# COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
## Committee on Transportation and the Environment

Performance Oversight Hearing
### District Department of Transportation

**Meg Maguire**
Friday, March 6, 2015

We appreciate the opportunity to offer our support to Leif Dormsjo as he assumes his responsibilities as Director of the District Department of Transportation. His job is one of the most challenging in city government, especially when staff and citizens are confused and dispirited about many transportation issues. We offer these recommendations as he begins service:

First, listen to public concerns and adopt policies that address them. In our experience, DDOT has too often undervalued community knowledge and wisdom. We are impressed that, even before his formal confirmation, Mr. Dormsjo reached out to the ANCs, acknowledging their important role as citizen officials. To further strengthen public communications, we suggest that the DDOT information officer report directly to him and not to the Mayor's Office as we understand was the case in the last administration. However, better communication, transparency and public relations are not enough; *the public wants good data, sound studies and unbiased policy*.

Second, take an independent look at the Office of Planning's proposed zoning changes regarding parking. Data to support radical revisions in parking requirements for new development does not exist and DDOT is buying itself and the city a world of woe by trying to solve all parking problems at the street level.

DDOT's recently released *Curbside Management Study* emphasizes the consensus among commercial establishments that curbside loading zones are too small and too few, and that there is need for more commercial parking. Yet, if it follows OP's proposals, the Zoning Commission is poised to reduce off-street loading bay sizes and numbers, reduce off-street commercial parking and exempt private development from meeting the increased loading and parking demands they are creating. Furthermore, by taking a one-size-fits-all approach to residential parking, OP has simply ignored the differences in parking demand in different parts of the city. And who will be blamed for the problems these changes will create? DDOT.

DDOT and OP are currently overseeing a study of "right-size parking" with Cambridge Systematics. We were stunned to see that the consultants' technical approach focuses exclusively on outreach to the development community with no engagement of tenant users or the affected public in surrounding neighborhoods. Why should the public accept the findings of a study that hasn't included city residents?

Third, <u>assess the cumulative traffic impacts of new development and present this information in a timely manner to the Zoning Commission and the BZA.</u>  Urgent priorities for detailed and realistic transportation analysis include the following:

- <u>Walter Reed</u> - OP has recommended that there be no minimum parking requirements, leaving all decisions about parking up to private developers without ANC or public consultation.  DDOT needs to weigh in on this high-handed policy.
- <u>Massive developments at McMillan, Soldier's Home and N. Capitol St. cloverleaf</u> - Traffic studies of internal circulation at these sites is not enough.  How will these projects affect the already heavily trafficked N. Capitol St., and Michigan Ave.? DDOT needs to be clear with OP, the Mayor, the Zoning Commission and the BZA that over development will exact a sharp price from commuters and neighbors, and that public transit is not on course to keep pace with developers' intentions to max out these sites.

Fourth, <u>revisit the recently issued draft DDOT sign regulations.</u>  We are now in the comment period for DC's new sign regulations.   If adopted as written, they will open our city to a flood of so-called "entertainment districts" – designated at the sole discretion of the Mayor -- where the city will permit huge flashing electronic billboards.  Verizon Center and Gallery Place can offer a taste of what residents, businesses and historic buildings are being made to suffer.  We urge the Mayor and DDOT to curb this abuse of public space and to rewrite the current regulations to safeguard our scenic city from the insidious and pervasive influence of the billboard industry.

Fifth, we urge you to <u>finalize the proposed regulations for triangular parks</u> so that these lovely open spaces can continue to grace our neighborhoods.

Finally, as you review the <u>future of streetcars</u>, we ask that you revisit the OP/Goody Clancy study that projects vastly increased property values due entirely to streetcars.  This study has been used to justify value capture financing wherein properties within a certain distance of streetcar lines would pay for the system.  However, the rationale for investing in rail is to attract investment in less affluent areas through a permanent transportation improvement.  DC's experience with this theory is not clear: Metro stations in Wards 7 and 8 have not generated either the investment or significant increase in property values anticipated.  The city cannot afford for assessment districts to drive out struggling businesses. *If streetcars are to benefit the entire city, their financing should come from general revenues.*

Director Dormsjo, at your request we would be happy to make available our extensive testimony and correspondence to DDOT over the past 6 years – almost all of which went unanswered -- related to the failure to develop basic plans for streetcar finance, governance, maintenance and facilities; the placement of the streetcar barn on the beautiful, historic Spingarn campus; the poorly conducted Environmental Assessment, Section 106 studies and public meetings for the streetcar extension in Anacostia; the failure to adequately address commuter rail in *moveDC*'s priorities; and much more.  We urge you to make a fresh start, to build on what is good and to remedy glaring deficiencies.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer our support.  Monte Edwards will cover other streetcar and moveDC issues in his testimony.