

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

District Department of Transportation



Public Hearing on:

[Bill 24-565](#), Safe Routes to School Expansion Regulation Amendment Act
of 2021

[Bill 24-566](#), Walk Without Worry Amendment Act of 2021

Testimony of

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Before the

Committee on Transportation and the Environment

Council of the District of Columbia

Monday, March 14, 2022

12:00 p.m.

Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairperson Cheh, members of the Committee, and staff. My name is Everett Lott and I am the Director of the District Department of Transportation, commonly referred to as DDOT. I am here today to present testimony on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser regarding B24-565, the Safe Routes to School Expansion Regulation Amendment Act of 2021, and B24-566, the Walk Without Worry Amendment Act of 2021. We thank you for the opportunity to engage in a conversation today about what we are doing to improve the safety of our roadways for students on their journeys to and from school as well as the broader work we are doing to improve safety for sidewalk and bike lane users in the District. We hope today's hearing will identify ways in which we can better collaborate to make our roads safer for everyone.

Existing Programs

Every day, DDOT works to make the District safer. The Mayor's Vision Zero Initiative is based on 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 not only lessen the severity of crashes but also reduce the number of crashes.

Safety is our top priority in everything we do as an agency. DDOT works to specifically address transportation safety for schools, students, and their communities as well as our most vulnerable road users through the following initiatives and programs:

- The Safe Routes to School Program;
- School Crossing Guards;
- Streetscape Projects;
- Bus Priority and Protected Bike Lane Projects; and
- Traffic Safety Investigations.

Safe Routes to School Program

Safe Routes to School is a local and federally-funded program with the goal of promoting safe walking and biking to school through infrastructure improvements, safety education, and incentives to encourage walking and bicycling to school.

With additional support in the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2020 budget, the Safe Routes to School program doubled its capacity. In the last two years, the Safe Routes to School team has conducted safety studies for 36 schools across all 8 Wards. DDOT began implementing the recommendations from these studies in Fiscal Year 2021 and we will complete the implementation in Fiscal Year 2022. In

Fiscal Year 2022, DDOT will complete studies at another 18 schools across the District.

Between the improvements recommended in comprehensive school safety studies and other requests from TSIs and schools, the Safe Routes to School team completed over 300 spot improvements in the vicinity of 116 schools from 2019-2021 and submitted work orders for safety improvements at 81 schools. These spot improvements and work orders include measures such as high visibility crosswalks, signage, speed humps, and vertical deflectors (flex posts) to manage speed and improve pedestrian safety. In Fiscal Year 2021, work orders generated by our Safe Routes to School team resulted in 57 new or rebuilt speed humps, 79 signage improvements, and 130 crosswalks were upgraded to high visibility crosswalks.

School Crossing Guards

DDOT has 245 part-time Safety Technicians, commonly known as School Crossing Guards. Our crossing guards work to protect the safety of students who walk, bike, and take transit to school. School crossing guards help students safely cross busier intersections near school buildings. Of the 245 part-time crossing guard positions at DDOT, we currently have 219 positions filled and deployed in the community. One hundred seventy schools have at least one crossing guard and

we are working with 23 schools to fulfill their request for a second crossing guard. We are actively recruiting and hope to hire an additional 20 part-time crossing guards.

Additionally, through Mayor Bowser's approved Fiscal Year 2022 budget, DDOT is supplementing the Safety Technician program with assistance from 20 full-time Traffic Control Officers. These full-time positions will allow DDOT greater flexibility to deploy safety technicians beyond the standard morning and afternoon shifts.

Streetscape Projects

DDOT has more than 30 streetscape projects in concept design, active design, and construction and all of them include safety improvements. These projects are significant undertakings and each one undergoes multiple reviews to ensure they incorporate improvements like protected bike lanes, wider sidewalks, and pedestrian refuge islands. Two examples of projects currently under construction include the 16th Street Transit Priority Project and the C Street Northeast Project. Both will bring safer and improved multimodal networks to arterial streets adjacent to public schools. The 16th St Transit Priority Project not only includes bus lanes and greater deployment of Transit Signal Priority, but also pedestrian improvements including wider sidewalks and high visibility crosswalks. The C Street Northeast Project includes the conversion of painted bike lanes to

fully protected bike lanes, raised crosswalks and bike crossings, and pedestrian refuge islands. These changes will be permanent, but take time to bring from concept design to construction.

