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Golden Triangle BID ★ Greater Greater Washington ★ Greater Washington Partnership ★ Mt. Vernon Triangle CID
NoMa BID ★ Rosslyn BID ★ Sierra Club DC Chapter ★ Southwest BID ★ Washington Area Bicyclist Association
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**Testimony by David Alpert, Executive Director
DDOT Performance Oversight Hearing
February 25, 2019**

Dear Chairperson Cheh and members of the Committee,

Good morning. DC Sustainable Transportation (DCST) is a nonprofit organization which works to make DC a global leader with frequent, rapid, safe, affordable, and reliable transportation to, from, and around DC job centers. DCST brings together business, advocacy, and government entities around shared priorities for DC transportation.

Our members include ten of DC's Business Improvement Districts; business groups including the Federal City Council and Greater Washington Partnership; and advocacy groups like the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the Sierra Club DC chapter, and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association.

The District of Columbia urgently needs bold action on transportation, to move people where they need to go, eliminate deaths and serious injuries on our roadways, facilitate commerce, and utilize our public space in the best interests of all.

DCST has three major priorities:

1. Improving bus service in DC, particularly with bus priority corridors with bus lanes, signal priority, paying the fare before boarding, and more.
2. Curbside management to provide curb space for communities' needs like pick-up and drop-off, deliveries, tour buses, bike parking, or parklets.
3. Emerging technology including autonomous vehicles and dockless bikes and scooters, and their effects on mobility and public space.

We have been working closely with DDOT on all of these priorities over the last year and beyond. I'd like to address each of these priority areas.

Bus priority

There is widespread consensus in the transit community that making buses faster, more frequent, and more reliable is the most efficient and cost-effective way to improve mobility, as well as closing equity gaps for our residents.

Bus speeds have declined by 2 mph, from 12 to 10 mph, since 2002, but on our most heavily traveled corridors it is much lower: 7 mph on 16th Street and Georgia Ave and only 3 mph on I Street downtown, which serves the buses to Wisconsin Ave NW and Pennsylvania Ave SE. These are three of the region's five most used bus corridors.

DC residents ride Metrobus 15% more than Metrorail on a typical weekday; 54% of Metrobus riders are in households making under \$30,000 a year. The vast majority (85%) are not transferring to Metrorail.

The way to do that is well established and proven in many cities in the US and the world: create bus lanes in congested areas, configure traffic signals to reduce delays for buses, help people pay before they board and board through all doors, and rebalance stop spacing.

We've been talking about it for at least a decade. What we need is the will among executive, legislative, and community leaders to actually implement these changes despite the obstacles inherent in any change in our roadways.

Seattle's King County has 40 miles of bus lanes; the District, only a third of a mile, on Georgia Avenue. Yet the segment has reduced travel times through that small area by 23% southbound in the morning peak and 17% northbound in the afternoon peak.

DDOT has studied and plans to implement bus priority treatments on 16th Street in 2020 and 14th Street in 2019, and is looking into additional pilot projects.

We need DDOT to have the resources and priority to plan, design, and implement these projects. We need support from elected and community leaders to move forward. It is easy to constantly water down such projects, but this is perhaps the clearest of any opportunity to allocate our road space based on what the greatest numbers of people, including people of all incomes, need.

The bus moves over half of the travelers on 16th Street, for instance, but has only a fraction of the space, and at many times of day must constantly merge in and out between parking and general travel lanes.

DDOT has agreed to establish a dedicated group focused on bus priority projects, similar to (but thus far much smaller than) groups in San Francisco and New York and other cities and the dedicated bicycle infrastructure group at DDOT. We applaud this step and look forward to helping it staff up and be successful.

Circulator

DCST strongly supports the success of the DC Circulator. We are watching with great interest to see if the Circulator able to progress under the new contract toward better maintenance and better on-time performance.

The ongoing on-time performance under the 80% target is disappointing, particularly in light of the fact that buses are still considered on time if they are up to 5 minutes early or 5 minutes late. Also, DDOT in recent years had to switch from the original headway managed service, where dispatchers worked to keep buses 10 minutes apart, to a schedule, where each bus has to hit time points. That means one bus could be early and the next one late with a long gap in between and still count as on time.

DCST hopes that the Circulator can improve on-time performance up to and beyond the current 80% target and ultimately set more aggressive goals around customer experience.

