

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
*District Department of Transportation*



Roundtable on  
Bus Service and Fleet Management in the District of Columbia

Testimony of  
Leif A. Dormsjo  
Director, District Department of Transportation

Before the  
  
Committee on Transportation and the Environment  
  
and the  
  
Committee on Finance and Revenue  
  
Council of the District of Columbia

Thursday, September 29, 2016  
11:30 am  
Room 500  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004



Good afternoon Chairperson Cheh, Chairperson Evans, and members and staff of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment and the Committee on Finance and Revenue. I am Leif Dormsjo, the Director of the District Department of Transportation (DDOT). I am pleased to testify before you today on DDOT's management of the District's Circulator bus service and to share additional information regarding planned future improvements. I will also identify areas in which the DC Council can support these enhancements to ensure that the Circulator Bus service is safe and reliable for riders and employees alike.

First, I would like to address the efforts DDOT has made in the last year to increase and improve oversight of the DC Circulator program. When I arrived at the Department, there was only one staff member dedicated to the Circulator and I made it a priority to add more staff. Since then, we have doubled the dedicated career service staff and hired a Deputy Associate Director to manage oversight of the Circulator. We have seen significant benefits from our increased staffing of the program.

DDOT is conducting a wholesale evaluation of both the management structure and the schedule and performance of routes and route segments in order to determine how to most efficiently and effectively provide this service. While great attention has been paid in the past to extensions and new routes, our current focus is on fixing the system we have in place today and making sure it is safe and reliable. For this to happen, we need to have the right infrastructure in place—not just vehicles and facilities, but also human capital with expertise in maintenance, service quality, scheduling, dispatch, vehicle technology, and other functions critical to the effective management of the Circulator program.

I now want to discuss the Circulator maintenance issues that were identified in the recent series of audits conducted by DDOT's contractor, the Transit Resource Center. DDOT hired this

contractor to conduct vehicle maintenance audits in order to provide improved oversight of the Circulator operations and to better inform decisions on Circulator vehicle replacements. To date, DDOT has conducted four audits, in August 2015, January 2016, May 2016, and earlier this month. The reports from the first three audits have been provided to the committees along with the preliminary findings of the most recent report, expected to be completed next month. These audits find that Circulator maintenance has been deficient for two reasons: (1) the current maintenance facilities are inadequate; and (2) the contractor has not provided sufficient staffing for the maintenance needs of the fleet. By industry standards, the DC Circulator fleet should have at least six maintenance bays, but the current facility only offers three.

To deal with these issues, the Department of General Services (DGS) released a solicitation to enable DDOT to competitively select a site for this facility. Under the current contractual agreement, the maintenance facility is provided by the contractor, currently First Transit. If the District were to own a facility, the DC Circulator program would have access to a larger pool of vendors who may provide higher performance and/or more competitive pricing. To address this need, we are working to identify an appropriately-sized maintenance facility controlled by DDOT. This maintenance facility would enable DDOT to maintain assets properly and to hold contractors to high performance standards. The first review of proposals for the DGS solicitation is scheduled to begin in early fall. A progress update on all findings from the previous maintenance audits was provided to your staff in June. That letter also included an analysis of in-house management of the Circulator, including the resources required, as well as the need for a maintenance facility and the purchase of new buses. The DGS solicitation and June letter are enclosed for your reference.

Despite the limitations of the current facility, DDOT has worked diligently with WMATA and the contractor to improve the maintenance of the fleet since the first audit performed last year. The August 2015 audit identified a concerning number of safety-sensitive “A” defects, at a rate of 2.9 per vehicle. This rate has been reduced by more than 90 percent, as the rate fell to 0.27 in the May 2016 audit and held steady at that rate in the audit conducted earlier this month. The Rate of “A” Defects graph submitted to the Committees shows the progress made over the last year.

While the improvement is noteworthy, DDOT believes there is more room for improvements and continues to press forward with the goal of further reducing the rate. DDOT continues to research best practices and conduct outreach to peers with successful operations in order to inform our process.

To emphasize the importance of improving maintenance of the fleet, I met personally on August 10<sup>th</sup> with Brad Thomas, President of First Transit, and insisted that he provide a plan to address the backlog of deferred maintenance and bring the fleet up to a state of good repair. Since then, my staff, with support from WMATA, has conducted two meetings each week with executives from First Transit to ensure that the plan is fulfilled. The plan calls for an increase in maintenance technicians, maintenance supervisors, and utilization of third party maintenance vendors to supplement maintenance staff until the backlog is cleared. I am pleased to report that additional staff and third-party resources are now in place, but the contractor will need to do more to reach and maintain appropriate staffing levels and competencies.

Lastly, DDOT is preparing to replace more than half of the current fleet of vehicles for the DC Circulator. DDOT is developing a procurement package for this purchase and will share details of the purchase once the procurement package is finalized. We would appreciate your

support of this initiative to modernize the fleet, nearly half of which will reach the end of its useful life next year. We are grateful to the Council for providing the funds required for this purchase in the FY 2017-2022 Capital Improvements Plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and thank you, again, for your support of the DC Circulator. I look forward to a good discussion of how we can work together to improve the DC Circulator program.