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1275 K Street NW ★ Washington, DC 20005 ★ 202-578-5075 ★ info@dcstcoalition.org

Testimony by Caitlin Rogger Executive Director, DC Sustainable Transportation
PR24-326 – Director of the District Department of Transportation Everett Lott Confirmation Resolution
of 2021

October 26, 2021

Dear Chairperson Cheh, and members of the committee,

My name is Caitlin Rogger and I'm testifying in support of Everett Lott's confirmation as DDOT Director. I serve as Executive Director of DC Sustainable Transportation (DCST), a nonprofit organization which works to make DC a global leader with frequent, rapid, safe, affordable, and reliable transportation to, from, and around DC job centers. DCST brings together business, advocacy, and government entities around shared priorities for DC transportation.

Members include ten of DC's Business Improvement Districts; the Federal City Council and Greater Washington Partnership; and advocacy groups like the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the Sierra Club DC chapter, and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association.

The members of our coalition meet on a monthly basis along with representatives of the District Department of Transportation, WMATA, the mayor's office, council staffs, and other organizations. We also meet in smaller committees on key issues of concern to our members, including bus priority, curbside management, and congestion pricing.

Director Lott has attended some of our monthly meetings and also met individually with myself and members of the coalition. I've heard witnesses today tout DDOT's recent investments in sustainable transportation and safety, but also highlight the need for transformative change. I'm here to do both!

Director Lott has overseen implementation of very important investments in transit, walking and biking - most notably in bus priority. At the same time, there will continue to be limitations on the potential these projects can reach without deeper clarity on the “What we are doing and why?” We’ve heard it in some of the testimony today, with witnesses pushing back against even minimal adjustments to drivers’ current experience as the top priority, over life, equity and even the future of the planet. **DDOT needs to feel and act completely confident in saying that we are moving toward a city where you don’t need to drive to get around. That will require tradeoffs - but so does the status quo.**

The Why is actually there; DC has made mode shift an explicit priority through MoveDC goals of 50% trips by transit, 25% by active transportation and 25% percent by private vehicle. But even though DDOT’s challenges in focusing and being pro-active about these goals pre-date Director Lott, to fix it the Director needs to lead on embracing these goals organizationally. Call it culture change, call it strategic priority; what it looks like is that in every choice that DDOT makes, it should be crystal clear and understood by every actor and every observer, that the goal is to make transit, biking, scooting and walking the default choices. They have to be safer, more enjoyable, easier and cheaper than driving.

Mode shift is good for the economy, it’s good for safety, it’s good for equity, and it’s good for lowering our carbon emissions. But perhaps most relevantly, it’s our agreed citywide mandate.

Today Director Lott and his team at DDOT face great challenges; how to get transit performing a lot better, how to keep the public safe in public spaces where drivers act with near-impunity, and how to ensure that our precious public asset of space like the curbside lane is being used to its greatest impact - which is very rarely parking. I want to highlight that the injuries and fatalities on our streets don’t need spot fixes - they need a systematic, public health approach, which recognize the risks faced by non-drivers can’t be turned on or off but require a long-term, multi-sectoral approach. There are also tremendous opportunities, with DC’s forward-thinking investments in transportation in the FY22 budget. In a pandemic-weary city, there’s a real appetite for vision and boldness to use this unprecedented interruption to do things better.

Director Lott has taken several opportunities to voice his support for safety, sustainability, and mode shift, but the goal needs to have that buy-in reflected in actions - not just spot fixes - to succeed. I won’t ask if we’re serious about the mode shift goals; I will simply note that they are our goals until someone introduces other ones.

I need hardly observe that road safety has not just plateaued, it’s deteriorated, in direct contravention of our **Vision Zero goals** adopted several years ago. This is not a “bike people” or “pedestrian” issue, as public environments that are perceived as unsafe are simply not going to draw people out to be in public space, to engage in community or commercial activities. **It’s also a national problem, not a DC-specific issue, in the late pandemic period. We don’t doubt the Director’s commitment, but we’d ask that he focus on the organizational mechanisms and culture that are going to put safety, not driver convenience, at the forefront.** The modal preferences I alluded to above go part of the way there, but we need big interim solutions to stop the injuries and deaths.

