



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Committee on Public Works and Transportation

District Department of Transportation
Performance Oversight Hearing

Statement of Meg Maguire
On behalf of The Committee of 100 on the Federal City
March 4, 2013

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City is pleased to present comments and recommendations on the performance of the District Department of Transportation.

I. Mass transit maintenance facilities

Most people can agree:

- DC needs more and better mass transit – a well-maintained and functional Metro system, more buses, and streetcars to connect the city and support investor confidence to invest in underserved neighborhoods.
- The transit system must have good facilities for maintenance, vehicle storage, servicing and repair, and they should be significant contributors to civic architecture, just as the car barns of over 100 years ago were.
- The modern, industrial style sites, as currently contemplated, are not popular in residential neighborhoods.
- The city should properly design and equitably site these facilities in all wards so that Ward 5 doesn't become a dumping ground just because it has the most industrial land.

Last year saw two instances of citizen anger and pushback against the city's ad hoc approach to siting backup facilities. First, in Ivy City, citizens sued DC over its ill-conceived plan to house long-distance buses near a residential area. Second, at Spingarn High School, local residents have spoken out in large numbers against the travesty of locating the first streetcar maintenance barn on this designated historic site. This undercuts citizen good will and is the direct result of DDOT's and OP's failure to develop an equitable, comprehensive transit facilities plan for the future that would contribute to the civic architecture of our City. Not everyone needs to like the plan but everyone needs to recognize it as fair. And, as our scarce supply of land meets development demands, we must move now to set aside the land we need to develop a first-class transit system to serve the whole city.

The Transportation Infrastructure Amendment Act of 2010 (Title 9 of the DC Code) requires a comprehensive plan for streetcar financing, operations and facilities and contains, among other things, limitations and restrictions on overhead wire installation and requirements to examine non-overhead wire propulsion technologies.¹ The Mayor has appointed a task force on finance and governance, though regrettably he included no one representing H St. or Anacostia where the first lines will operate. But even though the current law requires (DC Code 01) that “The Mayor shall submit to the Council a comprehensive plan for . . . operations, and necessary capital facilities of the Streetcar Project, along with a proposed resolution for approval of the plan, for a 45-day period of review . . .,” nothing has been produced.

The ill-advised location of the maintenance and repair facility at Spingarn is a direct result of DDOT’s piecemeal planning and artificial deadlines to operate streetcars. I call your attention to The Committee of 100’s testimony of October 9, and on February 28, 2012 on the Streetcar Amendment Act for a detailed history and critique of the process that resulted in this outcome. After testifying before this body for the past 3 years calling for better planning, it is deeply discouraging to see so little evidence that our city’s planners and transportation experts are laying the groundwork for more rational decisions about where these facilities will be located. We understand that some of that work is now underway by the office of Planning and we call on the City Council to set a firm deadline to receive a site-specific mass transit facility plan for the next 20 years.

II. Comprehensive Freight and Passenger and Commuter Rail Study

The up-coming Long Bridge Study will evaluate passenger operations as well as freight operations and will involve the Office of Planning in that study. Currently, there are plans to increase the capacity of the Virginia Avenue tunnel that serves only the CSX freight traffic. But increasing the capacity of the tunnel will simply relocate the route’s bottleneck to the Long Bridge, a place where passenger rail competes with freight trains and where CSX, by virtue of its ownership of the bridge, will be in a position to limit the number of passenger trains with access to it. *Given that the Long Bridge is the only Potomac River rail crossing within 70 miles of Washington, DC, restriction of its use by non-freight trains is likely to have a devastating impact on commuter rail.*

The study of the Long Bridge requires a careful weighing of the competing interests of passenger, commuter and freight rail operations and needs to be evaluated using the transportation expertise of DDOT together with the planning expertise of the Office of Planning. While projections of future rail traffic on AMTRAC, VRE and MARK are

¹ Such general planning requirements were originally included in the Transportation Infrastructure Emergency Amendment Act of 2010 (B18-0882), which was enacted July 19, 2010. Thereafter, on August 6, 2010, the Council passed more extensive legislation in the Transportation Infrastructure Temporary Amendment Act of 2010 (B18-0883), which then became permanent in the Transportation Infrastructure Amendment Act of 2010 (B18-0823) on March 31, 2011. See DC Code § 9-1171 *et seq.* and §9-1208.01.

available, CSX treats its projections as proprietary. East Coast freight rail traffic is expected to increase dramatically starting in 2015 when the widening and deepening of the Panama Canal will result a greater number and much larger container ships being able to use the Canal. This will significantly impact CSX because Norfolk, New York and Baltimore will be the only East Coast ports that can accommodate the larger container ships. CSX projections are essential to assess whether increasing the capacity of the Long Bridge or whether building another Potomac River Crossing is the correct solution. DC's ability to remain competitive as a regional job center and to handle the daily influx of workers in a sustainable way depends on our ability to expand commuter rail and specifically commuter rail from Virginia. Providing capacity to increase VRE and MARC commuter as well as AMTRAC passenger rail capacity will reduce dependency on automobiles and thereby advance the Mayor's Sustainability Vision. Currently, VRE's Operating Agreement with CSX prohibits any increase in commuter train frequencies until the rail corridor from Fredericksburg to Washington is triple-tracked: either by adding a third track on the Long Bridge or by constructing an additional Potomac River rail crossing. An explanation of that requirement is contained in the Report of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation titled *Washington, DC to Richmond Third Track Feasibility Study* (<http://www.drpt.virginia.gov/activities/files/HD78.pdf>).

