

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

District Department of Transportation



Public Hearing on

[Bill 24-66](#), Safe Passage to School Expansion Act of 2021

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
and the Committee of the Whole
Council of the District of Columbia

Tuesday, October 12, 2021
9:00 a.m.

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, Chairperson Cheh, other committee members, and staff. My name is Everett Lott, Acting Director of the District Department of Transportation or “DDOT.” I am here today to present testimony on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser on B24-66, The Safe Passage to School Expansion Act of 2021. We thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you what we are doing to improve the safety of our students on their journeys to and from school.

DDOT understands that the bill's intention is to protect students from violent crime on their trips to school. DDOT specifically addresses transportation safety for school communities through the following initiatives and programs:

- School Crossing Guards;
- The Safe Routes to School Program;
- Access to Metro initiatives including the Kids Ride Free Program and Bus Operations coordination efforts with WMATA; and
- Vision Zero Safety Improvements.

School Crossing Guards

DDOT has 265 positions for safety technicians, commonly known as School Crossing Guards. Our crossing guards protect the safety of students who walk, bike, or take transit to school. School crossing guards help students safely cross hazardous intersections en route to the school building. Of the 265 crossing guard

positions at DDOT, we currently have 219 positions filled and deployed in the community. 132 of our schools have at least one crossing guard and we are working with 11 schools to fulfill their request for a second crossing guard. We are actively recruiting and hope to select an additional 46 crossing guards.

Additionally, through Mayor Bowser's approved FY 2022 budget, DDOT is hiring 14 full time safety technicians as well. These full-time positions will allow DDOT greater flexibility to deploy safety technicians beyond the standard morning and afternoon shifts, and provide more opportunities to hire and retain employees who are seeking full-time employment.

Safe Routes to School Program

DDOT's Safe Routes to School program was established in 2005 with a goal of promoting safe walking and biking to school through infrastructure improvements, safety education, and incentives to encourage walking and bicycling to school. I would like to note that this program is different than the Safe Passage Program conducted by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education.

In the prior two fiscal years, the Safe Routes to School program conducted safety studies for 36 schools across all 8 Wards in the city. DDOT began implementing

the recommendations from these studies in FY 2021 and we will complete implementation of those recommendations in FY 22. Recommendations that we have implemented include signage improvements, crosswalk painting, requests for raised crosswalks, speed hump installations and repairs, sidewalk repairs, and improved or refreshed pavement and school zone markings We will continue with new safety studies for 18 more schools in FY 22.

In addition to the improvements set forth in the school safety studies I noted earlier, the Safe Routes to School program made over 300 spot improvements in the vicinity of 116 schools from 2019-2021. Those spot improvements include measures such as high visibility crosswalks, signage, speed humps, and vertical deflectors (flexi posts) to manage speed and improve pedestrian safety.

Access to Metro

DDOT helps improve access to safe transit for students through the Kids Ride Free Program and Bus Operation coordination efforts with WMATA's bus planning team.

Kids Ride Free Program: DDOT is the implementing agency for the Mayor's Kids Ride Free program which provides free Metrobus and Rail access to all DC Public and Charter School students between the ages of 5 and 21 who live and attend school in the District. Students can collect their new School Year 2021-2022 Kids Ride Free SmarTrip cards from their school ID administrators like they did during the last school year. Lost or stolen cards are replaced for free.

DDOT's Kids Ride Free program manager convenes bi-weekly coordination sessions with all DC agencies involved in distributing the free SmarTrip cards. To date, more than 21,000 DC students have received their Kids Ride Free cards for this school year.

Bus Operations: DDOT's Transit Delivery Division coordinates with WMATA's Bus Planning and Operation team every day. In previous years, WMATA and DDOT have received requests from parents and schools to modify Metrobus operations to enable students to get to and from school more easily and safely from many different touch points. We have improved our coordination to ensure requested changes are incorporated in Metrobus schedule updates that occur twice a year in January and June. It is important to note that, starting in September, the top 15 Metro bus routes used by students began receiving service improvements

such as earlier start times and more frequent bus service. DDOT will continue to coordinate between WMATA and the District's schools on any changes to schedules that occur in January.

Vision Zero

Thus far, I have shared information on DDOT's efforts that are most relevant to the bill before you—our crossing guard program, our Safe Routes to School program, and our coordination with Metro and school communities to ensure safe passage to and from school. But we have to go beyond that. The Mayor's Vision Zero Initiative conveys the principle that traffic fatalities are preventable and that everyone has the right to move safely in their communities. As a government, and as a community, we must take responsibility for improving our streets, our traffic management policies, and other related systems to lessen the severity of crashes. Through our Summer Safety Campaign, DDOT has accelerated the completion of 67 roadway and intersection improvements, including installation measures that provide visual and concrete reminders to drivers that they must drive responsibly, slow down and pay attention, including driver feedback signs, high visibility crosswalks, concrete curb extensions, and extended leading pedestrian intervals.

Heartbreaking traffic crashes in recent weeks have kept our focus on the primacy of safety in our mission at DDOT. Like many members of our community, I too am angry at the inattention and recklessness of the drivers involved. I am a parent, I am a husband, I am a cyclist, I am a runner that uses our DC streets every day—and I walk and ride with my son. And when I do that, I'm often frightened, just as many other parents in this city are. I personally met with the family of Allison Hart who was a victim of one of the recent crashes in our city to convey my heartfelt sympathy for this tragic loss. I can only imagine the grief and trauma they are feeling, and I have no words to express what I would be going through if my family had gone through what they are experiencing.

More recently, another family was traumatized when a reckless driver crashed into a father and his two children walking in a high visibility crosswalk at the signalized intersection of Mississippi Avenue and Wheeler Road. The fact that the family survived this crash does nothing to temper my outrage and frustration. And the fact that we see too many instances of such senseless and reckless behavior strengthens my resolve to continue DDOT's partnerships with MPD, OAG, and the U.S. Attorney's Office to hold dangerous drivers accountable.

We share the concern and frustration that members of the community have expressed about safety; that same passion is what keeps DDOT's staff committed to doing what is needed to make our streets safe. I want to be clear that when we say that safety is our top priority, we mean it.

Because we need action across the District, and we need it now, I'm announcing that we are expanding beyond the 2021 Summer Safety Campaign that Mayor Bowser introduced earlier this year. With Mayor Bowser's support, going forward every year DDOT will target 100 intersections in the city that include locations in Vision Zero High Crash, High Injury Corridors. Just as we did with the 2021 campaign, DDOT will publish a dashboard on our website that the public can access in order to track our progress throughout each year.

In addition to taking on additional safety workloads, we also know that we must shorten the amount of time it takes to implement safety improvements. In order to do this, we will be making changes to our public engagement process so we can deliver safety improvements more quickly.

Effective November 1, DDOT will streamline several administrative processes, including the following:

- Reducing the public comment period for safety-related improvements
- Limiting project Notices of Intent to only those required by District law
- Discontinuing the requirement to provide supporting documents from Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs) and the community for traffic safety investigations requests

DDOT will continue to welcome ANC recommendations and other community input on proposed safety projects. But we will not wait to act when we know that the safety of our residents is at stake.

DDOT remains committed to our goal of eliminating deaths and critical injuries and making our roadways safer for everyone, especially our students.

I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you today and look forward to answering any questions you may have.