OVERVIEW:
The Madison/Wabash elevated station house and metal canopies located on Chicago’s historic Loop Elevated is the last original station on the east section of the Loop to retain its original station house. Most of the others were removed or destroyed beginning in the 1950s. It displays marvelous classical detailing, pilasters and ornamental stamped metal. This station house forms a backdrop to the historic Louis Sullivan-designed Schlesinger & Mayer/Carson Pirie Scott building along with the adjacent buildings by D. H. Burnham and Holabird & Roche. It’s also situated atop the Jewelers’ Row Chicago Landmark District.

HISTORY:
The Madison/Wabash station was one of the first activated in the late 19th Century by railroad and rapid transit magnate Charles Tyson Yerkes and was a central point in what was then known as the Union Elevated Company.

The station is designed in a Palladian style and differs in appearance to the fully restored Quincy/Wells station house which is far less visible to the general public and not located in a Chicago Landmark District. It features Corinthian capitals, pilasters and window surrounds and cartouches along the roofline. It is the last original station to remain on Wabash Avenue, itself a street of historic buildings protected and influenced over the years by the presence of the elevated rails.

Madison/Wabash “L” Station House
Address: 2 N. Wabash Ave.
Neighborhood: The Loop
Architect: Unknown
Date: 1896

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This station also employed the city's first direct connection between an elevated station and an adjacent building. The Louis Sullivan-designed Schlesinger & Mayer (later Carson Pirie Scott Store) was attached to the station by a now-lost Sullivan-designed covered passageway, which allowed access from the south portion of the west platform across the “crystal bridge” to the famous department store, also designed by the world-renowned Sullivan. The construction of the passageway caused tremendous controversy between Yerkes’ Union Elevated company and then Mayor Carter H. Harrison who argued that the passageway constituted an unlawful use of the public way. Legal action ensued, however the passageway was constructed and set a precedent where similar improvements were often challenged between the Union Elevated and the city.

**THREAT:**
The Chicago Transit Authority plans to consolidate Madison/Wabash with Randolph/Wabash and create an entirely new Washington/Wabash station. Construction is slated to begin this year. At this time the Madison/Wabash Station is to be demolished.

The Madison/Wabash station house retains many original features and the structure also retains its original canopies. It is the last surviving example of an original Elevated structure on Wabash and is within the boundaries of the Jewelers’ Row Chicago Landmark District. While the original station house on the west side of Wabash Avenue is in need of repairs and a restoration plan, it is an original structure on this world-renowned system, from which the Chicago Loop or downtown Chicago derived its name from both the cable car lines as well as the Loop “L” elevated structure circling downtown. Additionally, the station forms the backdrop and is contemporary with the recently restored Schlesinger & Mayer building. It’s loss would negatively impact the Jewelers’ Row District and the many historic and landmarked buildings in the vicinity dating from about the same period.

Preservation and restoration of the Madison/Wabash stationhouse and platform should be a priority both for the CTA and the Chicago Department of Transportation as it is in keeping with the historic loop elevated structure circling downtown Chicago and the building adjacent to this station.