



**Government of the District of Columbia
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3/4G**

Chevy Chase, Barnaby Woods, Hawthorne

5601 Connecticut Avenue N.W. P.O. Box 6252 Washington, D.C. 20015
3G@anc.dc.gov <http://www.anc3g.org> YouTube: ANC3G Office: 202.363.5803

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**ANC 3/4G Testimony Before the
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Performance Oversight Hearing on the Department of Transportation
February 18, 2022**

Chairperson Cheh and members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment. I am Lisa Gore, Vice Chair of ANC 3/4G. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the District Department of Transportation's (DDOT) performance over the past year. I am testifying on behalf of our Commission, which authorized this testimony at its properly noticed February 14, 2022, public meeting by a vote of 7 (yes), 0 (no), 0 (abstentions) (a quorum being 4).

Our Commission interacts more frequently with the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) than any other District agency. In the last year, we have worked with DDOT on numerous street paving projects, sidewalk installations and repairs, the reconstruction of Oregon Avenue, the successful completion of the Chestnut Street Sidewalk project, Urban Forestry issues, the Broad Branch Road Rehabilitation, and ongoing traffic calming measures, among many other issues.

We are encouraged that DDOT continues to improve its services, and we have had success in working

with Director Everett Lott, Deputy Director Sharon Kershbaum, Chief Performance Officer John Thomas, Traffic Safety Branch Manager Sahar Nabaee, and their team to advance our community's transportation needs.

We particularly want to commend the work of Christian Pineiro, Community Engagement Specialist, Ward 3 and Emir Gur-Ravantab, Liaison, Ward 3, Mayor's Office of Community Relations and Services. Without their assistance, the work of the Commission would be appreciably more difficult (and frustrating).

Nevertheless, our streets remain unsafe because of speeding vehicles and DDOT's failure to install traffic calming measures, many of our sidewalks remain broken including some that would appear to violate Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, and the wait times before DDOT assesses a problem let alone takes action to correct it is far too long and poses safety concerns, especially to our most vulnerable residents.

Most problematic however is the systematic failure of DDOT safety engineers and other personnel to engage with us to help find solutions. The standard operating procedure for DDOT is to make its assessment and provide its "final" answer. If the answer is no, (see for example the case study below on Western Avenue), they simply close the case. Of course, in a more functional organization, the response should be "we can't fix the problem you identified in the manner you sought but let's work together to see what other solutions are possible to mitigate the situation." This lack of engagement and dialogue between DDOT and the ANC (and our community members) to help get to "yes" is an area that this committee's oversight functions should address.

Below are a few of the many longstanding concerns that require DDOT's prompt attention. While we do not expect this committee to address these individual issues, they are identified as examples of the kinds of problems that remain unattended to and as to which we have no transparency into if or when DDOT will address them.

Military Road-Chevy Chase Parkway Intersection

The Commission has been working with DDOT and nearby residents to get changes made at the intersection to reduce vehicle accidents. Four years ago, after reviewing accidents

records, DDOT took a number of steps, including installing a sidewalk on the northeast side of Chevy Chase Parkway, eliminating several parking places along Military Road to improve visibility for drivers and erecting short-lived pedestrian crossing signs on Military Road. It also proposed making Chevy Chase Parkway one way heading north but dropped the idea after the proposal prompted strong opposition by residents of nearby Legation Street who were concerned the move would increase traffic on their street.

Accidents continued to occur. DDOT concluded more than a year ago that more safety measures were needed. The department re-floated the one-way proposal. In a July 2021 site meeting with several of my ANC colleagues, DDOT agreed to a series of changes, including enlarging STOP signs at the intersection, painting pavement warning signs, and installing flex-post islands on Chevy Chase Parkway as it approaches Military Road from the north and south. It took DDOT until mid November to implement the changes. In the intervening period, there were several accidents, including one in which a car careened onto the sidewalk along Military Road, frightening neighbors about the danger to children who use the sidewalk on their way to and from school.

The changes now in place appear to have made some difference in terms of improving safety, but have not eliminated accidents altogether. A two-car crash at the intersection February 12th tied up traffic for several hours. Luckily, no one was hurt.