DCST is enthusiastic about the battery electric buses. These represent a great opportunity to reduce emissions, especially on our streets in close proximity to many people. We look forward to seeing information about how these are performing and hope DDOT can add more electric buses in the near future.

An extension of the Rosslyn-Dupont route to U Street and Howard University has been at the top of DDOT's list for new service, and we are eager to see the Circulator perform and grow its fleet in the future so it can add this service.

Curbside management

Even just a decade ago, there was no Uber and Lyft and Via. Amazon was a much smaller fraction of our shopping than it is today, and Instacart, DoorDash, and other delivery services did not exist.

All of these services have provided residents with new choices for travel or commerce, choices which make it easier to live in walkable urban places and not own or rarely use a car.

We now have Capital Bikeshare, Jump bikes, Bird and Lime scooters. We have more people in our city who'd like to use our public space for sitting, eating, and we need stormwater management infrastructure.

However, our roadway curb spaces are not allocated based on these needs. Instead, we have private car parking, some building entrance areas, taxi stands, and bus stops -- the needs of the past. We must work to take advantage of our curb spaces to serve our residents today.

Pick-up/drop-off zones

DDOT has created a late night pick-up and drop-off zone at Connecticut Avenue and 18th Street, near many nightclubs, and we have worked with DDOT and the Golden Triangle to improve the functioning of this zone. More recently, DDOT has been creating new, all-day pick-up/drop-off zones at 14th and U, the Wharf, the Zoo, Georgetown, the Mount Vernon Triangle, and Union Market.

We applaud this effort and will be collaborating with DDOT to help these be successful. We ask that DC work to expand these pilots much more widely in 2019, by adding 25 more pick-up/drop-off zones in all wards of DC. We now have the ability to see data about where there is high demand for ride-hailing and taxi pick-ups and drop-offs, and can therefore target those spots where sixty feet or so of curb space could serve tens or hundreds of people an hour instead of just a few.

In the Budget Support Act last year, the Council established new authority for DDOT to create and enforce zones like this. This law needs to be extended to become permanent.

These zones can also serve deliveries, and there are many opportunities to improve the ways we help delivery trucks pull out of the main flow of traffic to serve the people waiting for packages. DDOT has been without a freight planner for some time, and we look forward to them filling this position and working closely with him or her.

Bike parking

Bicycling is growing in the District, and yet for many people, the availability of places to park bicycles is an obstacle. This is even more the case with the dockless bikes and scooters which have become more numerous. Racks in all neighborhoods will offer residents places to park these vehicles without putting them somewhere which interferes with a person with a disability or a stroller, for instance.

DDOT has installed 83 racks last year with a summer “rack attack” blitz, but we feel this needs to scale up by another order of magnitude. Past contracts for rack installation have foundered for lack of bidders willing to brave DC’s procurement process for a very small contract. The BIDs have been able to install many racks thanks to the reimbursement MOUs DDOT has signed with many BIDs.

DCST is asking DDOT to make a plan for 7,000 racks around DC, including in every neighborhood, and contract for installation of 1,000 per year for at least five years.

Parklets

Finally, we can make our public space in busy areas more livable with parklets, but the process of designing and permitting these has deterred actual installations. We suggest a program to create a turnkey parklet which can be pre-designed and permitted, and a grant program offering a parklet

to, say, five businesses who only need to maintain them rather than buy, design, and solicit permits.

Residential parking

At neighborhoods' request, DDOT has looked into a number of improvements to residential parking. ANC 2B in my neighborhood of Dupont Circle, for instance, has asked for rules where instead of 2 hour free parking or resident-only parking, people can park in residential zones who do not have an area sticker but must pay. ANC 2B also has asked to shrink the RPP zone to align with the neighborhood instead of ward boundaries.

DDOT does not currently have the authority to modify RPP zones or to charge for parking for non-RPP holders in residential zones. We ask the Council to provide this authority so that DDOT can move forward on pilot programs that meet community needs.

Further, redistricting is coming up, and historically parking zone boundaries have changed with ward boundaries. This doesn't make much sense, since we don't modify school district boundaries, or Police Service Area boundaries, or any other boundaries just because we change legislative districts. There was controversy in the Shaw neighborhood in 2012 over whether to change that area from Zone 2 to Zone 6.

The simple solution would be to decouple RPP zones from ward boundaries now, and give DDOT authority to modify them by regulation, published in the Register and subject to Council action if necessary.

