



District Department of Transportation

**Public Oversight Roundtable on the District of Columbia Street Car system
and the Move DC plan**

**Testimony of
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Mayor**

**Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Councilmember Mary M. Cheh, Chairperson**

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Room 500**



Good morning, Chairperson Cheh, Members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment, and District residents. I am Matthew Brown, Director of the District Department of Transportation, commonly referred to as DDOT. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in this roundtable on the DC Streetcar program and moveDC, the District's long range, multimodal transportation plan. These are important topics, and I welcome the dialogue.

My testimony today focuses on three things: first, our vision for and the benefits of the streetcar program and why we are pursuing the build-out of an eventual system to connect all 8 wards of the city with this transit technology. Second, the status of the operations and planning for the system as a whole. And third, the moveDC Plan and how streetcar, and transit in general, fit into the vision for the District's transportation future.

1. Why Streetcar?

As you all are well aware, the District has seen rapid growth in the past 5 years, with about 1,100 new people each month living in the District. In the past 10 years, the District has grown by over 80,000 people, reversing fifty years of population decline. And these trends are expected to continue. The latest round of regional forecasting done by the Office of Planning in partnership with other jurisdictions predicts that by 2040 we will add approximately 250,000 residents and over 200,000 jobs. While this is great

news from the economic development perspective, it presents incredible challenges for the District's mobility needs; posing the potential to gridlock the City with traffic.

DDOT is actively working to address our future transportation needs by implementing infrastructure projects, specifically streetcar, and formulating a long range transportation plan which will define future projects. Our challenge is great; we must endeavor to move hundreds of thousands of additional people across our city which already struggles with congestion on our streets as well as our rails. We must look to technologies which can carry large loads of people across relatively long distances. We view streetcar as the key element in our plan to ensure that District residents can move about the City in a safe and reliable manner. Streetcar has the ability to carry more people, more reliably, and potentially faster than other transit modes.

Streetcar vehicles can accommodate more people than buses (a 66 foot streetcar can accommodate approximately 140 people versus an articulated bus at around 100). And because modern streetcars have multiple doors and level boarding, they are at station stops for significantly less time, keeping operations more efficient and reliable than carrying the same number of people on buses. We also intend to prioritize the movement of streetcar vehicles to reduce the time the vehicles spend stuck in traffic.

While I have focused on the need for streetcar to serve future development, streetcar investments are as much about existing transit riders as they are about future growth. In corridors across the District, buses are full today despite frequencies as often as 5 minutes, in some cases. In the corridor from 5th Street NW to 16th Street NW, bus lines currently carry 70,000 – 75,000 people every day, resulting in extreme overcrowding in peak conditions on some routes and high volumes throughout the day on other routes. DDOT is actively planning a streetcar line in this corridor and expects that current transit demand already provides the volume of passengers to warrant streetcar service, as other successful street car lines in the US have far fewer passengers than the District’s current and forecasted demand.

In addition to providing transportation value, streetcar also has the potential to catalyze land development projects. Other streetcar investments across the country have shown the potential to focus and direct growth to places where it can be served by high quality transit service. In Portland, streetcar benefits were found to accrue most prominently to properties within 1 block of the corridor, with increases in density of development and land value that ended up sheltering some lower density areas from development pressures.

As Christopher Leinberger, noted in last Sunday’s Washington Post, Portland, Seattle, and other cities that have invested in modern streetcar systems have seen a return on investment multiple times over and have used streetcar

investments to improve their economic competitiveness. This has also been borne out by analysis conducted by the Office of Planning on the streetcar system.

The Office of Planning has completed preliminary analysis of the potential land use impacts of the streetcar network, updating their 2012 Master Land Use Study. OP studied two scenarios in addition to a “no-build”, and estimated the potential incremental tax revenues in the areas served by the 2010 System Plan would range from \$600M to \$1.3B on top of a base of \$2.6B.

None of these benefits are to say that streetcars are the only solution. WMATA has made great strides through their Metro Extra service and the new Metroway service in Alexandria, and we continue to partner with WMATA to ensure the streetcar augments and enhances bus service in the District, too, we also partner closely with WMATA in enhancing bus service on non-streetcar corridors, and DDOT continues to expand Capital Bikeshare and Circulator service. We see streetcar as integrally linked to all forms of transit, and even as a way to make the roads passable for those who will still need to or choose to drive by inducing those who can choose onto transit while also improving service for those who are dependent on the transit system for mobility. In the future, the District will need to have high quality

surface transit in all parts of the city to supplement and connect the transportation network.

