



## **Lee Harris Pomeroy restores East 180th Street station - \$65 million project; Weidlinger Associates served as structural Engineer**

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The N.Y.C. Transit Authority's East 180th St. Station has undergone a \$65 million restoration and upgrade that reestablishes the 100 year old complex as a landmark. This station was originally meant to be the flagship for the emerging N.Y. Westchester and Boston Railway Co. and its transformation returns it to its original glory. Lee Harris Pomeroy Architects with Weidlinger Associates, structural engineers, assisted the TA in achieving it. The general contractor was Citnalta Construction Corp.

Designed concurrently with Grand Central Station and created by one of its architects, Alfred Fellheimer of Reed & Stem, East 180th St. is one of the few stations in the TA system that includes a free-standing building and formal plaza and is a designated national, state and city landmark. The building had not received serious attention in 40 years and piecemeal interventions had gradually modified the integrity of the design.

"With this project, we had an extraordinary opportunity to restore a landmark building from the same period as Grand Central Terminal; a time of great optimism for the Bronx. The station building represents the ambitious legacy of JP Morgan, who championed the value of architecture and the golden age of railroad development," said Lee Harris Pomeroy, FAIA, the firm founder and principal.

With its restoration, the building is an encouraging symbol of the importance of public transportation and the growth of the Bronx. The work involved replacing individual AC units that had been punched into the exterior walls with an HVAC system and removing all the signs of wear and tear to the walls, windows and skylights that had accumulated over the years. The lobby and its retail spaces also received lighting that is period appropriate.

The station's main entry leads through a circular plaza to the Italian villa style administrative building, which was built by J.P. Morgan using the finest materials and most advanced construction methods of its time. Red tile roofs cap its twin towers and the walls of are of warm-hued stucco. A plaque topped with the head of Mercury, the Roman god of travel, and featuring wings on either side is prominent on the facade. Travelers pass through a colonnade porch and central lobby, continuing on to the mezzanine level connecting passage and the elevated train platforms beyond.

The wide mezzanine passage way has been completely refurbished with new tile work and ornamental mosaic bands and the introduction of mosaic panels designed by the artist Luisa Caldwell under NYC Percent for the Arts program. The panels, which have natural imagery that refers to the local geography and the nearby Bronx Zoo and New York Botanical Gardens, also appear elsewhere in the station. The side entrance to station has been similarly renewed and both passageways are marked by large spans of structural steel overhead which have been painted a

vibrant pale green, their color when the station first opened. Special lighting has been introduced throughout and the facade is flood lit in the evening, making it a beacon for pedestrians as well as motorists on the nearby Bronx River Parkway.

The elevated subway platforms have similarly been repaired, replacing missing or decaying elements from the wood canopies. New platform roofing that is a close approximation of the original roof is in place. Designated a key station, there is now an elevator connecting the mezzanine to the platforms, and a walkway inconspicuously circles the entry plaza to allow wheelchair access.

### Station History

What is now the East 180th Street subway station was first the administration building of the New York, Westchester and Boston Railway (NYW&BRWY) in the Bronx. The NYW&BRWY operated as an electric commuter railroad in the Bronx and Westchester County from 1912 to 1937. Its developers sought to create a terminal that would rival Grand Central Station and trigger upscale development in the Bronx, which was still a sparsely developed rural area. The designer of the building, Alfred Fellheimer of Reed & Stem had been the lead architect for Grand Central Terminal in 1903.

In the early 1900s, the directors of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad (which today is part of Metro-North) wanted to expand their operations into the Bronx, which was only then beginning to shake off its rural reputation and become urbanized. The New York, Westchester and Boston Railroad emerged in 1906, guided by Charles S. Mellen. He was appointed by J.P. Morgan who controlled the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad, NYW&Brwy's parent company. Mellen's grand plan was to build a new station in the Bronx to rival the then-overtaxed Grand Central Station. Trains would terminate in the Bronx, and commuters would then transfer to the Bronx subways, which then cost only a nickel. Commuters would save a great deal on fares, since it cost a lot more to take the railroad all the way to Grand Central Station.

Mellen decided to make the NYW&Brwy the flagship of his master plan, and designed the route for efficiency and speed. It was a four-track route, built for heavy traffic, even though much of the route was then rural. Construction began in 1909 and the line opened May 1912. Mellen and other officials hoped that a successful railroad would trigger development in the Bronx that would make it look like midtown Manhattan.

A series of fabulously ornate stations was built along the line at East 180th Street, Morris Park, Pelham Parkway, Gun Hill Road, Baychester Avenue, and Dyre Avenue, at a time when other railroad lines settled for simple sheds for their stations.

The master plan failed. Given the choice of higher fares for a one-seat ride to Grand Central, or lower fares for a transfer to the IRT in the Bronx, most commuters chose the former. The line continued to lose money until it finally closed down on December 31st, 1937. The NYW&B was doomed by the bankruptcy of its patron, the New Haven. The portion in the Bronx became part of the New York City Transit System and the Administration Building eventually became the East 180th Street subway station.