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Greater Greater Washington ★ Greater Washington Partnership ★ Mt. Vernon Triangle CID ★ NoMa BID
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1440 G Street NW ★ Washington, DC 20005 ★ 202-681-0509 ★ info@dcstcoalition.org

Testimony by David Alpert, Executive Director, DC Sustainable Transportation
PR22-564, the Director of the District Department of Transportation Jeff Marootian Confirmation
Resolution of 2017

December 8, 2017

Dear Chairperson Cheh and members of the committee,

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.

Members include nine of DC's Business Improvement Districts; Events DC and Destination DC; 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.

DCST believes in providing all residents and workers with options to travel by transit, walking, and biking; to mitigate congestion and better manage curb space; and to prepare for mobility changes in the future with advancing technology.

The members of our coalition meet on a monthly basis along with representatives of the District Department of Transportation, WMATA, the mayor's office, council staffs, and other organizations. We also meet in smaller committees on key issues of concern to our members, including bus priority, curbside management, autonomous vehicles, and dockless bikeshare.

Jeff Marootian has attended several of our meetings since taking over as Interim, and now Acting, Director. In addition, I and many other members have had the opportunity to speak with him individually.

DDOT has often struggled with the twin goals of, first, advancing transportation needs for all people in the District, and second, consulting affected communities on its plans. Some project teams tend to vacillate between either deciding what to do and trying to do it without talking to anyone, or becoming paralyzed with inaction in the face of a lack of community consensus – which as you well know, is often not possible.

I believe that Mr. Marootian is well positioned to strike that balance. He has a clear understanding of the transportation issues facing the District, and a good set of values to help him move forward on projects and initiatives to improve the lives of residents, visitors, and workers. At the same time, his background in community engagement makes him experienced with, and talented at, reaching out to stakeholders, listening to their concerns, ensuring they are heard and heeded, and integrating their feedback into DDOT's actions in an appropriate way.

In an organization with many engineers, communication has not always been the strong point of DDOT outside its official communications team. I am very hopeful that Director Marootian will enhance this facet of this very large and very important District agency.

Many significant challenges face DDOT in the coming years. Ridership has been declining on Metro rail and bus, and more people are using ride hailing services which threatens to make traffic worse. With a multi-year streetcar effort having been mired in mismanagement in past administrations and seeing budget cuts from this council, there is not yet a clear next big vision for improving mobility. I believe it lies in a strong commitment to fast, frequent, and reliable bus service, but the specific nature of that must be worked out with MoveDC as a starting point.

Our transit systems also need ample space for storage and maintenance of vehicles, something which has been a challenge for Circulator in the past and a potential issue for WMATA as well. We must secure adequate space now and be more proactive in identifying the District's needs as well as where and how its existing industrial land can meet that need.

Walking and bicycling are ideal means of travel for those who are physically able and well-located to use them, but progress on improving infrastructure has often been slow. I do want to applaud DDOT's Vision Zero efforts which have led to a number of meaningful safety improvements at intersections around the District, but there is much more work to be done.

In our business districts in particular, the proliferation of ride hailing, an increased level of deliveries thanks to e-commerce, and other trends have increased demand for scarce curb space. DDOT's pilot in the Golden Triangle to create a special zone for ride hailing along the curb is a welcome step, and we are eager to work with DDOT to measure its success and replicate elements which work in other business districts, as well as try out similar innovations for deliveries to

residents and shops. We also look forward to DDOT evaluating and hopefully replicating its performance parking efforts such as the one currently being piloted in Chinatown.

Finally, new technologies like dockless bikeshare and autonomous vehicles are poised to significantly transform the mobility landscape, and need significant attention from DDOT to shape them in a way that is positive for the people of DC.

I believe Jeff Marootian is an excellent candidate to lead DDOT to solve these problems, and look forward to working with him.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Alpert". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "D" and "A".

David Alpert
Executive Director
DC Sustainable Transportation