A document that should be a useful reference in terms of alternative river crossings that was prepared by the National Capital Planning Commission, titled *Freight Railroad Realignment Feasibility Study*. The NCPC study examines alternative Potomac River rail crossings, but does not include the Shepherd's Landing rail bridge that was constructed during WW II between Virginia and what is now known as Blue Plains.

The Committee of 100 fully supports a coordinated, comprehensive, joint planning effort by DDOT and the Office of Planning study of the Long Bridge to enhance AMTRAK, VRE, MARC and CSX rail service and optimize the greatest public benefit from their operations.

III. The Zoning Rewrite

The Office of Planning's zoning rewrite sets DDOT up to take the fall on parking. DDOT already bears the brunt of DC resident's complaints about inadequate parking. So DDOT is in for even more future whiplash with the spillover parking in residential areas that will occur as developers are given a pass on providing little or no parking; as institutions such as schools are given a pass on providing parking; and as homeowners who will now be able to add another residence to their lot are required to provide no

parking. What is the value of RPP that allow 2-hours parking by parkers who do not have non-RPP permits for residences across the street from commercial businesses in a transit zone that do not provide customer parking? The downtown area clearly shows that a 2-hour limit on parking meters is adequate for commuting shoppers. A 2-hour free pass to park in an RPP zone would be even more attractive.

OP and DDOT assure the public that they are coordinating how to deal with this radical change. But it defies logic when, on the one hand, DDOT is swimming in demand from residents for residential parking while at the same time OP wants to do away with the one-time opportunity available in new development to bury our cars underground, provide parking for those who need and want it and are prepared to pay for it, and make our streets more available for dedicated transitways. Mistakes of the magnitude waiting to happen under the proposed zoning policies cannot be fixed down the line. DDOT should not be left to repair the damage of an experimental one-size-fits-all-neighborhoods planning theory applied to our diverse neighborhoods.

We urge the City Council to hold public hearings on the direction of the zoning rewrite, particularly the cumulative impacts of its proposals as they affect parking, before permitting the Office of Planning to set down their proposals at the Zoning Commission.

III. Move DC must tackle hard issues

The District’s mandatory long-range transportation plan, Move DC, is on the move. Here’s a chance to tackle tough issues like the ones raised above and many more. The kickoff meeting was well attended, well staffed and well run. There was an open mike so that everyone could hear what was on the questioners’ minds.

But the panelists did not represent diverse points of view about the city’s challenges. When asked about a maintenance and facilities plan for mass transit, and the fiascos at Ivy City and Spingarn during the past year, panelist Christopher Lineberger glibly said he thought that those who work at their computers all day would love to look out their windows at busy train tracks in maintenance yards. Tell that to the folks who live in Kingman Park and have fought so hard to save the remarkable Spingarn/Phelps school campus from his entertainment!

Livability isn’t a buzzword; it’s a high aspiration requiring lots of very tough decisions, especially in our built-out city of diverse neighborhoods and needs. People flock here precisely because it is so livable, walkable and increasingly, bikeable. Going forward DDOT must structure a process that will solve real, pressing and long-avoided problems. MoveDC offers the possibility of meaningful debate, detailed planning for required facilities and accommodation of many different needs.

Conclusion

Commented [ME1]: Is it one word, or is there a space?

Commented [ME2]: What does this add?
It is a very different tone

We wish to end on a positive note by commending DDOT for some noteworthy accomplishments:

- DDOT is doing a better job of street redesign, implementing long-needed changes in the way we think about the public realm. And the planning process for individual projects can be quite successful. For example, Toole Design, hired by the city to rework Maryland Ave., NE, knows how to engage the public, gather and apply data, and collaborate to find the right solutions. They are real pros who respect and mine community wisdom.
- DDOT is doing a good job of informing the public about street closings and events that help all of us plan our travel more efficiently. Thanks to John Lisle for his role in this vital service.
- The Pedestrian Master Plan is an excellent document and we hope that the city will accelerate investment in sidewalk repair and other measures to improve pedestrian safety in DC. Too many people are dying or suffering serious injury on our streets. We must do more to make our streets safe. Thanks to George Branyan, Pedestrian Coordinator, and to Jim Sebastian for their work with communities to make our city work for pedestrians and cyclists as well as drivers.

Thank you.