



## COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Committee on Public Works and Transportation

### District Department of Transportation Budget Oversight Hearing

Statement of

**Monte Edwards**

Tuesday, April 29, 2014

My name is Monte Edwards. I am the Vice-Chair of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City. The purpose of my testimony is to present the Committee of 100's recommendation concerning three items:

1. The need for an appropriation to prepare a comprehensive freight, passenger and commuter Rail Plan for the District of Columbia.
2. The need to restrict DDOT's expenditure of any further money for engineering and design of streetcar extensions beyond the H Street/Benning Road line until the requirements of DC Code§ 9-1171 and 9-1173 have been satisfied.
3. The need to provide a streetcar propulsion technology assessment as required by DC Code §9-1174.

#### **1. The Need for a DC Rail Plan**

Currently, DC is the only state without a rail plan,<sup>1</sup> yet the city is a growing hub for all kinds of rail transportation. Three bold and badly needed rail transportation plans have been proposed. The Union Station Master Plan proposes to triple the number of passengers and double the number of passenger and commuter trains and the Maryland Avenue Small Area Plan and the SW Ecodistrict Plan propose through-running MARC trains to Virginia and increasing the number of commuter trains using L'Enfant Station. An overarching goal (and premise) of these initiatives is to provide an energy efficient and environmentally friendly alternative to automobile commuting.

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<sup>1</sup> Statewide Rail Plans are required under the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-432) (PRIIA). PRIIA also requires the inclusion of projects in rail plans for federal funding eligibility (49 CFR §§ 24401-2402). DC has a number of rail initiatives (Virginia Avenue Tunnel, Anacostia Waterfront Initiative and the Long Bridge) but does not have a Rail Plan.

The proposed expansion of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel is being considered without taking into account these other rail initiatives. Greatly increasing the capacity of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel, without consideration of proposed passenger and commuter rail expansion creates the very real possibility that CSX will satisfy its own needs for increased rail capacity at the expense of other rail users. Neither Amtrak nor MARC was included in the Virginia Avenue Tunnel DEIS proceeding. Looking solely at the Virginia Avenue Tunnel exclusively from the perspective of freight rail will preclude practicable rail alternatives to automobile commuting. The Committee of 100 has explained this problem to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, and their 2014 Regional Transportation Priorities Plan now incorporates commuter rail and recognizes the problem of commuter rail competing with CSX.<sup>2</sup>

A rail plan would coordinate and plan for implementation of rail projects in the context of other DC issues, such as auto congestion, air quality, and parking. While Virginia and Maryland have their own Rail Plans, DC is attempting to approach individual projects without looking at their long range impacts on such issues as encouraging commuter rail as an alternative to people commuting in cars and adding to pollution and congestion.

To bring these diverse and segmented plans and perspectives together our City must have a comprehensive rail plan. The Committee of 100 requests that the Council authorize funds<sup>3</sup> to develop a comprehensive Rail Plan that would enhance Amtrak, VRE, MARC and CSX rail service; coordinate the different rail-related projects; and optimize the greatest public benefit from their operations.

## **2. Streetcar Extensions.**

DC Code §9-1171 limits the installation of aerial wires “to the H Street/Benning Road streetcar transit line, between the intersection of North Capitol Street and H Street, N.E. on the west and the

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<sup>2</sup> “Freight and passenger trains currently share the Long Bridge’s two tracks which is nearing its practical capacity during rush hours. The bridge’s private owner, CSX, maintains the right to give priority to freight traffic over passenger traffic, limiting the scheduling ability and frequencies of passenger trains using the facility. This issue will only get worse a demand for freight and passenger traffic increase in coming decades [sic].” (MWCOC Regional Transportation Priorities Plan, page 29).

<sup>3</sup> The Committee of 100 estimates \$500,000 would be required to prepare such a Plan, based on the most recent experience of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation in preparing the *2013 Virginia Statewide Rail Plan and Rail Resource Allocation Plan*: <http://varailplan.org/>. That plan provides a defined vision for passenger and freight rail transportation in Virginia through 2040. Virginia’s Plan is an update of a previous Plan and the cost of the consultant was \$200,000. For DC to develop its Rail Plan, we would not have the benefit of updating a previous Plan, so the work would be more extensive. Additionally, Virginia already had a staff in its Department of Rail and Public Transportation to work with the consultant and administer the consultant contract. These would be new expenses for DC.

Anacostia River on the east **until the requirements of §9-1173 are met.**” [Emphasis added] DC Code §9-1173(a) requires that:

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 that includes:**

\* \* \*

(5) **The feasibility of using non-aerial power as a means of propulsion for the phase or extension.** [Emphasis added]

As the Committee of 100 pointed out in our April 22 letter to Director Bellamy (copy attached), the draft Environmental Assessment and Section 106 Review for the Anacostia Streetcar Extension neither acknowledges nor complies with DC law. The entire Environmental Assessment is based on aerial (or overhead) wires to power the streetcars. Before any further engineering work can be done, or regulatory approvals considered, for the Anacostia Extension or any other streetcar extension, the non-aerial propulsion feasibility analysis required by DC Code §9-1173 (a)(5) must be submitted to Council and subjected to hearing.

### **3. Streetcar Propulsion Technology Report.**

DC Code § 9-1174 requires DDOT to submit a comprehensive assessment of *Advances in Propulsion Technology* to the Council by January 1, 2014, and for the Council to hold public hearings on that report.<sup>4</sup> This requirement is to assess advances in propulsion technology; feasibility, including cost, of converting to non-aerial motive power where aerial wiring has been installed, in locations such as the H Street/Benning Road segment; and the feasibility, including cost, of using non-aerial motive power on such segments of the streetcar system where construction has yet to be initiated, such as the Anacostia Extension segment. DDOT has not yet submitted the required assessment and report to Council.

DDOT has now completed The *Union Station to Georgetown* study that includes Appendix C, a 49-page, well written, informative and optimistic assessment of advances in streetcar propulsion technologies around the world. That can provide the starting point to satisfy the assessment of advances in propulsion requirement of §9-1174. The Appendix C propulsion technology write-up is

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<sup>4</sup> DC Code § 9-1174

(a) By January 1, 2014, and by that date every 3 years thereafter, the Mayor shall submit to the Council an assessment on the:

(1) Advances in propulsion technology;

(2) Feasibility, including cost, of converting to non-aerial motive power where aerial wiring has been installed;

(3) Feasibility, including cost, of using non-aerial motive power on such segments of the streetcar system where construction has yet to be initiated; and

(4) Any recommended amendments to this chapter, including a potential sunset date.

(b) The Council shall hold a public hearing on this report.

basically *a survey* of the currently available technology, with limited evaluation of technologies now in service in different parts of the world. The report does not provide specific recommendations, "...but rather establishes the framework needed to create an appropriate platform for the implementation of a strategy necessary for the development of a comprehensive and complete technology program as deemed appropriate for the District Department of Transportation." (Report, pp. 1-2) In other words, the report requires a further report. Appendix C does not satisfy the requirements of DC Code § 9-1174.

Appendix Q of DDOT's 2015 budget submission lists the "Active Planning Studies" in which DDOT is engaged. None of the studies address streetcar propulsion technology. DDOT's planning studies need to be expanded to include streetcar propulsion studies to comply with DC Code §9-1173 and §9-1174.

Thank you.