DCST is excited about the progress of the bus lane and bike lane programs under Director Lott. In terms of bus and bike infrastructure, **DC looks like a transformed city than it did a year ago. But these interventions ultimately run the risk of flopping if they aren't properly enforced.** DDOT must engage closely with the Department of Public Works to ensure that these investments, as well as PUDOs, are properly enforced as a matter of A-1 priority. **Automated Traffic Enforcement Cameras are only part of the puzzle; we absolutely need dedicated Traffic Control Officers, dedicated tow trucks and other layers to ensure these major investments yield major improvements.**

Turning to curbside management, again we see investments that must be followed up with enforcement and active management. **Making the Streatery program permanent and accessible, and enforcing legal use of Pickup-Dropoff Zones (PUDOs), will be majorly important for recovery in the short, medium and long term.** I won't be alone in registering astonishment during the earlier part of this hearing when DPW informed us that they sometimes have to stop towing for lack of space to put vehicles in. **That kind of limitation will lead to no meaningful enforcement program until it's eliminated by leadership - that includes but goes beyond DDOT.**

In terms of engagement, we appreciate Director Lott's efforts to streamline the community input process while also strongly encouraging that the baby not be thrown out with the bathwater. **Early engagement with strategic stakeholders such as DCST, ANCs and the Transportation Equity Network can yield great returns in ensuring projects, such as the K St Transitway and bus lanes, are the powerhouse successes that they can be.**

We furthermore want to encourage the Director in his new role to pilot programs and unique solutions for moving people and things throughout the District. Dedicating staff to **support new initiatives in mobility, experimentation, and pilots would help advance our thinking and position DC as a hub for new and innovative mobility solutions.**

When it comes to micromobility, DDOT has the talent and capabilities, but sometimes seems to be in a reactive mode instead of leading the conversation on the roles these should play in our mobility universe. The Council, I'd be remiss not to note, can do its part by prioritizing legislation that makes it easier, not harder, for these high-potential modes to flourish.

The overarching issue at play here is right of way, and that means the Director will need to guide the agency to make explicit choices and tradeoffs because by definition not everyone gets to have right of way in every place. Some agencies address this as a modal hierarchy, which I think could be helpful in making decisions about what to prioritize and where. I believe that, with the right support, Director Lott is able to lead in this respect, and I would volunteer DCST as a willing partner in helping identify supporting actions. **But we'd also highlight the value of longer-term measures such as congestion pricing, which DDOT is exploring in partnership with DCST, to manage demand more pro-actively and ensure we're in a position to achieve those mode shift goals.**

DCST would like to see DC firstly lay out that clear agenda for our transportation system - and more specifically how that fits into a recovery framework - and secondly identify some clear priorities for community engagement and where it should sit.

Let's be responsible in planning for DC's future. We can't absorb an endless number of cars on the road; whether it's DC's sustainability, equity or health goals you most care about or simply the amount of space we have available, that's square one for making a plan. To achieve recovery, DC needs people to come back, people of all stripes, not just three or four stripes. And they will do that if we ensure our city is not just easy to get around without a car, but enjoyable. **We need people to get out of their homes and personal vehicles, because without time spent among each other, the vitality, dynamism and communal activity of the city is lost. If DC can figure out a modal hierarchy and go for it, we'll be able to capitalize on our competitive advantages as a city and regenerate as a place where people want to live, work, raise children. It will take tradeoffs.**

I believe that, with the right focus, Everett Lott is a strong incumbent to pursue these goals, and I'm excited to continue working with him.

Thank you very much, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Caitlin Rogger

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Executive Director
DC Sustainable Transportation