DDOT is looking to develop more meaningful streetscape projects designed to meet both short and long-term safety needs. Two examples include both interim and long-term designs for Wheeler Road Southeast and plans to remove the reversible lane and add protected bike lanes along Connecticut Avenue Northwest.

Bus Priority and Protected Bike Lane Projects

In December 2021, we released the Bus Priority Plan which lays out a road map to deliver 51 transformative bus priority projects. While bus priority projects are often thought of as only including transit improvements, we intentionally design them for safety improvements as well. For example, the Minnesota Avenue Southeast Bus Priority Project near Kimball Elementary School in Ward 7 will be constructed later this year. This project will produce safety improvements for all road users, including bus bulb-outs, protected bike lanes, and median refuges. As all bus riders are pedestrians at some point in their journey, every bus project will include safety improvements for everyone using sidewalks and bike lanes along these corridors.

DDOT constructed a record 7.5 miles of new protected bike lanes in Fiscal Year 2021. However, we know we must deliver more protected bike lanes and

trails more quickly to create a connected and protected network. This year, we will build another 10 miles of protected bike lanes and have plans for another 20 miles of protected bike lanes in Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024. Much like bus priority projects, protected bike lane projects include safety improvements for all road users. Protected bike lane projects often include road diets, like 17th Street Northwest near Ross Elementary School in Ward 2, where the street was transformed from two parking lanes, two travel lanes for vehicles, and an unprotected bike lane to a street with a singular travel lane making the crossing distance much shorter for pedestrians. This project also included new loading zones and marked parking setbacks to improve pedestrian visibility.

Traffic Safety Investigations

As part of the Traffic Safety Investigation (TSI) process, proximity to a school is considered when evaluating locations and potential safety improvements. Over the last 14 months, DDOT has installed 825 safety mitigations as a result of the TSI process. In the last year, 74 percent of all TSIs closed with a safety mitigation were within a quarter mile of a school, improving safety near 147 unique schools. Some examples by schools include speed humps by CW Harris Elementary School in Ward 7, a raised crosswalk on Central Avenue Northeast in front of Friendship Public Charter School's Woodridge campus in Ward 5, and new pedestrian crossing pylons on 14th Street Northwest just north of John Lewis

Elementary School and the Latin American Montessori Bilingual School in Ward 4. Additionally, as a result of this process, DDOT's Automated Traffic Enforcement Branch deployed speed safety cameras on the 3400 block and 4000 block of Wheeler Road Southeast to modify driver behavior and reduce speeding around Eagle Academy Public Charter School and KIPP DC's Wheeler Road campus in Ward 8.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is critical to the success of DDOT's Safe Routes to School program. Every school is truly unique and safety improvements must be site specific and tailored to the needs of each school community and neighborhood. Although by nature, this means improvements are both custom and complex, every community deserves to be heard and involved in the process to ensure the needs of their students are met.

For example, Barnard Elementary School in Ward 4 was one of the 18 schools studied in 2020. With almost three-quarters of students living in boundary, many students are walking and biking distance to their school. However, the school is bound by two minor arterials and collectors with higher vehicle volumes and vehicle speeds. Our Safe Routes to School study identified 5th Street Northwest, immediately adjacent to the school, as being unsafe and uncomfortable

to cross. Short-term improvements were made including new pavement markings and signs to reduce the barriers to students having a safe route to walk to school.

Alternatives

Thus far, I have shared information on DDOT's current efforts to address traffic safety for all pedestrians, but especially around schools. However, we agree with Council that it is time to update our processes and enhance our efforts to improve safety around our schools.