Even before the most recent accident, commissioners and neighbors near the intersection had been seeking a meeting with DDOT to discuss additional steps, including removing a parking place on the northwest corner of Chevy Chase Parkway to make room for cars to maneuver around the flex-post island, as well as a mirror to help improve sight lines. No meeting has occurred to date. Additional measures are needed including the possibility of installing "Don't Block The Box" pavement markings at the intersection.

In general, DDOT's view appears to be that having invested some resources at the intersection, it is time for the agency to move on. This is unfortunate because the additional corrective actions that would markedly improve safety are low-cost and could contribute to making the original investment successful.

We ask that DDOT meet with neighbors and the Commission and implement further safety measures before still other accidents occur. We ask the Council to exercise its oversight authority to ensure that this happens in a timely manner.

Chevy Chase Parkway between Jennifer Street and Military Road

The residents on Chevy Chase Parkway have been pressing for too many years to get a sidewalk on the heavily traversed space between Jenifer Street and Military Road where students are forced to walk on the road to get to Deal Middle School and Wilson High school. The project underwent a Traffic Safety Investigation (TSI) study, approved for sidewalk installation and placed on a scheduled list for projects in FY 2021. It was determined, however, that funding was lacking, and the project needed to be pushed into 2022.

Presently, we have been told that funding may not be available in FY 2022 and may need further assessment. One complicating factor is the presence of several large trees that the sidewalk would have to navigate. Doing so apparently requires the tree and sidewalk divisions to coordinate. To our knowledge this has yet to occur. The residents of our Commission are entitled to know the status of the project. Presently, pedestrians must continue to compete with speeding cars and the Commission has no transparency when, or if, this situation will be mitigated.

We have two requests: 1) DDOT must promptly provide an answer on when this sidewalk need will be addressed; and 2) DDOT needs to provide the Commission with the criteria by which projects are advanced or demoted so we can prioritize our requests to DDOT.

Infrastructure Maintenance

We recognize the challenges that DDOT faces as it works to repair and maintain our aging transportation infrastructure and make critical safety improvements. We do not expect perfection, and we understand that mistakes will occur, and requests for remediation require prioritization across the city. However, the Commission is concerned that the time lag between 311 or other requests is too long, especially when DDOT offers no explanation for the delays when pressed for an answer. Some 311 requests to repair extremely hazardous sidewalks have gone

unacknowledged and unrepaired for years (e.g., 5317 Broad Branch Road, NW, 311 Request No. 21-00202230). There continue to be instances when residents do not receive the required notice on their street.

DDOT must properly maintain community infrastructure to keep our residents safe, especially green infrastructure installations. Green infrastructure, including bio-retention cells and impervious pavers, must be adequately supported and cleaned to prevent failures that will undermine their storm water maintenance function and may lead to higher costs associated with repairs. To this end, DDOT might consider a program that allows neighbors to “adopt” green infrastructure, including bio-retention cells and impervious paver projects.

Lafayette Elementary School

We need to make our streets safe for the most vulnerable — e.g., children traveling to and from school. Commissioner Zeldin, in whose Single Member District Lafayette resides, repeatedly has requested that speed humps and other traffic calming measure be installed around the perimeter of the school. To date, few, if any, measures have been implemented. Indeed, Commissioner Zeldin’s request that yellow signs be posted on 32nd Street and other streets that, while not immediately adjacent to the school, are feeder streets to Lafayette has been rejected by DDOT because, according to DDOT, they are not proximate to the school. The illogic of this frankly is stunning.

It is worth noting, too, the absence of a sufficient number of traffic control officers to help students cross the street and control vehicular traffic especially at the start and end of each school day. We understand that this is a District-wide problem that DDOT needs to address.

Public Transportation

Our community needs to make buses truly accessible and reliable so that they provide a viable alternative to more dangerous transportation modes. Instead of increasing access to public transportation, we face the possibility that critical bus routes will be permanently reduced with no viable replacement (e.g., micro transit services). Specifically, the possible elimination of the E6 and rerouting of the M4 bus line in a way that denies access to Connecticut Avenue and Friendship Heights

creates a real and present danger to students who rely on these buses to get to and from the schools in our area, seniors who depend on the bus to get to shopping and medical appointments, and workers who use these buses to commute to their jobs. Elimination or reduction in these bus lines run directly counter to the Mayor's Vision Zero goals. With the prospect of the installation of bike routes on Connecticut Avenue, these reductions/eliminations are even more harmful to the well-being of our Community and especially our seniors.

