



WASHINGTON AREA BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION

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September 9, 2016

Leif A Dormsjo
Director
District Department of Transportation
55 M Street, SE, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20003

Re: Upcoming DDOT Potomac and Anacostia Bridge Rehabilitation Must Improve Non-motorized Facilities

Dear Director Dormsjo,

Since adopting the 2005 Bike Master Plan, the District of Columbia has made great strides to increase the number of residents riding bicycles for transportation. With the expanding network of protected bike lanes, regional and local trails, bike lanes and Capital Bikeshare, most measures show that the District Department of Transportation's (DDOT) efforts are successfully increasing bicycle use. Despite this decade of progress for bicycle access and a Complete Streets policy in place, the District's major bridges remain a serious unaddressed hazard to safe bicycle access and a limiting barrier for the growth of sustainable transportation.

In March of 2013, we learned of DDOT's rehabilitation plans for the Whitney Young Memorial (East Capitol St.) and Theodore Roosevelt (I-66) bridges. In a letter to DDOT dated March 25th, 2013, we laid out a list of serious safety concerns for both bridges that expose bicyclists and pedestrians to unacceptable risk while using the narrow and ADA non-compliant sidewalks. We requested that any rehabilitation efforts address the unsafe barriers, substandard width, and access challenges. Now, as DDOT advances plans for substantial rehabilitation of both bridges' structural and highway elements, there have been no efforts to correct these serious shortcomings and project staff have quickly dismissed bicycle and pedestrian improvements as "outside the scope of work." Projects of this scope happen only once or twice a century and these glaring issues cannot wait another 50 years to be addressed.

Safety Concerns Must be Addressed

Both the Whitney Young and Roosevelt bridges suffer from similar design problems. Built more than 50 years ago, the bridges' designs prioritize highway traffic at the expense of any other mode of travel. The side paths are very narrow, with a short guardrail separating vulnerable bicyclists and pedestrians from highway traffic. Bicyclists must slow to a stop to pass each other carefully, yet nevertheless, there have been incidents of riders falling onto the highway. These paths are only a few feet wide, far from the current American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) standards for side paths, which recommends 10-12 feet. And though each bridge was built with a side path on both the upstream and downstream sides, neither bridge connects both side paths to the existing trail or sidewalk network at both banks. These short-sighted designs leave the unfortunate traveler who picks the wrong side on a grassy median, penned in by highway ramps and with no choice but to backtrack or scurry across high speed roads.

These bridges reflect the design principles of an era in which we planned for only one mode of transportation. We need to be designing bridges for the city we want to live in now and in the next century, not 50 years ago.

Opportunities Around the Whitney Young Bridge (East Capital Street)

DDOT, Events DC, major developers, and the National Park Service (NPS) are moving forward with plans that depend on safe, high capacity trail connections on both bridges. In a few months, the Kenilworth extension of the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail will bring hundreds, if not thousands, of new daily trail users to the east bank of the Anacostia. These trail users will need a bridge connection to reach destinations west of the river. In its National Capital Region Paved Trails Study, NPS proposes a direct link from the east bank trail to the East Capital Bridge as one of its 18 priority capital projects. DDOT's Southeast Livability Study and the redevelopment plans for RFK and Reservation 13 will create new destinations and new demand for non-motorized connectivity on either side of East Capitol Street. These initiatives cannot succeed if the bridge is rebuilt as it is today with substandard side paths.

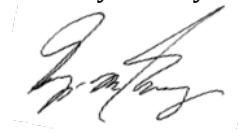
Opportunities Around the Roosevelt Bridge (I-66 / US Route 50)

Trail improvements on the Roosevelt Bridge are integral to medium and long term plans in DDOT's MoveDC Plan and the NPS Paved Trails Study. During peak bicycle commuting months, automated counters on the Roosevelt Bridge report an average of 500 bicyclists per day or one-fourth the volume recorded on the Francis Scott Key and 14th St. bridges, suggesting a clear preference for wide, protected, and connected paths. As a point of history, the Key Bridge was originally built with narrow sidewalks that were widened during rehabilitation work in the 1990s, resulting in large increases in walking and biking. Three of NPS's top 18 capital projects will create direct connections from the Roosevelt Bridge to the Rock Creek Park Trail, Mount Vernon Trail, and Arlington Boulevard Trail. Similarly, the MoveDC plan lays out a network of protected bike lanes in the West End to deliver bicyclists from the Roosevelt Bridge to downtown destinations on low stress corridors. Failing to retain and improve both side paths now will diminish the returns on these planned investments.

We strongly urge DDOT to include needed improvements to the side paths in the scope of rehabilitation of the Roosevelt and Whitney Young bridges. Improving the design of these trails to comply with AASHTO standards for width and separation is possible without altering the structural elements of the bridges. Final rehabilitation plans must maintain the side paths on both sides of both bridges. Removing a side path is not an acceptable alternative. DDOT's Complete Streets policy and the soon to be enacted DC Complete Streets law, require far more justification and evidence to dismiss crucial connectivity and safety improvements.

We look forward to a response from you and the opportunity to work with the appropriate DDOT project teams to incorporate these critical multimodal improvements that will serve the community for decades to come. I can be reached by email at greg@waba.org.

Thank you for your attention on this matter,



Greg Billing
Executive Director

CC:

Mayor Muriel Bowser, DC

Councilmember Mary Cheh, DC Council Ward 3

Councilmember Jack Evans, DC Council Ward 2

Councilmember Yvette Alexander, DC Council Ward 7

Councilmember Charles Allen, DC Council Ward 6

Superintendent Alexcy Romero, NPS, George Washington Memorial Parkway

Superintendent Gopaul Noojibail, NPS, National Capital Parks-East