Safe Routes to School Expansion Amendment Act

School Zone Definition and Speed Limit

Starting with the Safe Routes to School Expansion Act, DDOT agrees that we should define what constitutes a school zone and agrees with the Council's proposed definition of 150 yards immediately surrounding a school facility, starting from the edge of its grounds. DDOT's current practice is to define a school zone as 200 feet from the edge of school grounds. This is the minimum in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices and was developed in a study conducted in 2015. DDOT believes 150 yards will capture the areas around schools where there is likely to be the highest concentration of students.

Building on the Success of the Safe Routes to School Program

In 2020, DDOT expanded its Safe Routes to School Program and is now able to study and implement safety improvements near 18 schools every year in addition to education, outreach, and programming for eight of those schools. To build upon a successful program, DDOT envisions an evolution of the existing program that could meet more schools' needs sooner alongside a dedicated Safe Routes to School Safety Capital Program. Both programs could include everything in DDOT's existing toolbox and include new tools like road diets, turn calming infrastructure, and deconflicting turn movements.

Every neighborhood and its associated needs are unique. To meet schools and neighborhoods where they are is critical to the success of the current Safe Routes to School Program. To apply a one size fits all approach misses the nuances of each school and community. A re-envisioned plan of action and an expanded toolbox for the Safe Routes to School program based on the past two years of success would allow DDOT to continue meaningful community engagement with realistic and inclusive project planning processes. We would continue the work of reviewing crash data and street characteristics in coordination with parents, guardians, school staff, and leadership so safety measures would be tailored to each location, crash pattern, or complaint pattern. Focusing on generating buildable recommendations for the areas around schools, high-injury intersections within a

quarter-mile of schools could be prioritized for larger interventions based on the Crash Composite Index.

Building upon an expanded Safe Routes to School Program, DDOT envisions a future where we can take Safe Routes to School related work and recommendations a step further. This could include the creation a dedicated contract for construction effectively creating a separate capital program. To ensure we are holding ourselves accountable, an action goal to add safety improvements to a minimum number of high-injury intersections near schools could be set. Intersection design would be based on a community-driven process much like the rest of the Safe Routes to School Program.

With a dedicated capital program, the toolbox for the existing Safe Routes to School Program could expand to include many of the improvements included in the bill in front of us today. High-visibility crosswalks, school zone signage, and school pavement markings (where applicable) are already standard, and DDOT is committed to installing them throughout school zones wherever they are not present or need to be refreshed or replaced. Though other interventions would be selected based on site-specific characteristics and crash data, some of the interventions could include the following:

For all intersections near schools, possible interventions include:

- High visibility crosswalks;

- School zone signage;
- School zone pavement markings;
- All-way stop control;
- Automated Enforcement/Safety cameras;
- Marked pick-up and drop-off zones;
- Pedestrian crossing pylons;
- Flashing pedestrian signs;
- Curb extensions or bulb-outs; and
- No Turn on Red restrictions.

For lower volume streets below 5000 annual average daily traffic, or AADT, regardless of functional class, options could also include:

- Speed humps or speed tables; and
- Raised crosswalks and raised intersections.

Other new Safe Routes to School toolbox items for higher volume streets include:

- Road diets, including reducing the number of travel lanes and installing refuge islands;
- Deconflicting turn movements;
- Bus lanes or other transit priority;

- Turn calming infrastructure;
- Traffic signals; and
- Pedestrian-activated traffic signals (HAWKs) and rapid flashing beacons.

Together, a re-envisioning of the existing Safe Routes to School Program and the establishment of a dedicated capital program could be an opportunity for DDOT to meet more schools where they are more quickly, while simultaneously supporting more widespread and larger-scale safety improvements.

Safety Technician Program

DDOT continues to support the growth of our Safety Technician program. DDOT currently employs 219 part-time Safety Technicians, commonly referred to as School Crossing Guards. With the supplemental support of 20 Traffic Control Officers, DDOT currently supports the needs of 170 schools. Requests for crossing guards typically come from school communities and DDOT staff, including both the Safe Routes to School team as well as the Safety Technician team, work together to evaluate and then prioritize requests based on highest need. Staff is currently working to fill requests for additional crossing guards at 23 schools. In order to maintain the ability to flex our resources to the areas of highest need, DDOT does not recommend strict requirements as outlined in the legislation. The

need for crossing guards is not evenly distributed across the District as is evidenced by uneven requests from schools and crash data. Retaining our ability to focus our resources where they are needed is critical to meeting our mission to equitably deliver a safe transportation network.

