

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City



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February 24, 2016

Mr. Leif Dormsjo
Director
District of Columbia Department of Transportation
55 M Street, S.E., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Director Dormsjo:

In our meeting last December, you described a clear process for a go/no-go decision on the H-Street streetcar. Your description of a \$9 million mistake being corrected by a \$200 million investment is a perfect description of the situation.

Now that you have announced resolution of the H-Street issues and the beginning of service, you will by necessity have to consider how and if to proceed with the rest of the previously announced system. The Committee of 100 has spent considerable time and energy since early 2010 examining an appropriate streetcar system for DC. In January 2011, we released our streetcar report entitled *Building a World Class Streetcar System for a World Class City* that called on the Mayor and the Council to adopt a comprehensive financial, governance, maintenance and management plan for streetcars **before proceeding to enlarge the system**. This foundational work was never done and we have now spent \$200 million with no answers to these fundamental questions. (You may access the C100 streetcar

study at

http://committeeof100.net/download/transportation/dc_streetcars/reports_and_presentations/A-World-Class-Streetcar-System-for-a-World-Class-City.pdf)

We have also repeatedly called on prior Councils and Mayors to conduct a thorough study of alternative propulsion technologies as required by law § 9-1174. Overhead streetcar wires are unsightly, expensive and potentially unnecessary. Rapid advances in battery storage and other rail propulsion technologies make it imperative that DDOT study in depth the recent experience of cities in other parts of the world where wireless rail technologies are in operation. Then, as required by law, the Council should hold a public hearing on the report so that both the Council and citizens can become more educated about the advances, advantages and disadvantages of a wide range of technologies including ground level power supplies and on-board energy supplies (super-capacitors, batteries, flywheels, on-board fuel tanks, fuel cells).

Second, to fulfill DC Code § 9-1173, and prior to any further expansion of the system to Minnesota Avenue or Georgetown, DDOT should initiate further technical studies about the best technology fit for DC. The law on streetcar system expansion requires that,

(a) Prior to the expansion or construction of aerial wire-powered streetcar transit beyond the H Street/Benning Road line, authorized pursuant to § 9-1171, the Mayor shall develop a plan for the use of aerial wires for each phase or extension of the streetcar transit system and submit the plan to the Council, along with a written report.

(b) The Mayor shall submit each proposed plan to the Council for a 45-day period of review, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, holidays, and days of Council recess. If the Council does not approve or disapprove of a proposed plan, by resolution, within the 45-day review period, the plan shall be deemed disapproved.

Third, any plan to extend the system from the Union Station to Georgetown must locate the 8-9 acre Vehicle Maintenance and Storage Facility outlined on pages 36-41: a storage yard to accommodate 12 streetcars (2-3 acres), a vehicle maintenance shop building, automobile parking and an Operations Control Center (6 more acres). The exact location of this 8-9 acres facility on a zoned industrial site is essential before proceeding with any other aspects of the extension.

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As you are all too aware, the streetcar system to date has been a fiasco, driven more by simplistic ideology than sensible planning. This has resulted in many avoidable mistakes and misspent public funds. It has also resulted in the outrageous decision to locate the first car barn on the historic Spingarn High School campus adjacent to the historic Langston Golf Course. The community deeply resents the location of this industrial facility in their residential neighborhood and has pointed out other nearby sites that would have been more appropriate but were not adequately considered. Such roughshod treatment of historic sites in low-income neighborhoods cannot be repeated.

I want to thank you again for meeting with C-100 representatives in December, a meeting that I we found to be very informative and positive. As you move forward in the planning and decision-making for surface transportation, we look forward to working with you.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Campbell".

Sarah Campbell

Chair, Transportation Subcommittee

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Cc: Councilmember Cheh
Chairman Mendelson