Emerging technology

New technology could change the ways we get around significantly in coming decades, as it already has begun to over the past decade. Let's look at some short-term and long-term innovations.

Dockless "micromobility"

Dockless bikes and scooters came in rapidly and have been changing almost as fast. The unpowered bikes appeared and then disappeared nearly as quickly. Electric bikes and scooters are still here, at least for now.

DCST believes these technologies represent a real valuable choice for many residents. In my opinion, e-bikes are a fantastic mobility option for longer distance trips, and scooters are filling a real need for shorter distance trips.

In many parts of our city, bicycling is difficult in part because of lack of bike lanes, but also because of hills, bridges, and distances. E-bikes make hills nearly disappear and allow people to ride more comfortably on higher-volume roads, like our bridges, because they can keep up with traffic.

While DDOT has expanded and refined its permit program, many companies still have not been able to scale to meet the actual demand. A consequence of this is lower availability east of the Anacostia and in farther northwest and northeast areas.

We should enable these services to meet this demand, especially in underserved areas of our city.

We also recommend revising the 10 mph speed limit for scooters, which deters scooter riders from operating in bike lanes or general travel lanes in the street, where they ought to be much of the time.

Autonomous vehicles

Are fully autonomous vehicles that can operate in urban areas two years away, ten, twenty? Whenever they are coming, they promise to transform our mobility, though we still don't know exactly how.

They could make roads much safer by removing fallible human drivers. Or, they could lead many more people to drive longer distances, since they can work or sleep during the commute, adding to sprawl and traffic. They could free people with disabilities to be more free to move and allow us to repurpose road space for other uses. Or, we could be pressured to fence off sidewalks and make roads more like freeways.

DCST is managing a study of the impact of autonomous vehicles that was requested by this committee, and we expect to deliver the report by June 30, 2019 as requested by the committee.

The study is looking at four major scenarios:

1. A future where most automation is freeway driving with privately-owned AVs.
2. A future where urban, fully autonomous vehicles become widespread, and our current trend toward more ride-hailing usage accelerates and represents most of our travel.
3. A future where the District strongly prioritizes high-occupancy vehicles with dedicated lane space and other policies.
4. A future where the District prices the use of road space to manage congestion.

We have also devised a set of preliminary recommendations around the upcoming budget process. The initial recommendations are:

1. Add two FTEs at DDOT to work on autonomous vehicles and other emerging technology like micromobility.
2. Study pricing options such as those in the 4th scenario, including regional and equity impacts and including substantial public engagement.

3. Begin piloting uses of autonomous technology to fill mobility needs and promote valuable, rather than counterproductive, uses of the technology while also making DC a leader in innovation.

Further in the future, the study recommends:

4. An analysis of the technical infrastructure necessary to support and regulate AVs.
5. An analysis of the legal and policy frameworks necessary to support and regulate AVs.

Additional recommendations on public policy and other matters will be provided in the final report.

We look forward to continued discussions about how to best shape the future of autonomous vehicles in DC to maximize the benefits and minimize the harms.

Overall

DCST has appreciated working with Director Jeff Marootian. He has demonstrated himself to be very accessible and responsive to our stakeholders and other community leaders, a sentiment we have heard from many such as ANCs and other organizations.

I also wanted to take a moment to thank the many other hard-working and capable people we have worked with over the past year. These include, but are definitely not limited to: Amanda Stout, Kendra Harvey, Dena Iverson, Dan Emerine, Faye Dastgheib, Giz Andargeh, Cameron Stokes, Jonathan M. Rogers, Terry Owens, Sam Zimbabwe (now in Seattle), Jim Sebastian, Jeff Bennett, David Koch, Megan Kanagy, Spring Worth, Raka Choudhury, Steve Strauss, Kim Lucas, George Branyan, Mike Goodno, Will Handsfield, Stephanie Dock, Stefanie Brodie, Evian Patterson, D'Angelo Baynes, Matthew Marcou, Brant Miller, and many more. We are excited about the hiring of Linda Bailey to run the new Vision Zero office.

We appreciate the hard work our public employees do every day to make this a better city for residents, workers, and visitors. We want to see DDOT achieve more, and faster, and so do many people at DDOT. We try to both support them when they do so and often urge them to do a little bit more as well at times. We hope they can have the resources, leadership, and support from the mayor, council, and public to take these bold steps and solve problems.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Alft". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Alpert
Executive Director
DC Sustainable Transportation