

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

District Department of Transportation



Public Hearing on:

[B24-0673](#) – Safer Intersections Amendment Act of 2022

[B24-0674](#) – Upgrading Tactical Safety Projects Amendment Act of 2022

Testimony of

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District Department of Transportation

Before the

Committee on Transportation and the Environment

Council of the District of Columbia

Thursday, May 5, 2022

12:00 p.m.

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 B24-677, the Safer Intersections Amendment Act of 2022, and B24-674, the Upgrading Tactical Safety Projects Amendment Act of 2022. We thank you for the opportunity to engage in a conversation about what we are doing to improve the safety of our roadways for pedestrians and cyclists in the District. We hope today's hearing will identify ways in which we can continue to collaborate to advance the District's Vision Zero goals.

Safer Intersections Amendment Act of 2022

DDOT supports the intent of the *Safer Intersections Amendment Act of 2022* to make the District's intersections safer for all users of our roadways; however, we have reservations about the means by which this bill seeks to meet this objective. As part of this testimony, I will share our practice and engineering concerns. We are hopeful today's hearing will lead to further discussion about how we can continue to improve safety for all roadway users.

Right-turns-on-red

DDOT maintains its position and current practice that right-turns-on-red should be prohibited, broadly, where analysis and engineering support it being safe and beneficial. At DDOT, we want to use the tools in our toolbox to tailor safety enhancements to the needs of specific intersections. Our reservation about banning

right-turns-on-red District-wide is founded in our commitment to safety. Such a ban would preclude the agency's ability to enhance intersections based on their unique needs and could unintentionally compromise intersections where it may not be what is best for safety.

While DDOT does not support a *universal* ban on right-turns-on-red, the agency has been working toward prohibiting the maneuver at locations where it may compromise safety. In 2019, DDOT installed signage to prohibit right-turns-on-red at approximately 100 intersections. We are now processing more than 250 new intersections that will incorporate prohibitions of right-turns-on-red. This represents a significant expansion of this measure throughout the District.

We are confident in our current approach to implementing no-turn-on-red because our work has been supported by data collection and analysis. DDOT recently published a study of prohibiting right turns on red at those first 100 locations and uncovered some challenges to the practice at *every* intersection. The study highlighted cases where permitting right turns only on green signals *can* create conflict between vehicles turning right and crossing pedestrians. Prohibiting right-turns-on-red, restricts right turns to the same phase when pedestrians cross parallel to moving traffic; this increases the potential for dangerous interactions. Although this study largely found that prohibiting right-turns-on red yielded safety benefits at

most intersections, there are instances where such a ban can reduce safety for vulnerable road users, such as where many vehicle and pedestrian conflicts exist.

DDOT's recently completed Signal Optimization Program made light cycles more pedestrian friendly by eliminating the need for push-button signals—or “beg” buttons—and adding more Leading Pedestrian Intervals (LPIs) to the system. Since the fall of 2018, DDOT has added 900 LPIs, optimized signals, and enhanced crosswalk visibility, demonstrating its commitment to improving safety based on the contextual needs of each intersection. The Signal Optimization Program reduced the percentage of signals with “beg buttons” to 15% of our signalized intersections and brought the total number of intersections with LPIs to over 1,100, or 75%. The installation of high-visibility crosswalks is now the default. And tactical improvements have served to “harden turns” and “daylight” intersections to make crossing safer for pedestrians.

“Idaho Stop” and “Delaware Yield”

DDOT has safety concerns about permitting cyclists to treat red signals as STOP signs and STOP signs as YIELD signs, otherwise known as the “Idaho Stop” and “Delaware Yield,” respectively. Although studies from other jurisdictions where these maneuvers have been permitted may indicate promising results, none of these locations have similar traffic volumes or the variety and prominence of complex roadway designs that are present in the District.

Unlike other cities where these rules have been enacted, the District has various types of traffic configurations that range from a standard four-way intersection to traffic circles and triangles. Many of these rely on signals and engineered timing to move all road users through them safely. At many intersections, limited visibility may make it difficult for riders to determine when they can safely proceed without relying on signals. Although there are locations that do not necessarily pose these difficulties, these proposed changes would apply universally. Permitting cyclists and users of shared mobility devices to universally enter an intersection in ways and at times unexpected by motorists creates a hazard, especially at more complex intersections.

Safely executing these maneuvers requires all roadway users to exhibit sound judgement in traffic as to avoid a crash. Endorsing these policies could encourage dangerous behavior, a risk that could come at the expense of safety.

Upgrading Tactical Safety Projects Amendment Act

DDOT supports the intent behind the *Upgrading Tactical Safety Projects Amendment Act of 2022*; we would like to inventory and convert to permanent many tactical installations throughout the District. However, DDOT has three primary concerns with this legislation as introduced.

- 1) First, we are concerned with the negative inferences that may be drawn about tactical improvements by the bill's use of "upgrade."
- 2) Secondly, implementation of the bill as introduced would create a significant burden on agency operations while not significantly improving safety for roadway users to the same extent.
- 3) And finally, the legislation may also be premature due to the Tactical Improvement Study that DDOT is going to begin in FY2023

Requiring that tactical improvements be "upgraded" reinforces an incorrect notion that tactical is always inferior to permanent. There are instances where tactical improvements may be preferable to permanent options. Using flexible posts with reflectors to separate a protected bike lane provides a tall, visual barrier between the bike lane and the vehicle travel lane. Concrete blocks or curbs can complement flexible posts where possible to add an additional physical barrier. This cannot be easily replicated with a permanent material.

Tactical improvements can be installed much more quickly and cost-effectively than their permanent counterparts. This makes them a flexible tool to address safety needs both more proactively and reactively. As an example, curb extensions, also known as bulb-outs, can be implemented quickly, without any stormwater management ramifications that would require time-intensive design and engineering.

Requiring that all tactical improvements be made permanent would impose a tremendous burden on DDOT's existing operations and require many additional resources. DDOT would need additional staff and contractors to study, design, and build engineering changes to the roadway. Permanent improvements are also appreciably more expensive than tactical ones, oftentimes due to the infrastructure beneath the roadway. For example, a tactical curb bulb-out, can cost about \$27,000, whereas a permanent improvement could cost nearly \$260,000. This cost is often driven by the need to redesign and relocate stormwater management infrastructure that would need to be moved along with the curb.

DDOT's preferred path forward is to allow the agency's Neighborhood Planning Branch to complete their study on the tactical improvements that may be good candidates to be made permanent. DDOT recently received this money from the federal government to fund this study and expects it to begin in the fall of 2022. Once that study is complete, the agency will have a better sense on how to move forward with making appropriate improvements permanent.

The changes recommended in these legislative proposals are aimed at improving safety for all roadway users, which DDOT readily supports. However, critical considerations regarding engineering, roadway utilization, and resource management should not be omitted. DDOT welcomes the opportunity to discuss these bills and other ways in which we can make the District's roadways safer for

all. And thus, we look forward to ongoing discussions and planning with the Council.

This concludes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.