

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



Fiscal Year 2015 Performance Oversight Public Hearing

Testimony of

Leif Dormsjo

Director, Department of Transportation

Before the

Committee on Transportation and the Environment

Chairwoman Mary M. Cheh

Councilmember, Ward 3

February 29, 2016

Room 412

John A. Wilson Building

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, D.C. 20004



Good morning Chairperson Cheh, members of the committee, staff, and District residents. I am Leif Dormsjo, Director of the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), and I am pleased to testify before you today on DDOT's performance. It was almost exactly a year ago that I first appeared before this committee. At that time, I pledged to give Mayor Bowser, the Council, and the residents of the District of Columbia my energy, dedication, and integrity and to make DDOT more transparent, more responsive, and more innovative. I believe I have delivered on that commitment.

I also promised that DDOT would do its part to deliver on Mayor Bowser's commitment to use transportation to bring the District closer together and to knock down barriers that have historically blocked access to opportunity, a better quality of life, and mobility options. I committed to identify innovative solutions to unite the District's neighborhoods, improve the natural environment, and spur economic investment.

I am proud of the accomplishments we have achieved over the past year. In September, we opened an improved 16th Street Bridge at Military Road under budget and ahead of schedule. We launched the first ever AlleyPalooza campaign which was so successful that we launched AlleyPalooza 2 later in the year. Combined, we improved over 200 alleys during this construction season.



We expanded the Circulator fleet by 18 vehicles and opened a new route on the National Mall. Working with our sister agencies under the leadership of Mayor Bowser, we welcomed Pope Francis to the District and mobilized an extraordinary response to a blizzard of historic proportions.

And last but not least—streetcars are once again running in the District! Mayor Bowser charged my team with taking a failed Streetcar program and making it work for District residents. After years of overspending, mismanagement, and lack of direction, we made it happen. Just this week, we successfully launched the first streetcar line in the District in 50 years and look forward to integrating streetcar into our transportation network.

Safety is Our Priority

Transportation safety is our overarching priority, and we have worked with our partners across District government to meet this goal. Our DC Streetcar Team has worked in coordination with the District’s State Safety Oversight Office, housed within the Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services, to ensure the H Street/Benning Streetcar line operates safely. DDOT has partnered with the Metropolitan Police Department to provide security aboard the streetcar, so passengers can travel safely. Additionally, we installed mile

markers and LED lights on the Metropolitan Branch Trail to ensure the safety of the trail users and to provide guidance for emergency response teams if necessary.

Perhaps, the most significant safety initiative is the Mayor's Vision Zero plan which sets a bold yet necessary goal: zero traffic fatalities and serious injuries by the year 2024. DDOT served as the lead agency in planning and launching Vision Zero. For the remainder of the fiscal year, DDOT's goals are to improve safety data reporting and transparency, enhance our ability to detect risk, prioritize safety improvements based on risk, and strengthen enforcement. To shape this plan, residents completed nearly 3,000 safety surveys that informed the focus of the action plan strategies. This interagency effort has four (4) aspirational themes: create safe streets, protect vulnerable users, prevent dangerous driving, and be transparent and responsive. As we speak, agencies are working to implement the Vision Zero Action Plan. We are eager to work closely with this Committee as Vision Zero proposals advance.

Focus on Transparency

Neighborhood transportation issues require a great deal of community engagement and trust-building. In 2015, DDOT worked to provide early and



meaningful opportunities for public participation in decision-making during all phases: from planning to implementation. DDOT regularly participated in public meetings to hear from residents, gather input, and share information with residents regarding agency projects and services. We attended numerous Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) meetings and initiated more than 30 public meetings to obtain feedback on various transportation planning, traffic, bicycle, and pedestrian and safety-related studies and projects.

DDOT's Office of Communications issues more than a dozen press releases, advisories, public notices each month to keep residents informed about services, meetings, and projects. We are also working to provide additional material about current and future DDOT projects on our website.

Focus on Equity and Inclusion

Mayor Bowser charged DDOT with ensuring equity and inclusion by supporting and improving transportation and transit options for all residents including District seniors, persons with disabilities, and children. In order to do so, we are reviewing our policies, programs, and planning initiatives for compliance with guidelines of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Age-Friendly DC Task Force. For instance, in January 2016, DDOT



completed and submitted its ADA Transition Plan to Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the ADA: to remove identified barriers for people with disabilities. Furthermore, DDOT's Deputy Director is currently acting as the agency's Transportation Equity and Inclusion Officer while we interview to fill this critical role. We anticipate having a full-time Equity and Inclusion Officer in place soon, and this unit will be housed within the Office of the Director.

