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Feb. 27, 2023

Oversight testimony: District Department of Transportation

Good afternoon. My name is Alex Baca and I am testifying on behalf of Greater Greater Washington, where I serve as D.C. policy director.

Much of my testimony from the Feb. 16, 2023, oversight hearing for the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Operations and Infrastructure applies today; please reference it [here](#). Of particular relevance to the District Department of Transportation are the following asks:

- Move the Vision Zero team under DMOI, as its mandate of reducing fatal crashes to zero is too cross-cutting to be confined solely to DDOT;
- Heavily scrutinize the performance of the District Department of Transportation's leadership, which, while despite excellent work by agency's project teams, has reduced the scope of or changed the intent of projects touted by the mayor, including the Connecticut Avenue bike lane and the 7th Street bus priority lane;
- Release the road-pricing report, which the executive has shown no sign of making public despite the fact that the council, when it allocated \$450,000 for it in 2019, required it to be released in 2021. Road pricing is not GGWash's pet project. We simply want the District to carry out a policy that it has included in a number of its own long-range plans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The 2014 moveDC plan states, "The moveDC vehicular network for the Downtown planning area includes a downtown congestion pricing cordon around the Central Employment Area;" the 2021 update to moveDC includes a recommendation to "implement congestion management tools to support accessible, reliable, sustainable, efficient, and affordable movement throughout the District." A similar requirement is in the [2019 Resilient D.C. plan](#): "Study congestion dynamic mobility pricing and how that funding could be dedicated for new transportation infrastructure and subsidies."

These plans also call, if not for an explicit reduction in single-occupancy vehicle trips, for goals that are incumbent upon fewer single-occupancy vehicle trips: "By 2032, increasing use of public transit to 50 percent of all commuter trips in all wards, from 40.5 percent; increasing use of biking and walking to 30 percent of all commuter trips in all wards, from 16.8 percent, and *reducing commuter trips made by car to 25 percent*, from 42.7 percent ([Sustainable D.C. 2.0](#)); "make transportation cheaper, faster, and more convenient and people-centered" (Resilient D.C.); and zero traffic deaths by 2024, er, well, by some indeterminate point, now ([Vision Zero](#)).

The District has sown a beautiful crop of carrots to meet these targets and goals, such as the bus priority program and Metro for D.C. But it is unfair to expect the carrots to change things alone. To meet our goals, we will have to disincentivize driving. Pricing something that people are currently doing for free—driving into the District, especially downtown—is not and will never be popular, but bus priority, Metro for D.C., and other carrot-like programs will not perform as well as they could without some sticks.

There is nearly no research showing downsides of road pricing, and the report is written specifically to address concerns about its potential impacts on people who have been displaced from the District. A road pricing program is estimated to generate between \$90 and \$500 million in revenue per year; with prognostications of a fiscal downturn, it is foolish to leave buried a report on something that could generate that much money and waste taxpayer dollars to do so. If the executive agency does not cooperate with the release of the report, we would like the committee to subpoena the executive for it.

Additionally:

- If I recall correctly, in FY23, the committee funded in FY23 a parking study intended to at least begin to review all parking assets, including private parking. I don't know what happened to this funding, or this idea. Do you?
- There is seemingly no concentrated effort to manage curbside. Curbside is contested, and
- It's my understanding that DDOT's design and engineering manual will be rewritten...soon! We would like to see the DEM rewrite follow NACTO standards and include designs for roundabouts, curbless streets, and chicanes, so that those "tools" are available off-the-shelf.
- As always, we are huge fans of the bus priority project, and the bus priority team. GGWash will continue to support bus-priority work, and it is with that enthusiastic spirit that we'd like the committee and the agency to acknowledge that there is demand for more intensive projects, particularly bus projects, and find a way to meet that demand. GGWash understands that projects involving curbside work are of a different class than bus-priority projects, which don't touch the curb.
- GGWash has been conducting research with Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates regarding differences in travel patterns between March 2019 and March 2022. We undertook this project because of the vacuum of quantitative data on how the Covid-19 pandemic has changed how people move into and around the District. Yes, trips by car dropped precipitously; trips by bike increased, and there is a distinct softening of the former morning and afternoon peaks. While that drop in trips by car is, I think, being used to justify much panic around the fate of downtown and, thus, the fate of the District's financial fitness, I think it presents a considerable opportunity and demonstrates that people *will* change their behavior—perhaps to something more sustainable and productive—given an exogenous shock. Slides from a webinar we hosted about this project last week are attached to my testimony, and I'll submit the completed report to the committee later this week.

I would also like to affirm the testimony of my colleagues, Caitlin Rogger and Kai Hall, on behalf of coalitions that they manage, and of the many Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners who

spoke in support of safer streets today. GGWash endorses ANCs in part on the basis of their willingness to support not just safer streets, but the removal of parking and travel lanes to facilitate them, and we are proud of our endorsed commissioners for showing up today. While GGWash is supportive of the direction of “TSI 2.0,” and feel that the rollout *is* the inciting incident for feedback, what I value greatly is commissioners taking a political risk to demonstrate publicly that slowing down drivers matters greatly. My own testimony on DDOT has become increasingly technocratic in the past few years, perhaps to the relief of the committee, mostly because I’ve had to compartmentalize: I can’t communicate the pain and exhaustion of doing the work to prevent drivers from killing or hurting people, *and* keep doing the work—so I thank GGWash’s endorsed ANCs for their honesty and thoroughness.

I’ve channeled my energy instead to pushing the council to hold the District to its commitment to exploring a road-pricing program because drivers do not pay, in any form, for the potential of death or injury that they inflict upon others. District residents deserve the paradigm shift this would represent, to say nothing of the potential revenue generation. Both the council and the executive *have* been leading on improvements to transportation and road safety, much to our delight, and we want those improvements (bus priority, Metro for D.C., protected bike lanes), not driving, to be the baseline for transportation in D.C., to meet the goals that the District has set for itself.

When we testified in support of Director Lott’s appointment, we received considerable backlash from our supporters because of it. Though I stand by GGWash’s support for the director in early 2021, I found that backlash quite legitimate, and do myself question the director’s capacity to lead an agency that must, according to the District’s own goals, de-prioritize driving.

Thank you,  
Alex

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