



**Mayoral Review Hearing
Maryland Avenue Southwest Plan**

**Statement of Monte Edwards
February 1, 2012**

My name is Monte Edwards. I am representing the Committee of 100 on the Federal City, one of the oldest citizen-based urban planning groups in the United States. The Committee of 100 on the Federal City has long been concerned with protecting and enhancing the L'Enfant Plan (1791-92) and the planning work of the McMillan Commission (1901-02). Historic avenues such as Maryland Avenue, SW can evolve in the 21st century to build on the success of and correct the deficiencies of earlier generations and building campaigns.

The Committee commends the Office of Planning's initiative in tackling the transportation infrastructure challenges posed by Maryland Avenue. These challenges are multi-modal and have grown over time since the horse and buggy days of L'Enfant to include railroads, highways, subways, and looking to the future, most likely streetcars.

The Committee commends the Office of Planning in its efforts coordinating with the National Capital Planning Commission Southwest Ecodistrict plan and thanks OP for the laying out the opportunities and challenges of the several options presented in the plan.

While supportive of the approach that the Office of Planning is taking, the Committee hopes that as many options as possible be kept "on the table" as the study moves forward. Recognizing the need for comprehensive planning in the Southeast and Southwest quadrants, we urge the Office of Planning and the National Capital Planning Commission to enlarge the initiative undertaken in the Southwest Ecodistrict Initiative to include all of the railroad tracks and right-of-way in SW and SE.

CSX railroad is embarking on an ambitious project to reconstruct a 4,000-foot long tunnel in the Virginia Avenue, SE right of way. <http://www.virginiaavenuetunnel.com>. The purpose is to replace the existing single train track Virginia Avenue tunnel (VAT) with double tracks and to lower the tracks to accommodate double stacked container trains. As a related effort, CSX has proposed the National Gateway Project that consists in part of track lowerings in the area encompassed by the Maryland Avenue SW Plan to accommodate the taller, stacked container trains for which the VAT is being reconstructed. While DDOT and CSX served on

the Maryland Avenue Advisory Committee, the Maryland Avenue Plan does not adequately address the VAT or the National Gateway Project.

There is an absence of systematic coordinated review and oversight. The Federal Highway Administration and the District Department of Transportation are overseeing the VAT project, the National Capital Planning Commission is leading the SW Ecodistrict Initiative and DC Office of Planning is overseeing the Maryland Avenue, SW Plan. Although the projects address different segments of the same railroad tracks, it's all one transportation system in relationship to continuous urban fabric. A comprehensive, coordinated planning effort is urgently needed to leverage the private initiatives of CSX for the greatest civic benefit, heal urban scars created by earlier infrastructure, reconnect urban fabric and invest in the long term revitalization, growth and sustainability of the historically important Maryland Avenue SW and Virginia Avenue SE corridors.

The Considerations Addressed in The Maryland Avenue SW Plan Extend Further East than the Present Boundaries of the Plan

The proposed enlargement of the VRE Rail platform from 7th Street, extending east almost to 4th Street SW and the proposed Metro Portal at 6th Street SW (page 3-13) are moving the commuter rail and Metro aspects of the Maryland Avenue, SW Plan (Plan) to the east. The current eastern boundary of the Plan along the train tracks ends at 6th Street SW (page 1-1). The 4 track alignment and enlarging the existing VRE Rail platform impacts Virginia Ave to the east: “Depending on the width of the eventual expanded rail station configuration, Virginia Avenue may need to be narrowed or reconfigured to accommodate the freight rail tracks. In this case, an alley will be necessary for continued access to the garage entrances of buildings along Virginia Avenue between 4th and 6th Streets.” (Page 2-8). This will affect Virginia Avenue from 6th Street, SW to New Jersey Ave, SE. The eastern boundary of the Plan shown on page 1-1 needs to be moved further east to take into account those impacts.

“The vision set forth in the Framework Plan and the goals of the Southwest Ecodistrict are to transform the Maryland Avenue and 10th Street and corridors into vibrant well-connected places to live, work, and visit in a manner that creates a national showcase of sustainability (page 3-1). To achieve that result, the Plan is dependent on maximizing development of vacant or under-utilized GSA properties located primarily along Maryland Avenue, from 12th Street SW to 6th Street SW (page 2-4), to achieve a required high level of residential units (a threshold of 1,000 residential units, page 2-4). The undeveloped/underdeveloped parcels east of 6th Street SW offer development potential similar to the identified GSA parcels, and the study area of the Plan should be extended to the east to permit a coordinated evaluation of those properties and how they might contribute to achieving the goals of the Plan.

The Plan mentions the need to lower the tracks (page 2-10), but does not discuss the functional dependence of the CSX track lowerings along Maryland Ave (to accommodate the double stack trains that CSX has described in its National Gateway Project) with the Virginal Avenue Tunnel rebuilding. The extent of lowering that CSX will require along Maryland Avenue SW will affect the decking over of Maryland Avenue and the street overpasses that cross over the CSX tracks. The Plan acknowledges that “CSX is planning significant infrastructure upgrades along its railway corridor which offer opportunities to set the stage for Maryland Avenue SW” (page 1-3). But we should ask for more than that: the City should leverage the private initiatives of CSX for the greatest civic benefit of this Maryland Avenues, SW Small Area Plan.

The Committee of 100 realizes that transformation of Maryland Avenue Southwest is a long term proposition and likely to change significantly over time. The overall vision to heal the wounds of several generations of layered infrastructure, knit the urban fabric together and create sustainable communities, however, is sound. The Committee of 100 is pleased to see this start and we look forward to additional information in the future.