



WABA

WASHINGTON AREA
BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION

Testimony for the March 30, 2023 District Department of Transportation Budget Oversight Hearing before the DC Council Committee on Transportation & the Environment

Good morning, Chair Allen and members of the committee. My name is Garrett Hennigan, I live in Ward 6, and I am testifying on behalf of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association and its 6,000 members in the Washington Region. Thank you for considering our input on the DDOT budget.

WABA empowers people to ride bikes, build connections, and transform places. We envision a just and sustainable transportation system where walking, biking, and transit are the best ways to get around. DDOT's success is essential to realize this vision in DC.

Lessons From the Vision Zero Audit

In March, the DC Auditor released the first part of an audit of DC's nearly 9-year-old Vision Zero initiative. The findings were largely expected and echo concerns that WABA and community advocates have raised for years. But it provides a close look behind the curtain at an administration that made a groundbreaking, and necessary, commitment, but failed to follow through with the required actions, resources, and systems quickly enough to move the needle. We should all take a moment to consider the more than 243 people who were killed in traffic crashes on DC streets since 2015. How many of these individuals could still be here today had this government done more, with more focus, and more urgency?

The audit found that the Vision Zero program lacked dedicated funding and had insufficient staffing within key departments at DDOT. It found that data on equity considerations were not being collected or used to choose which safety projects to prioritize where, despite the consistent facts that Black and Brown communities are bearing far more traffic fatalities and injuries. It shows a continuous pattern of DDOT doing studies, consulting communities on their traffic safety priorities, and developing project ideas, only to put those ideas in a drawer. Too many of these projects could have saved lives or prevented serious injury.

The most critical recommendation is this: "The Mayor and the D.C. Council should fund the Vision Zero Omnibus Amendment Act to the extent required to implement provisions to reach zero fatalities." It goes on, "Failure to fully fund the Vision Zero Act will arguably impede Vision Zero implementation. Until the Vision Zero Act is fully funded, complete expenditure data is captured, and program outcomes are analyzed, the District government cannot determine if additional funding is necessary to achieve the goal."

Fund the Vision Zero Omnibus Act

WABA's first priority this budget cycle is to fund the Vision Zero Omnibus Act. This budget clearly takes inspiration from the Act, funding more traffic cameras and traffic safety projects, as if the Act were a sampler plate at a restaurant. But without full funding, dozens of critical policy, procedure, and legal changes will stay in the drawer, collecting dust, and not making a difference for street safety.

The Council already identified a funding mechanism through Automated Traffic Enforcement revenue. WABA supports the proposed ATE program expansion because traffic safety cameras have a proven track record of curtailing red light running, speeding, and stop sign running without the biases of in-person enforcement. But we do not support diverting revenue from the Vision Zero fund for general spending. The Fiscal Impact Statement for the bill estimated that roughly \$10 million each year would cover DDOT's required policy and program changes. This total is likely less now that many of these changes have been partially funded. We ask for the Council's leadership in funding DDOT's portions of this bill.

We are pleased to see that despite many cuts, strong investments remain in the budget for trail development and safe streets overhauls, especially in Wards 7 and 8. We know that where we invest in making biking and walking a safe choice for getting around, people choose to do so. DDOT needs the staff capacity to engage residents on how, not if, these safety improvements are made.

Additional Funding Priorities, Concerns, & Proposed changes:

Plan Funding for the Electric Bicycle Rebate Program Amendment Act of 2023

This popular bill will establish an E-bike rebate program for D.C. residents, with enhanced funding for residents who qualify as low-income. We encourage the Council to fully fund the bill, so that residents can realize the transportation benefits as soon as possible.

Find funds for Metro For DC bus Improvements and to scrutinize Cuts to Circulator

Bus service is essential to DC's equitable recovery and the Council's Metro For DC bill deserves its fair shot. This is not the time to cut lines or shy away from increasing sustainable transportation choices. We hope that the Council finds funds to reverse these cuts and invest in buses.

Staff reductions in the Public Space Regulatory Administration

DDOT has seriously struggled with its mandate for safe accommodations in public space permitting this year with direct results for public safety. This budget proposes cutting nine vacant positions from the team responsible for this work. We ask this committee to investigate what impact this will have on safe accommodations.

Reject Delays to the Transportation Benefits Equity Act

The BSA proposes delaying the requirements in this act until 2026, to no longer require employers to give their employees the option of cash instead of a free parking space at work. This will incentivize employees to drive to work over any other option. Incentivizing more driving is not a Vision Zero solution and will not revitalize our downtown.

Scrutinize Capital Projects for Vision Zero Opportunities

Throughout the Capitol Budget are substantial investments in repaving and rebuilding streets that do not directly serve Vision Zero or multimodal goals. For example, Local Street Maintenance is \$37 million each year- split equally for all wards, regardless of need, explicitly not about improving safety, but to refresh pavement. This program does address ADA needs, but leaves unsafe road design. This should be a Vision Zero program.

Addressing late revelations from Director Lott's Testimony on April 10, 2023.

At the April 10, 2023 DDOT Budget Oversight Hearing, DDOT Director Lott revealed an alarming change in scope for the K St NW Transitway and protected bike lane project. In 2018, Mayor Bowser committed to completing this project with bus lanes and new protected bike lanes. After four years of community input, where community stakeholders deeply invested in the future of this corridor spent dozens of hours giving thoughtful input, DDOT reached 100% design and was set to start procurement for construction. While the project was far from perfect, WABA supported it as a big step in the right multi-modal direction.