2. Streetcar Status

The DC Streetcar system has been a long time in the making. The District's 1997 long-range transportation plan envisioned "Light Rail Transit" on H Street and Georgia Avenue. This was followed by the District of Columbia Transit Development Study, completed in 2002, and the District of Columbia Transit Alternatives Analysis, commonly known as DC's Transit Future, completed in 2005. The 2005 plan identified the H Street Corridor as a key priority, along with Georgia Avenue. In 2007, DDOT entered into an MOU with WMATA for the purchase of 3 streetcar vehicles and continued to incrementally implement streetcar service in the corridor through the Great Streets program and streetcar funding appropriated in the District's Capital Improvement Plan. DDOT's 2010 system plan built on the 2005 plan, identified additional corridors, and was adopted by the Council to guide future streetcar system growth. Since 2010, we have been working to advance the system plan, and we have recently been working to update the system plan based on new analysis and assumptions.

Bringing streetcar back to the District after a 50-year hiatus has not been easy. Each time we have an issue resolved, something else seems to emerge that has not been fully resolved. This has happened over the past few years

with everything from the maintenance facility to the western terminus of the initial line to the safety certifications of vehicles and operations prior to the start of service. We all want service to begin as soon as possible, and are working day in and day out to make that a reality for the citizens of the District.

We are now three months into operator on H Street NE and Benning Road. Streetcars are mimicking service without carrying passengers in order to prepare for full operations. Overall, these operations have been smooth, with drivers getting used to coexisting with a different kind of vehicle and learning not to park on the streetcar tracks. There have been a few minor collisions where cars have clipped a streetcar. All have resulted in only cosmetic damage to the streetcars and have not resulted in injuries. These are no different than the types of incidents that happen with the Metro buses and Circulator buses every day. Vehicles have been generally able to maintain headways, and we have been able to identify and address operational issues with WMATA, DPW, and all of the entities who play a part in the streetcar system. It has been a steep learning curve for all involved, but we are getting very close to reintroducing service to the District after more than fifty years.

Part of the issues we have had with the streetcar on H Street and Benning Road has been the incremental nature of the program. This was necessary

due to the funding constraints, but it meant that decisions stretched out over a long period of time. To counteract this, and to deliver this needed service as soon as possible, DDOT devised the “Integrated Premium Transit” approach. The goal of this program is to deliver a “Priority Streetcar System” through a Design Build Operate Maintain contract (or DBOM) where a single entity will be responsible for taking streetcar corridors through the design and construction process as well as operating and maintaining the lines once built. Operations of the DC Circulator system, currently operated by a private company contracted through WMATA, are also included in the IPT package.

We think a program of this size and scale will bring innovation, expertise, and the technical expertise to smoothly deliver a massive investment. While we remain in the procurement process, we have been impressed with the overall technical competence that the shortlisted teams bring to this project. To support the IPT process, DDOT is now working on the preliminary planning and environmental studies necessary to enable the DBOM approach. Each corridor that is part of the 22-mile Priority Streetcar System is currently in the study process or already complete.

The budget adopted by the Council this year reduced the overall funding available for the streetcar system substantially, and while we are committed to moving forward with IPT as a way to deliver the streetcar system, we also have concerns that returning to the incremental approach that we have used

in implementing our initial corridors could lead to same challenges we have faced with H Street project delivery.

Since the adoption of the FY15-20 Capital Improvement Program, we have re-evaluated what is possible to deliver with the resources available. We have continued to advance planning and environmental studies on the full 22-mile Priority Streetcar System, but delivery dates have had to be adjusted. We plan to advance the program as corridors are ready and funding is available. We recently completed the environmental review process for the Anacostia Extension line, and received a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) from the Federal Transit Administration. This line is now able to move into the next stage of right-of-way acquisition, design, and eventually construction.

We are in the midst of the environmental process on three additional corridors:

- (1) The extension of the H Street Benning Road corridor east across the Anacostia River. We anticipate this Environmental Assessment will be completed in the next 6-9 months.
- (2) The extension of the H Street/Benning Road corridor west to Georgetown. This Environmental Assessment kicked off earlier this year, and will likely take through 2015 to complete.

(3) The connection from Historic Anacostia to the Southwest Waterfront area. This Environmental Assessment kicked off earlier this year and will also likely take through 2015 to complete.

These corridors would then be designed and built in sequential order, depending on funding availability. Our current projections based on funding availability and project readiness would have the Benning Road extension under construction from FY17-19, Union Station to Georgetown under construction from FY19-24, and the Southeast-Southwest corridor under construction from FY27-30. If funding were not an issue, design and construction of these corridors could be anticipated substantially.

We are also near completion of our North-South Corridor planning study. This corridor would connect from Takoma DC to the Buzzard Point area. Our planning study has been robust and involved a large number of stakeholders along the corridor, many of whom are eager for transit improvements in their community, but also a large number who have concerns about what transit investment would mean for them. Particularly in this corridor we have worked closely with WMATA to gather existing data about bus ridership and performance and look at ways to improve transit in an integrated, coordinated fashion in a way that will help us as we work on making citywide transit improvements.