DDOT needs to develop a work-around to address this problem.

Western Avenue

Traffic on Western Avenue routinely exceeds the posted 25 mph speed limit. At night especially, cars travel closer to 40 mph. Crossing Western Avenue is dangerous for pedestrians. Cars endeavoring to enter onto Western from most streets do so at considerable risk. Notwithstanding the danger that Western Ave poses, DDOT has yet to install the meaningful traffic calming measure that our Commission has requested for many years. The most recent reason DDOT offered, in response to 311 requests, from Commissioners Gore and Zeldin as well as residents of Western Avenue, for rejecting additional stop signs on Western is as follows:

"Thank you for your Traffic Safety Investigation. The intersection of Webster (sic) Ave & Tennyson St NW was previously investigated for an all-way Stop and it did not warrant such action. A stop sign is used to assign right of way at an intersection, it is not an effective means to control speeding. Research shows that where stop signs are installed as "deterrents" or "speed breakers", there are high incidences of intentional violations resulting in accidents.

Moreover, according to the Street Department of the City of Spokane many people believe that installing STOP signs on all approaches to an intersection will result in fewer collisions. This is not always the case, however. Although the crash severity may be lessened, drivers are penalized by the additional delay and higher vehicle operating costs (fuel, brakes, etc.). There is no real evidence to indicate that

STOP signs decrease the speed of traffic. Impatient drivers view the additional delay caused by unwarranted STOP signs as "lost time" to be made up by driving at higher speeds between STOP signs. Unwarranted STOP signs breed disrespect by motorists who tend to ignore them or slow down without stopping. This can sometimes lead to tragic consequences."

Once again, DDOT's logic strains credulity. It is only a matter of time before someone is killed on Western Avenue. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that DDOT's traffic engineers appear to be working at cross purposes with the Mayor's Vision Zero goals and the best interests of our community. Meeting with the Commission and the community to find a mutually acceptable solution is necessary. It is not

acceptable that DDOT feels it can make a unilateral decision, close the case, and walk away from a problem that has not been solved.

Connecticut Avenue Bike Lanes

Our Commission is on record in supporting Concept C for protected bike lanes on Connecticut Avenue. We were very pleased that the Mayor came out in support of this plan. While this project is likely years away, it is important that DDOT provide more visibility to existing bike routes on all streets. Additionally, DDOT needs to begin taking immediate steps to ensure that traffic on Connecticut Ave is not directed onto our less-traveled side streets, including Nevada Avenue where vehicles often travel south at high speeds to get to Nebraska Avenue. Signage and other measures must be installed now before apps like Waze or Google Maps begin routing cars onto side streets in greater numbers than is presently the case. We also request that DDOT work closely with the Commission on concerns related to parking availability and ADA accessibility for drivers once protected bike lanes are installed.

The 311 system

Citizens and ANC Commissioners alike are required to enter into the Mayor's 311 system any requests for service. While entering the requests into the system can be tricky it is navigable. The output from the system is very confusing and needs improvement. Here is a typical example of what happens: An entry is made asking for a TSI for a traffic calming measure like a speed hump.

When the TSI is completed (often months later) the 311 system generates an email indicating that it has been completed. A second automated email asks "How did we do?" The problem is that what the TSI determined often is not provided or, if provided, (especially if the request is denied) is so cursory as to not provide clarity or an opportunity to contest the determination. This system needs enhancing.

We have been advised that DDOT is launching a new TSI program. According to the DDOT announcement "Our newly launched TSI program provides a mechanism for DDOT to investigate roadway and intersection concerns, analyze existing conditions, and provide a plan for safety mitigations, if warranted. Our new TSI Dashboard tracks the TSI process from start to finish and gives residents the ability to readily check the status of a TSI."

We look forward to seeing how this is implemented but as the expression goes, we will trust and verify.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of our Commission.