



Dear Chairwoman Cheh and Members of the Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Kevin O'Brien and I am here representing the Capital Trails Coalition. The Coalition is made up of over 70 member organizations, agencies, and businesses across the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, and Maryland.

Our goal is to create an equitable, connected, and low-stress trail network that will transform public life by providing access to open space and reliable transportation for people of all ages and abilities.

I would first like to express gratitude for the record investment the Council made last year in multi-use trails and for the continuance of that investment this year. We applaud the Council for recognizing that trails are not simply a nice-to-have amenity, but are critical pieces of sustainable transportation infrastructure and are vital to our mental and physical health. We are also thrilled to see the Council and DDOT continue to allocate money to improve connections between existing trails like linking the Anacostia River Trail and the Marvin Gaye Trail on Nannie Helen Burroughs Ave NE (identified in the budget as "Anacostia Riverwalk Trail - Neighborhood Access"). The District has long needed to invest more heavily in trails in Ward 7 and 8 and we are glad to see this happening via both new projects and connective, gap-filling projects. We urge you to preserve the overall funding for trail projects large and small to complete the city's ambitious vision and ensure access for all residents and neighborhoods.

To bring about this vision, the Council and DDOT have rightfully expanded staff capacity dedicated to trails. But we believe further staff growth is needed, particularly in DDOT's legal office, to ensure timely and efficient cooperation, coordination, and execution of complex development plans. Without the experienced legal experts to navigate and negotiate hurdles like right-of-way acquisitions, thorny projects like the South Capitol Street Trail that have been identified as high priority for more than a decade continue to stagnate in development limbo.

The need to maintain existing trails is just as important as building new trail connections. The CTC celebrates the Council's decision to increase funding for the Washington Area Bicyclist Association's Trail Rangers, friendly on-trail ambassadors who provide critical front-line trail maintenance and programming on six of the city's most-used trails year-round. In the last two months, the newly-expanded team of six full-time Trail Rangers has ridden 2,952 miles, spoken with 286 trail users, spent 374 hours doing cleanup, and removed 62 bags of glass from the trails. We hope to see this immensely important program sustained. While the Trail Rangers handle light maintenance like glass cleanup and brush removal, the budget for more intensive maintenance like repaving is concerningly flat over the next 6 years even as the overall trail mileage grows and ages. We believe this line item should grow annually in accordance with the network's size.

Finally, we would like to see the Suitland Parkway Trail in Ward 8 move up on DDOT's schedule. This trail's conditions have been cited as dangerously deteriorated since 2013 and have now reached truly unsafe levels. Yet it is not slated for improvement until 2027 even as its use and importance is expected to grow with its connection to the new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge project. We therefore urge the Council and DDOT to reallocate capital funding in FY23 from projects with longer and more uncertain timelines (like the Shepherd Branch Trail) to the most critical network repairs. Growing our trail network cannot come at the expense of existing, unsafe trails.



I thank you for your consideration and for allowing me to speak today, and I look forward to the Council's and this Committee's continued work to make ours a greater, more walkable, and more bikeable city.

Sincerely,

Kevin O'Brien
Trails Coalition Coordinator
Washington Area Bicyclist Association

