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NoMa BID ★ Rosslyn BID ★ Sierra Club DC Chapter ★ Washington Area Bicyclist Association
1440 G Street NW ★ Washington, DC 20005 ★ 202-681-0509 ★ info@dcstcoalition.org

Dear Mayor Bowser, Deputy Mayor Babers, Director Marootian, and Budget Director Reed,

DC Sustainable Transportation (DCST) is a coalition of business, advocacy, and government entities who work together to make DC a global leader with frequent, rapid, safe, affordable, and reliable transportation to, from, and around DC job centers. We work closely together to advance shared priorities around bus service, curbside management, active transportation modes, and emerging technology in transportation.

The members of DCST appreciate your leadership through this difficult and unprecedented time, and share your concern for ensuring the health and safety of the residents of the District of Columbia and, as soon as possible after the immediate crisis passes, a speedy economic recovery that brings back jobs, commerce, education, and prosperity for all District residents.

We understand that due to the crisis, the District budget in the current and upcoming fiscal years is likely to require a close look at which programs bring the greatest value. As you formulate these difficult but necessary steps, we stand ready to assist in any way possible and also wish to share some recommendations from our members regarding our transportation budget.

Bus priority

First, we encourage you to ensure that planning can continue on important projects to improve bus service through dedicated bus lanes. As you are aware, buses provide a vital connection to jobs, schools, and more for residents of all ages, incomes, races, and backgrounds, yet buses had been caught in a vicious cycle of slower speeds and lower ridership for years.

Transit services have played a key role in the District's resilience through ensuring essential services could be maintained during the COVID-19 crisis, with more than a third of transit riders classed as "essential workers" in a recent Transit Center report.

Post-coronavirus, a better bus network with efficient and convenient service can ensure quicker and more equitable economic recovery by ensuring people have access to jobs. DDOT, fortunately, has several important projects at various stages in the pipeline, including the transformative K Street Transitway project, bus lanes on 16th and 14th streets NW, a study of potential bus lanes on New York Avenue NE, and a broader bus priority study with a particular emphasis on identifying the best corridors for bus priority east of the Anacostia River.

In the very near-term, a more efficient bus network will help the District return to safe operations by better balancing trip demand and the level of crowding on buses. The ability of the District to provide safe transit service, especially for the District's most vulnerable and transit-dependent riders, will be critical to the District's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Longer term, by giving the District world-class bus service through bus priority projects, we can position the District to be a highly appealing place for job creation through excellent accessibility of a broad workforce to potential jobs. Given the fact that the recovery will not be instantaneous, we encourage you to look at these infrastructure projects as a meaningful way to get District residents back to work and to take advantage of the opportunities that the slowdown presents from a construction standpoint.

Not only does a period of temporarily lower travel demand provide an excellent time to construct these bus priority projects, but it is also important that the District continues to plan and design such projects to help the District's long-term recovery efforts. Not only will local funding become available in future years, but we are also mindful that federal funding may be made available for infrastructure projects in the near-term. It is critical that the District has the capacity to advance projects so that it can benefit from future federal funding that may flow.

Vision Zero

Second, we urge that the District continue its emphasis on planning, designing, and building roadway improvements to make streets safer. At least 25 people were killed on District roadways in 2019, with areas east of the Anacostia River such as Alabama and Southern avenues some of DC's most dangerous. Your administration has made safety a top priority and we appreciate this focus, which has led to many DDOT plans and projects in the pipeline.

COVID-19 has forced residents to rethink the ways we interact with each other in public spaces, both now and with an eye toward life after the stay-at-home orders. This applies as well to how we make streets safe. We urge that the District's ongoing efforts continue, and that the Vision Zero program retain its staffing and project funding. Safety should always be the top priority, and the need for this will only become more pronounced as the prolonged impacts of COVID-19 influence new travel patterns, especially for non-vehicular trips.

Among the projects which would enhance safety and economic recovery are the K Street Transitway, previously mentioned, and also the Pennsylvania Avenue street redesign project. We

hope that funds for study and construction on K Street continue in the budget and design can be funded for Pennsylvania Avenue.

Curbside management

We appreciate the quick action by the Bowser administration to adapt curbside space. Using curb space for loading and unloading of people and goods had already become more imperative as people were switching to ride-hailing, shared bikes and scooters, and online shopping. The need for this as a tool of economic recovery will continue, particularly in freight as people have already shifted more purchasing to online grocers and retailers.

Fortunately, curbside modifications require very little funding, and so can continue to yield results in a constrained budget environment. We look forward to working with you to continue to identify places to use the curb for the greatest benefit for residents and economic recovery for businesses.

Roadway pricing

Finally, we hope to continue working with the Bowser administration to study equity-first policies that would better manage the use of scarce roadway space and ensure that those who really need it, because of their jobs or lack of access to transit or other factors, have the ability to use it.

Many commentators have already predicted a major rise in traffic congestion following the end of stay-at-home orders. The autonomous vehicle study recently released by your administration, which we were pleased to partner with you on, also predicted increases in traffic congestion in the future absent strong and proactive public policy. We do not know when either of these will come to pass, but to maximize the District's short-term economic recovery and long-term success, we should continue studying and preparing public policy options for the time when they are needed.

Overall

There are still many things we don't know about a post-COVID-19 world, but we do know that smart investments in transportation will be critical to the District's recovery. The ability to safely and efficiently move people throughout the city will be instrumental in DC's ability to return to operations and we know that resources will need to be made available to allow for this. We encourage you to incorporate this awareness into your budgetary decision-making. We also stand ready to support you and your staff in answering the big questions about how to safely and efficiently return public services to full operation.

We shared a list of budget recommendations in November for the FY21 budget, and continue to hope that many of these can be funded. However, we also recognize that there will be little opportunity to add new initiatives, and so are highlighting the above areas as the most important. Fortunately, these are areas that have already been receiving funding, and so we most of all hope they can continue at the levels they have been so the District can receive the maximum benefit for its residents.

We would be happy to answer questions or otherwise discuss these matters further if you wish.

Thank you very much,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Alpert". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and "A".

David Alpert
Executive Director
DC Sustainable Transportation