3. MoveDC

Finally, some discussion of the moveDC plan. DDOT initiated the moveDC process in February 2013, and the plan was characterized by unprecedented outreach and engagement with residents of the District and the region on our transportation future. Thousands of people were involved in the development of this plan, and the process has established new standards for engagement in the planning process by which we will continue to hold ourselves.

The engagement process included in person workshops; regular public meetings of a Transportation Plan Advisory Committee; online activities and surveys; and a random-sample research survey. Through these activities, four key themes emerged which the moveDC plan seeks to address with a 25-year vision of policies, programs, and investments in the transportation:

- The need for travel options: moveDC seeks to create a redundant and resilient transportation system that expands the travel choices available to all parts of the District—including building out the streetcar network--to allow people the freedom of choosing the right mode for the right time and purpose.
- A desire for travel reliability: everyone, from a family going to school to a business receiving a delivery, wants to know how long a trip is going to

take, now and into the future. MoveDC seeks to improve the reliability of the multimodal transportation system even as the District continues to grow.

- Safety for all users: moveDC seeks to improve safety for all users and all abilities, to create an inclusive transportation system that allows independence for the young and old, and works towards a goal of zero transportation-related fatalities.
- Efficiency of investments: moveDC is an ambitious plan that will require new investments in transportation over the next 25 years, but the plan seeks to make efficient use of these investments, allowing the transportation system to carry more people and more goods without impacting the quality of life in the District.

These four themes guided the development of a balanced approach to the transportation system.

We released a draft plan at the end of May and accepted comments through the end of July. Last month, we released a final plan, as well as a 2-year Action Plan that identifies more specific and concrete steps DDOT will take to implement the plan. The Action Plan includes many projects that DDOT is actively planning and working to deliver, such as the 22-mile streetcar system

and closing sidewalk gaps. For future investments in the transportation network, the moveDC plan provides a starting point.

The final plan incorporated the comments and feedback we heard through the comment period. I have distributed the document we released with the final plan detailing the comment period and major changes from the draft plan. During the comment period, we had an online survey available through the moveDC web site. 561 people completed the survey, and rated the plan overall a 4 out of 5 as well as commenting on specific elements and recommendations. We also received a number of comments separate from the online survey. We have posted all of the comments received through the survey and separate letters and emails.

Many of the comments received focused on the priority or appropriateness of specific infrastructure investment recommendations in the plan. Each investment in the plan will require more detailed and focused outreach and engagement with affected communities around the specifics of how, or if, a recommendation is implemented. Because of this, we did not remove recommendations from the draft, but did make a number of changes, clarifications, and adjustments based on the comments.

The moveDC Plan is a large undertaking, and lays out the vision and recommendations for a 25-year timeline. As we have the resources to

implement the plan, we will continue to pursue policy, programmatic, and regulatory changes. In defining the 2-Year Action Plan, we identified those areas that could demonstrate progress in a shorter time horizon. The Action Plan is organized around 7 areas of recommendations, from Capital Improvements to Policy, to Funding. In total, the Action Plan lays out 36 commitments that we think are achievable in a short timeframe. The Action Plan is not “all inclusive”; we will continue to implement other things outside of the Action Plan, but we feel that the Action Plan clearly outlines the priorities needed to begin implementation of the moveDC vision. We have brought hard copies of the Action Plan here today as well.

A critical component of the Action Plan and our continued work to implement the moveDC Plan is communicating our progress with the public stakeholders who gave so much of their time and energy in drafting the plan. To this end, we plan to publish quarterly newsletters and annual progress reports on the Action Plan and moveDC overall. In the Action Plan, we have also published the key measures, related back to the plan goals, that we can track and update. These relate to safety, transportation choices, and the state of our infrastructure. Our annual reports on the Action Plan will also give us an opportunity to revise and expand the implementation commitments while showing the progress that we have made. I have also instituted “Ward Update” meetings to brief community members about ongoing and upcoming projects and open up the agency to these discussions.

To date, we have held three meetings, in Wards 8, 1, and 7, and plan to hold additional meetings on a roughly 3 week basis. These meetings have been well attended, and we have been asked, and answered sometimes tough questions.

In conclusion, the moveDC Plan and the 2-Year Action Plan both identify the centrality of the DC Streetcar system to the future of transportation in the District for the reasons I outlined at the beginning of my testimony. Executed properly, the DC Streetcar system will expand transportation choices, help reduce the percentage of trips in the District made by single-occupancy vehicles, and improve the reliability of transportation citywide as we successfully retain and grow the population of the District.

We are glad to have this roundtable to discuss how the streetcar system is integrated into the long-term planning for transportation in the District, and also about the progress we are making on the H/Benning line. We look forward to continuing dialogue with the Council, residents, and business owners in the District and all others involved in making safe and efficient transportation a reality. At this point I am happy to answer any questions you may have.