landscape architects: Lynn Wolff, ASLA, and Elena Saporta, Benjamin Thompson & Associates

Project team: Ben Thompson, principal; Jane Thompson, partner-in-charge; Jim Van Sickle, senior associate-in-charge; Anthony Ricci, project administrator; Diana Tracey, senior associate

Consultants: E.W. Finley, surveyor; Herbert S. Levinson, traffic; Sylvan Shemitz and Sol Cohen, lighting

Client: The Grand Central Partnership

Model of the entire district reveals street-level retail uses and major master-plan proposals—lighting, planting and paving.