



Getting From Here To There on Streetcars **Printed in *Last Word, The Hill Rag*, July 2014**

By Meg Maguire
Chair of the Transportation Subcommittee
Committee of 100 on the Federal City

The DC Council's decision to slow funding for the District's streetcar underscores the long overdue need for a sound foundation to administer this new transportation system.

First, the city needs to decide the best option to finance and govern streetcars. A mayoral task force has grappled with this issue since 2012 but has never reported publicly on its findings and recommendations. City Administrator Allen Lew who chairs the group, testified before Council on June 4, 2014 that three models were under consideration: operation by an agency subordinate to the Mayor, an independent authority, or a hybrid model. What are the risks and benefits of each model and how will the public interest will be represented and protected.

Second, we need to know where maintenance and storage facilities will be located, especially since they require substantial acreage and are not compatible with many other land uses. The outrageous decision to locate the first streetcar barn on the historic Spingarn High School campus has led to deep community resentment. Now the 2013 Union Station to Georgetown feasibility study proposes an eight-nine acre maintenance and storage facility along this route. Where? What are potential sites for other maintenance facilities to serve a 22-mile system? A 37-mile system? What will they cost in both dollars and lost opportunities for other uses? And what lessons can we take from the handsomely designed original streetcar maintenance buildings such as those at 1400 East Capitol Street and the multi-floor car barn on M Street?

Third, the city must comply with laws requiring objective studies on acquiring non-aerial streetcar propulsion technology appropriate in the nation's capital. Overhead streetcar wires are expensive and potentially unnecessary in much of DC. The stanchions and overhead wires on the H St./Benning Rd., NE streetcar route are unsightly and not befitting the future of this rapidly developing area.

Other beautiful cities in the world are adopting advanced technologies including ground level power and on-board energy supplies (super-capacitors, batteries, flywheels, on-board fuel tanks, fuel cells). We should not settle for lining our streets with a maze of 20th century streetcar wires and bulky stanchions at the same time that we are spending millions of dollars to underground other utility wires.

Finally, DDOT needs to substantially improve how it listens and responds to public wisdom, and how it communicates policy to the public. The Anacostia streetcar meetings featured junior staff members, outside engineers and public participation specialists at isolated presentation boards who could not answer even the most basic questions on

future development plans for the area. Checking the public participation box must be replaced by skillfully helping communities figure out their best options. Community impacts matter.

All of us are responsible to see that the streetcar system is done well. Residents and their elected Council members must demand better planning; and DDOT must communicate to a skeptical public how the department will get the streetcar system from here to there.