Automated Traffic Enforcement Program

When determining where to locate new automated traffic enforcement cameras (ATE), DDOT evaluates sites and considers a number of factors including whether or not there are any schools near the site. DDOT believes, and research supports, that more consistent enforcement is more likely to change driver behavior. To improve enforcement coverage adjacent to schools, DDOT is evaluating changing how we prioritize sites for automated enforcement. Crash data, proximity to the High Injury Network, and likelihood to change behavior will continue to be our guiding principles, but instead of proximity to schools being merely a consideration, DDOT is proposing to elevate proximity to schools to one of the guiding principles in prioritizing candidate sites for safety cameras.

Walk Without Worry Amendment Act

Raised Crosswalks + Resurfacing/Repaving Contracts

Moving on to the Walk Without Worry Amendment Act, DDOT continues to expand vertical traffic calming devices (also known as vertical deflection) across

the District. In the last year, DDOT has remained focused on fulfilling neighborhood and Safe Routes to School study generated requests for speed humps, speed tables, and raised crosswalks. In Fiscal Year 2021, DDOT installed more than 100 vertical traffic calming devices and we have installed another 275 in Fiscal Year 2022, to date. As DDOT works to scale up the volume of vertical deflection we deploy on District roadways, we have been hard at work finalizing guidance on vertical deflection. This document will serve as our primary guidance on vertical deflection, until an update is made to DDOT's Design and Engineering Manual.

Importantly, this guidance is being developed with increasing scale in mind. In order to deliver speed control to as many neighborhoods and schools as possible, DDOT has worked to not only standardize the process, but also standardize eligibility criteria. Relevant to this bill, DDOT's eligibility criteria for raised crosswalks precludes locations that may impact stormwater drainage and require utility covers be raised. Raised crosswalks that require utilities to be raised, impact stormwater drainage, and are level with the sidewalk require much more extensive design and engineering. Therefore, in order to bring more of this type of vertical deflection to more neighborhoods and schools, DDOT is streamlining eligibility for this standard design. This does not, however, preclude DDOT from considering a raised crosswalk in a location that has utility covers or stormwater

impacts when a capital project or streetscape project makes significant changes to the entirety of the right of way.

Critically, to ensure we can deliver these designs more quickly, DDOT recommends against tying these improvements to contracts for repaving, resurfacing, and sidewalk reconstruction. In order to expedite the delivery and ensure repaving, resurfacing, and sidewalk reconstruction can move forward without delay towards a state of good repair, DDOT recommends the creation of separate delivery mechanisms.

Raised Intersections and Continuous Sidewalks/Capital Projects

DDOT agrees that raised intersections and continuous sidewalks are tools we would like to incorporate into our toolbox and we agree that they should become a more common standard in our capital projects and streetscape projects where eligibility criteria is met. DDOT will also upgrade or install raised crosswalks that are level with the sidewalk through capital projects where eligibility criteria is met moving forward. More broadly, the level of design and engineering required means that these treatments are costly. In order to maximize impact and reach more neighborhoods and schools, DDOT wants to continue focusing on high impact and quicker to deliver alternatives in our toolbox. These include, but are not limited to, other vertical deflection like raised crosswalks, speed humps, and speed tables as well as other programs like the Safe Routes to

School Program as well as quicker build streetscape projects like the interim project for Wheeler Road, protected bike lanes, and bus priority projects.

Conclusion

The last two years have been challenging and DDOT has worked to adapt to changes in how we get around. We share the concern and frustration that members of the community have expressed about safety; that same passion is what keeps DDOT committed to doing what is needed to make our streets safe.

DDOT is committed to changing the way we do business by reviewing and updating policies, processes, and guidelines to meet the needs of the District and we will continue to welcome community input on proposed roadway safety interventions. We remain absolutely steadfast in our commitment to eliminating deaths and critical injuries, but especially in our commitment to protecting everyone, but especially our students, using sidewalks and biking in the District.

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