But at the 11th hour, the Mayor & DDOT have reworked the project to put the needs of private drivers first, second, and third in this "bus and bicycle priority project." Removing protected bike lanes from K St entirely to devote more space for parking, pickup, and loading contradicts DDOT's own MoveDC Long Range Transportation Plan and multimodal goals. Had it been funded and enacted in this budget cycle, this change would also violate the Protected Bike Lane Installation Requirements found in Section 5b of the Vision Zero Enhancement Omnibus Act of 2020 which provides exceptions only for physical site conditions that make it unduly expensive or where the district would be required to acquire an easement or property. Rather than excluding biking and scooting from this corridor, DDOT should instead repurpose one of the 4 general travel lanes for loading.

DDOT frames the removal of the protected bike lanes from this bike network expansion project as a "shift," yet, a protected bike lane has been in place on L St for a decade. Upgrades to safe biking on L St are welcome, but without plans or so much as a conversation on the details, we remain quite skeptical that this forced compromise will replace the lost network benefits of K St.

As neither WABA nor any constituency representing people who bike were consulted for this change which will irrevocably impair safe access to and through downtown DC, we vehemently oppose both the change in scope and the backroom deal that precipitated it. For a small fraction of the \$120 million cost, DDOT could plan and install a successful transit priority project to speed up bus commutes for thousands of people daily. At a time when the city is pinching pennies, even in the Capital Budget, it is irresponsible to make such dramatic last-minute changes, yet still push ahead. This project should be put on hold to reconsider these changes transparently.

Capital Improvements Program

While specific details on timeline and allocation are somewhat obscured by the budget publication, we would like to call out a number of trail, streetscape, and bicycling improvements for continued inclusion. We deeply appreciate the continued investment in equitable Capital Bikeshare expansion, buildout of the protected, and low-stress bike network, quick-build intersection improvements, and resources to upgrade successful tactical interventions.

In the realm of trails, we applaud the increase in capital funding to create new trail resources and improve community connections including:

- \$27M for streetscape improvements and a new pedestrian and bicycle trail along New York Ave. in Ivy City, providing connections to the Metropolitan Branch Trail and the National Arboretum,
- \$47M to build the Shepherd Branch Trail,
- \$3M for Phase 2 of the Oxon Run Trail,

- \$2.4M for planning and design of the Military Road NW (Oregon to Beach) multimodal trail,
- \$3.7M to complete the Arizona Ave. NW connection to the Capital Crescent Trail and \$9.5M for the rehabilitation of the pedestrian bridge over Arizona Ave. NW and related trails,
- \$16M to connect Wards 5 and 7 by creating the Anacostia River Trail through Kenilworth
- \$27M to rehabilitate the Suitland Parkway trail, and
- \$1.6M for the Fort Davis and Texas Ave. SE trail.

On safe streets projects, we enthusiastically support the significant investments in redesign of streets that make up the High Injury Network, especially in Ward 8, where a disproportionate share of traffic fatalities and injuries occur. While funding allows continued forward movement, oversight of these DDOT projects will need persistent oversight to ensure that streets are not simply rebuilt with the same car-first conditions that make so many of them unsafe to walk and bike today.

- \$61M for streetscape and traffic safety improvements on Alabama Ave. SE,
- \$20M for new pedestrian safety improvements along Wheeler Rd. SE where serious and fatal crashes continue,
- \$16M to improve pedestrian and traffic safety along Martin Luther King Jr Blvd. SE and Good Hope Rd. SE,
- Funding for the Southern Avenue reconstruction, a needed project that still does not prioritize safety or access for people outside of cars nearly enough in its current design,
- \$36M to complete the Pennsylvania Ave. NW streetscape between 17th St. NW and Washington Circle,
- \$2 million for a feasibility study of a partial deck-over of DC-295 to set DC up for future Federal Reconnecting Communities funding,
- Funding for implementing the recommendations of the Bladensburg Road Safety and Access study, to transform this corridor into a walking, biking, and transit priority corridor, and
- Continued funding for implementation of the Connecticut Ave NW Safety project in Ward 3 to put people, not cars, first on the corridor.

The following projects are not specifically listed in the budget publication, but deserve attention for funding or change in scope.

- **East Capitol Street Mobility and Safety Improvements Project** would redesign two miles of this street in Ward 7. DDOT's current 30% design includes painted bike lanes next to multiple high-speed lanes and does not meet DDOT's current design guidelines. DDOT committed to re-assessing the design last year, but has no funding for moving ahead with design or implementation. DDOT submitted a federal RAISE Grant application for funding this year. As the site of multiple fatal crashes, this corridor should also be a priority for local funding.
- The **East Capitol Connections Project** was added to the CIP last year to identify options for a bicycle and pedestrian connection from Minnesota Ave to the East Capitol Bridge which is currently only possible via the freeway. This project should remain in the budget.
- The **Broad Branch Road Reconstruction Project** would reconstruct the road and stormwater system on the edge of Rock Creek Park in Ward 3. The project has been in planning for more than a decade, but only recently completed the required Environmental Assessment. Unfortunately,

the EA makes the case for the MoveDC recommended bike facility, but recommends a design without one. We believe that DDOT has, but dismissed, viable options for creating a safe biking and walking space without increasing pavement or the cost. If this \$50+ million project is programmed in the CIP, the scope should be re-evaluated and updated.

- The **Palisades Trolley Trail** has the potential to fill an important gap in the walking and bicycle network in Ward 3 by connecting the Palisades and Georgetown commercial district four schools, including the new MacArthur High School. DDOT completed a feasibility study in 2020. \$3 million would allow purchase and stabilization of the Foundry Branch Trolley Trestle Bridge and begin design work on a paved, multi-use Palisades Trolley Trail.

Thank you.