Last year, DDOT and DC Public Schools continued to improve student safety through the Safe Routes to School Program. The program facilitates walking and biking to school, which boosts student physical activity, reduces parents' fuel consumption, and decreases pollution and traffic congestion near schools. We worked directly with individual schools on safety issues and on citywide programs like Bike to School Day and Walk to School Day. We also worked with DCPS to launch a new program for second grade DCPS students to learn to ride and build bicycle skills. The course taught students how to identify and define basic bicycle safety procedures. Over the course of the year, we worked with dozens of schools to provide safe routes to schools and biking courses. We continue to work with them this year and are in the process of purchasing more than 1,000 balance bikes



for DCPS pre-school and kindergarteners to prepare them to ride in the second grade program.

Lastly, in an effort to reduce the barriers to entry for those interested in gaining access to the bike share program, DDOT removed the \$101 authorization hold placed on credit/debit cards used to purchase short term memberships at stations. In the past year, we have worked with our Capital Bikeshare contractor and community stakeholders to develop a subsidized Bikeshare membership for non-profit organizations who serve communities in need.

Fix it First

Preservation and rehabilitation projects such as alleys, sidewalks, road resurfacing, bridge rehabilitation, street trees and other core assets are vitally important to the health and safety of the District. When I came to DDOT, there was a backlog of needed improvements. In addition to the more than 200 alleys that DDOT repaired or reconstructed last year, we also repaired over 130 sidewalks and 170 roads. Last year, I promised to focus more of the agency's effort on spending more on repairing alleys, sidewalks, and roads. Proactive investments in these critical infrastructure assets helps reduce more costly future replacement costs. For local roads, the fiscal year 2016 expenditures are



expected to be three times higher than fiscal year 2015, and approximately five times higher than the five-year average; for sidewalks, 2016 expenditures will be two times higher than 2015, and seven times higher than the five-year average; for alleys, expenditures will be 1.5 times more than 2015 and three times the five-year average. I am working with our Chief Officers to identify life-cycle costs models to expand our focus on fixing it first.

Institute a Rigorous Performance Management Culture

In my testimony last year, I committed to developing a data-driven performance management system at DDOT. One of my first performance initiatives in 2015 was creating a new program called “TranStat.” This bi-weekly program focuses on performance reporting and process improvements using a data-driven approach. At TranStat, a diverse group of managers and program experts convene to review data analysis, troubleshoot issues, and plan for new or restructured programs in a roundtable format.

Rigorous performance management also applies to customer service. In 2015, DDOT received more than 134,000 service requests covering everything from tree inspections to street repair. When I joined the agency, we had a history of maintaining unresolved requests. We have been carefully examining old requests to determine why they remain open and revisiting the workflow

processes. Our goal is to utilize the system more effectively both as a work management tool and a means to communicate with residents regarding the status of their requests.

Use Transportation for Community and Economic Development Purposes

Capital investments are bringing positive change to the District from a community and economic development perspective. This is true across District government, and especially at DDOT. As part of the re-aligned Economic Development cluster of agencies, DDOT works to ensure that our agency's schedules aligns with partner agency work, including the Deputy Mayor of Planning and Economic Development, the Department of Energy and the Environment, and the Office of Planning. DDOT is fostering these relationships to build a coordinated approach and a professional project delivery process. We are actively involved in several multi-agency, multi-million dollar projects such as Capitol Crossing, Buzzard Point, Hill East, and St. Elizabeth's.

Develop Clearer Lines of Responsibility

One of the first things I noticed in my early days at DDOT was the flat organizational structure of the agency and the lack of clearly identified lines of responsibility within the organization. I committed to assembling a team of

talented managers and establishing direct lines of responsibility within the organization so the public, the Mayor and City Council, and the DDOT Team itself understood where decision-making and responsibility rest. With the support of the Mayor, and the help of this committee with the Transportation Reorganization Act, we are moving ahead to realign the functional groups within DDOT into a more effective and efficient organization.

The Mayor has recruited a talented and experienced team to leadership positions in the District. We have been able to build on the excitement that her administration has brought to the District and to fill key positions with skilled transportation leaders.

Conclusion

Last year, Chairperson Cheh, you also asked me to identify three things that I wanted to accomplish over the course of the past year. I identified professional project delivery, enhanced public engagement, and improved performance management. As noted in my testimony, we delivered large transit projects, bridges, and other transportation projects. We also promoted safety, equity and inclusion, and community and economic development. We made great strides in transparency and performance management by focusing on



communication, public engagement, and holding ourselves accountable for the work that we do. Overall, we have accomplished much in this first year under Mayor Bowser's leadership. In year two, you have my commitment that we will ramp up and continue this progress.

This concludes my formal testimony. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am ready to answer any questions you might have.

