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1275 K Street NW ★ Washington, DC 20005 ★ 202-681-0509 ★ info@dcstcoalition.org

**Testimony by Caitlin Rogger, Interim Executive Director
Transportation in the District after the Pandemic
Roundtable
March 23rd, 2021**

Dear Chairperson Cheh,

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.

Our members include ten of DC's Business Improvement Districts; the Federal City Council and Greater Washington Partnership; and advocacy groups like the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the Sierra Club DC chapter, Greater Greater Washington, the Transportation Equity Network, and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association. DCST works closely with the District Department of Transportation to increase use of sustainable modes of travel such as transit, bicycling, and walking and sustainable uses of public space.

We all want a safe and equitable economic recovery in the late- and hopefully post-pandemic environment. If we invest now in **bus, public space and micromobility**, we can ensure that people are able to get back to places of business and recreation, and indeed that they want to do so. For that reason, a lot of what we're talking about today relates to avoiding a "carnageddon" scenario in which daily gluts of cars fill road and curbside space that could be put to better use.

By clearly defining a hierarchy now for the transportation modes and uses of public space that are most closely aligned with our goals as a District, we can help restore economic growth and social cohesion. **We'd frame the optimal hierarchy as investing in bus; setting up public space to promote safety and growth; making the return to work transit-led; and incentivizing micro-mobility.** DC has already made great progress in some initiatives that we'd like to see continue, and in other areas

there's still time to put the District on a better trajectory toward meeting our environmental, equity and economic goals.

Invest in bus

DC has done tremendous work in the last year on bus lanes. We now have a golden opportunity to make our bus system operate as one of the best in the country. By installing more dedicated bus lanes (and bike lanes) along high transit use corridors and connecting transit-dependent communities to jobs, DC is improving efficiency and reducing passenger wait times. As a mode with majority low-income riders and riders of color, investing in bus makes good on a commitment that DC will prioritize an equitable recovery. DCST applauds DDOT's efforts thus far and would strongly encourage using this moment to lean further into their potential to integrate efficient, high-quality bus access to the fabric of living & working here.

A few examples of areas where prioritizing non-car transportation could be transformative are: the K St Transitway, dedicated bus lanes on 16th St NW, the Columbia Heights/14th St NW Safety and Mobility Project, the six-mile Connecticut Ave/Dupont protected bike lane which will be the longest in the District, linking the Mall with Western Ave; and the C St NE Safety and Mobility Project.

To realize the full benefits of the investments DC's made in bus lanes (and hopefully will continue to make), it's imperative their proper use is enforced. DCST stands ready to work with both DDOT and the Department of Public Works, both agencies under your oversight, to support measures to increase compliance with this potentially transformative infrastructure.

Set up public space to promote economic growth and safety

Expanded outdoor dining opportunities, streateries, and expanded sidewalks have been a highlight of DDOT working closely with the business and advocacy communities. We need these great initiatives expanded on and further developed to play their full role, making more productive use of underutilized space to promote safer outdoor dining and retail.

DDOT could modify the regulations for these spaces in a few specific ways: extending the duration of how long these programs are expected to last; streamlining the permitting process and associated costs; and providing more grants to businesses who need support in outdoor space investments.

We'd ask DDOT to dedicate more parking spaces to pickup/dropoff zones near restaurants and retailers to support increased use of takeout and delivery services, as well as services making deliveries to businesses, restaurants, and residents. The value of these services is unlikely to fade entirely as the pandemic draws to a close. DDOT could also reduce congestion, double parking, and load zone competition by continuing to encourage commercial deliveries in off-peak hours and finding new ways of incentivizing this.

In February DCST and 27 Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners sent a [letter](#) to Mayor Bowser proposing two pilot parking programs, which would allow for more productive use of curbside spaces while reducing the neighborhood impact.

We'll refrain from comment on Slow Streets specifically as this program has been implemented, in favor of encouraging a more systematic approach to safety. During the pandemic, pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities have risen, a startling fact given the reduction in traffic that underscores the fact that speed kills, especially in cities. We applaud the 20 mph speed limits. As we stated in the oversight hearing last month, we also appreciate DDOT's focus on Vision Zero and would like to see more done systematically and communicated clearly. We do support the closure of Beach Drive to vehicular traffic.

Make the return to work transit-led

If we make sustainable modes of transportation the easy choice for workers, residents and those moving to, from and among businesses, it will pay off in terms of DC's economic development and social benefits for decades to come. To this end DCST strongly recommends measures to lower the cost of transit to users, perhaps even making bus services free or very low-cost, especially to DC residents.

DCST sees now as a prime opportunity to invest in goDCgo, the District's transportation demand management initiative, to facilitate better mobility. DC needs creative ideas to incentivize use of local businesses and movement around them via transit and activer transportation. There's also a need to re-establish the space of the city as enjoyable and lively, and creative uses of public space, such as public art installations, as well as incentives, all have a role to play in that vital effort.

The District will soon have an opportunity with the forthcoming release of the congestion pricing report to truly re-imagine our future mobility and how much value we're getting out of roads and other public assets.

Incentivize micromobility

Demand for micromobility and private bike usage would both be boons to mobility in the late- and post-pandemic economy, and should be encouraged. Space currently allocated for parking could be repurposed to support this, especially for freight delivery, micromobility corrals, or bike-based delivery services.

Now is the right time for DDOT to lift the cap on micromobility devices and change the fee structures to incentivize use of these for short trips, as opposed to automobiles. DC could also consider providing subsidies or creating e-bike tax credits or other financing options that make it easier for people to use e-bikes to access work, business, educational and recreational spaces.

Integrating travel modes and bundling multi-modal trips would also make it easier to get around DC without a car, as has been done in [New York City](#). One way to do this is by increasing contactless and integrated fare payments through WMATA for Capital Bikeshare and shared e-bikes

and e-scooters, especially while services are being reduced or reprioritized. This approach could pay off in terms of encouraging tourist activity, ensuring commuters will have non-car options even with reduced transit schedules, and converting more - and more diverse - sustainable transportation users by creating real financial incentives; it could also shore up certainty for agency revenues.

DCST appreciates the District's efforts to invest in the need and opportunity for mobility to play its full role in economic and social recovery. We'd encourage leaning into those initiatives mentioned to ensure that the growth we hope for as the pandemic starts to recede will set the stage for broader, greater and more equitable gains in the long term.

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

Caitlin Rogger
Interim Executive Director
DC Sustainable Transportation