

CAPITOL HILL RESTORATION SOCIETY



**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Committee of the Whole and
Committee on Parks, Recreation and Planning and
Committee on Environment, Public Works and Transportation**

"Streetcar Land Use Study"

Statement of
Monte Edwards

On behalf of the
Capitol Hill Restoration Society

Wednesday, February 1, 2012

The Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS) supports the proposed streetcar system and compliments the Office of Planning for providing the Streetcar Land Use Study to evaluate possible land use impacts of the streetcar system. CHRS recognizes that this Study represents the first of several study phases in planning for the streetcar system. CHRS offers the following comments and questions about the Study:

This Study Appropriately Revises the 2010 Plan Funding Proposal

Page 2 of the Study provides a chart listing the transportation studies prepared from 2004 to 2010. The last entry, titled "CURRENT," appears to be most relevant, since its description states "This updates the plan for a system of streetcars and limited stop bus services in the District". "DCAA" is listed as the sponsor. Apparently "DCAA" refers to "DC's Transit Future Alternatives Analysis (DCAA)", and DDOT's website contains an item "DC Transit Future System Plan - Final Report – April 2010":

[\(http://ddot.dc.gov/DC/DDOT/On+Your+Street/Mass+Transit+in+DC/DC+Streetcar/DC+Transit+Future/\)](http://ddot.dc.gov/DC/DDOT/On+Your+Street/Mass+Transit+in+DC/DC+Streetcar/DC+Transit+Future/)

Does this mean that the April 2010 Plan is being updated? CHRS hopes this will be the case, because there are several deficiencies in that April 2010 Plan. A particularly troublesome proposal in the April 2010 DDOT System Plan was the Business Assessment District (yes, "BAD" is the DDOT assigned acronym), a streetcar corridor-specific increased property tax

assessment that, after federal funding, would represent the largest source of streetcar funding. Page 4-52 of the 2010 Plan describes the proposal:

Streetcar System Funding

This section documents the recommended funding and financing options available to the District of Columbia to support the streetcar system plan.

* * *

Value Capture Funding based on property tax assessments within 1/4 mile of streetcar lines, beginning in 2012 or five years prior to service in each segment (whichever is later), such as BAD dedicated taxes generated by an increase in property tax rates to fund transit capital improvements

Under that proposal, the property owners along H Street, having in many cases barely survived 4 years of street and streetcar constructing disruptions, would be faced with increased taxes for having survived. Yes, that was a BAD proposal. The present proposal (pages 68-69), to recognize the increase in property appreciation and new development attributable to the streetcar corridor, and to use the property taxes generated by that appreciation and newly constructed taxable real estate to fund tax increment bonds to pay for 40-60 % of the estimated \$1.5billion streetcar system cost is a much better plan to help fund the Streetcar System

The 8th Street NE/SE Route Should be Reexamined and Relocated

Map 8 on page 19 shows that the 8th Street NE/SE streetcar route, segment 3D, will go right through the center of the Capitol Hill Historic District. But the other segments of Corridor 3 go through areas that have undergone and are undergoing recent intense redevelopment (*e.g.*, Arthur Capper, Nationals Park) as well as areas that present significant future redevelopment opportunities (*e.g.*, SW Waterfront, Buzzard Point). Streetcar route segments 3A, 3B and 3C contain very different communities that present different streetcar demands and real estate appreciation potential than Segment 3D, Capitol Hill. Thus, CHRS question lumping all of Corridor 3 together in assuming it will realize the second highest increase in new and existing property values (Figure 6, page 24) and that it will experience the same level of office market demand as the corridor segments that experience the highest level of office market demand in the entire City (Map 11, page 28).

Probably the most difficult to understand aspect of the Study’s portrayal of Segment 3D is Map 15 on page 66. It seems to identify limitations of future development that would constrain future development and suggest that a change in zoning could overcome those constraints. CHRS opposes any zoning changes that would increase the density of 8th Street. But another interpretation of Map 15 is that it purports to map the percentage of available capacity under existing zoning available for new development and assigns 100% to Segment 3D, Capitol Hill, but the notes to that map states: “Excludes all properties with historic structures or within historic districts.” These inconsistencies indicate that the Study should reexamine all considerations and recommendation that address Segment 3D.

In addition to concerns about the unique nature Capitol Hill, there are also concerns about the

nature of 8th Street, the proposed 3D streetcar segment. Page 45 of the Study states:

Challenges: 8th Street NE/SE offers only a single travel lane in each direction, but it could function as a streetcar corridor with an appropriate redesign to manage traffic and parking-related issues.

CHRS suggests that a better solution would be for OP and DDOT to study whether it would be feasible and productive to reroute segment 3D further east, and provide streetcar service to the future development at Reservation 13. Reservation 13 is one of the City's largest planned-development and waterfront park sites and offers the same or greater future development opportunities as do Poplar Point and Buzzard Point, both of which have been recommended for direct streetcar routing to capture and enhance their development opportunities (pages 59 and 60).

The Alternative Union Station Offers Considerable Benefits

The alternative routing proposed for Union Station, crossing North Capitol Street at K Street, rather than H Street (page 58) would have the beneficial effect of extending the streetcar route to underdeveloped parts of NOMA. It looks good on a flat map, but the changes in elevation pose considerable challenges. At the point that the 1st Street segment would connect to the Union Station Metro entrance on 1st street, it would be about 30 feet below the H Street over-pass. If the streetcar tracks were to continue east on to Massachusetts Avenue, at some point they would have to turn north and go through residential streets to connect to H Street, a configuration that Councilmember Wells and Mayor Gray have said will not happen. On the other hand, if the 1st Street segment were merely a spur, and the line continued east on K Street to 3rd or 4th street (until it was at the same grade as H Street,) it could at that point turn south to connect with H Street. A real advantage of the 1st Street "spur" is that it could provide at-grade access to the area under the western abutment of the H Street overpass that DDOT has already designed as a repair and maintenance facility, in place of the maintenance and repair facility the DDOT is now proposing for the Spingarn Campus. CHRS does not approve of placing an industrial repair, maintenance and storage facility on what is basically the front lawn of the Spingarn campus, a complex of several Georgian-style schools and athletic fields, surrounded on two sides by Langston Golf Course.

The Optimistic Estimate of Eligibility for Federal Funding Should be Reviewed

Page 70 of the Study describes improved eligibility for federal funding (up to 50% federal match) that would certainly be welcomed by all DC taxpayers, and contains the statement:

A full description of the process and criteria for seeking FTA funding appears in the Transportation Analysis appendix, which also evaluates how well the District's streetcar project aligns with the current FTA selection criteria.

CHRS has not been able to locate such an appendix and would welcome the opportunity to review it and any other appendices to the Study.