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80 M St SE ★ Washington, DC 20003 ★ 202-578-5075 ★ info@dcstcoalition.org

**Testimony by Caitlin Rogger, Executive Director
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
DDOT Budget Hearing
March 30, 2023**

Good morning Chair Allen and Members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment.

I'm testifying on behalf of the DC Sustainable Transportation (DCST) Coalition, of which I serve as executive director. DCST is a nonprofit organization that brings together business, advocacy and government entities to make DC a global leader in fast, reliable, safe and sustainable transportation.

Our members include ten of DC's Business Improvement Districts, the Federal City Council, Events DC, the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the Sierra Club DC chapter, the Greater Washington Partnership, Greater Greater Washington, the Transportation Equity Network, and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association.

DCST appreciates the challenging position that District government faces: needing to cut expenditures at a time when costs are increasing, yet demands remain as pressing and varied as ever. We're here today to comment on a few highlights of the proposed budget, but also some proposed cuts that may create short-term savings at long-term cost and should be reconsidered.

Bus priority and bike infrastructure

We commend Mayor Bowser on preserving DDOT's capacity for building out her vision for bus priority in the District. This investment should make it possible for this important and well-run program to deliver on its objectives and improve mobility, sustainability, and equity throughout

the District. **In a constrained time, the bus is a true multi-purpose tool:** it connects workers to jobs, it connects residents to services, it does all of this at a fraction of the cost of cars on per-person-basis, and every trip that shifts from car to bus is a win for our sustainability.

Similarly, DCST is pleased to note that the budget provides for additional investment in the Capital BikeShare program, and preserves the capacity of the wider bicycle infrastructure program to build on existing success. In a recent report we commissioned on travel trends in DC, the study team found that **biking is the only mode of transportation that people are doing more of in the wake of the pandemic**, a great and valuable clue for how preferences have shifted. We don't drive as much; we don't take transit as much (though bus is almost fully recovered); we don't even walk as much as we did before. But more of us ride bikes than ever before, and data [shows](#) that [cycling](#) is a strong investment for local dining and retail sales as well as improving the public realm, creates benefits for safety and general health, and reduces carbon emissions. **If we're paying attention to consumer demand, it's clear that biking is an important part of our economic recovery.** The shift in preferences is thanks in part to DDOT's build-out of the bike lane network, which we fully support as we look for ways for DC to meet residents' demand for cycling and work to create a city where more people want to live and work.

Circulator

I want to shift now to highlight some proposals that would benefit from reconsideration. Firstly, the proposal to reduce **Circulator services** came as not a surprise but a shock to the coalition and the many constituencies we represent. Some may recall that DCST played a founding role in both creating and operating the Circulator until a few years ago and had an ongoing relationship with DC government concerning its operation. Unfortunately this is the second time in three years the administration has come out, after zero consultation, with a proposal that would significantly alter the service, the first being the proposal to eliminate Circulator fares. No data has been provided concerning ridership or why these routes were selected, or how people who rely on this service now are expected to move around, if indeed any thought has been given to their needs.

The deputy mayor publicly justified [cutting Circulator services by half](#) because electrification has increased the cost of running the fleet. Electrification is a worthwhile goal, but as WMATA's General Manager [observed recently](#), **shifting trips from cars to buses is substantially better for the environment than shifting those buses' energy source**, especially given the fact that batteries come with their own negative environmental impacts. In a time of fiscal constraint, electrification, not service, is the priority to postpone. Certainly **DDOT should be asked to account for the riders left without a ride**; how many are there, when do they ride, what are their alternatives? Has there been any thought to the impact on the economy of cutting popular transit services that serve local businesses?

Safety and Vision Zero

DCST is keen to see more substantive progress on safety and traffic calming given the findings of the recent Vision Zero audit report. We would strongly **encourage that the funds raised by the Mayor's proposal to increase traffic cameras by 342 be applied to interventions that systematically improve traffic safety and alternatives to driving.**

Years of [research](#) and [other evidence](#) show that using these funds for transportation - rather than for general revenue - reduces opposition to traffic cameras, and improves their capacity as tools to improve economic and racial equity. (Persons of color as well as people living on low incomes are less likely to drive, but more likely to be hurt or killed by drivers). **We need cameras, but we need them for safety.** Furthermore, Using profits from ATE as general revenue violates [§ 50-921.20 of the D.C. Code](#), "Vision Zero Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Fund," which states, "the Fund shall be used solely to enhance the safety and quality of pedestrian and bicycle transportation, including education, engineering, and enforcement efforts designed to calm traffic and provide safe routes."

Metro for DC

DCST applauds the Mayor's long-term support for the bus as a means of improving equity and sustainability, and as part of that vision would have hoped that there is room for funding Metro for DC, a bold and forward-looking program. **While fare-free Metrobus can encourage mobility and, as the Mayor has stated is her intention, put more money back in the pockets of DC residents, we're just as enthusiastic about the law's provision for a \$10 million dedicated annual fund for improving bus services and all-night service on twelve lines**, which could do a lot to improve options for third shift workers as well as create more of a vibrant night time economy at a time when we clearly must diversify our tax base. We'd very much like to see this initiative fully funded, and appreciate the Council's vision in putting it forward.

K Street Transitway

It's vitally important that our central business district's infrastructure be redesigned around the principles of a sustainable, forward-looking DC. The K St Transitway project can deliver this vision, and we'd ask that it is funded this year with a design that prioritizes safety, transit, walking, and cycling, and dynamic curbside activity.

The Covid pandemic changed the landscape for downtown mobility needs, including how many people want to be downtown, when, and how they prefer to get there. While DDOT has made commendable efforts to accommodate the shifting environment in late-stage design processes, it's challenging to build a strong project on the back of an outdated vision. The K St Transitway is an important project, but since the current designs aren't what the District needs from a once-in-a-generation investment of this scale, more work is needed to get the priorities and design right.

For our downtown areas to thrive, we need workers, residents, and visitors to be able to move around it safely and enjoyably, and with a design that emphasizes modes of transportation that can move lots of people with less space, which will be imperative as the vision for more residents downtown is realized. While we're optimistic that the design can be gotten right in the coming months, it requires time, vision, and engagement between DDOT and stakeholders.

Road Pricing Report

DCST would like to see the **executive and legislative branches work together to find a solution to releasing the road or decongestion pricing report**, to ensure compliance with DC law.

Overall, we see many opportunities in the proposed budget and also some areas to carefully reconsider. We appreciate the opportunity to offer our comments and look forward to continuing to work with DDOT, the administration, and the Council to keep making progress on our shared mobility goals.

Curbside

DCST continues to be keen to see greater prioritization of curbside management, ideally a new pilot on parking reform or short term pickup-dropoff services. Perhaps this could be piloted on K St as an opportunity for innovation.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caitlin Rogger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caitlin Rogger

Executive Director

DC Sustainable Transportation