



Testimony before the Hon. Mary Cheh
Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Environment
Regarding:

FY2020 Budget Oversight Hearing for the Department of Transportation

By Cheryl Cort, Policy Director
April 11, 2019

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG). The Coalition for Smarter Growth is the leading organization working locally in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region dedicated to making the case for smart growth. Our mission is to promote walkable, inclusive, and transit-oriented communities, and the land use and transportation policies and investments needed to make those communities flourish.

D.C. is struggling with a spike in traffic deaths, declining transit ridership, and unreliable and slow bus service. We can and must do a better job of providing safe, reliable and affordable ways to travel. While improvements to walk and bicycle access and safety, and better bus service all specifically benefit lower income D.C. residents, everyone benefits from a safer and more efficient transportation system.

D.C. should be proud that it has the highest walk and bike to work rate in the country at 18 percent. This rate could be even higher if we enabled employees to choose to convert an employer-provided parking subsidy into a transit, walk or bicycle commute benefit. We thank Chairman Cheh for co-introducing the Transportation Benefits Equity Act to help accomplish that straightforward approach to incentivizing more sustainable commutes and reducing traffic congestion for everyone.

This year's budget has many important transportation initiatives that we commend, especially:

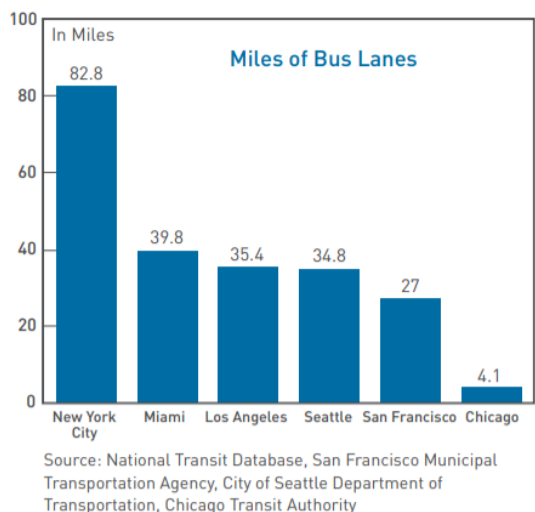
- Vision Zero investments, including Alabama Ave. SE safety improvements
- Dedicated funding for Metro
- K Street Transitway
- 16th Street Bus lanes and service improvements
- H & I Streets bus lane pilot
- Expanded bus service, including Circulator
- Bus stop improvements to ease access to stops and facilitate vehicle boarding

The proposed budget moves important projects forward. In addition to these investments, we urge the Council to continue to support DDOT's efforts to prioritize safety outcomes in infrastructure design and implementation, and to build out the essential pedestrian and bicycling facilities needed to make walking and bicycling safe and practical choices for all D.C. residents, from age 7 to 70.

We especially want to call out the importance of bus system improvements. Every day, D.C. residents ride the bus 200,000 times a day to get to and from work, or school, or carry out an errand. Bus service is especially critical for lower income residents who have far lower incomes, on average, than other commuters. Bus service extends to all the corners of the city and offers access to frequent transit service far beyond what D.C.’s Metrorail stations can do. Despite the District’s investment in the Circulator, and bold plans for High Capacity and Frequent Transit in moveDC, bus service for most residents is too often slow and unreliable.

On average, Metrobuses are slowing down 1 mph each year, driving up costs for the same, or slower service. Slow and unreliable service plays an important role in declines in bus ridership. To turn this around, we need bold new investments and policies to make bus transit a mode of choice. A 1 percent increase in average bus speeds would unlock a savings equal to 4 percent in operating cost savings.ⁱ

We are excited to support the FY20 budget proposals to implement 16th Street dedicated bus lanes, the K Street Transitway, and the summer H and I Streets rush hour bus lanes pilot. These investments are a great start to a new era of delivering a priority bus system that gets hundreds of thousands of D.C. residents and visitors where they need to go, safely and efficiently. Building on this budget, we ask the Council and DDOT to jumpstart the District’s new priority bus system by accelerating implementation of dedicated bus lanes, and the other improvements we need to make this transit service faster and more reliable.



DDOT and WMATA have considered and studied many improvements, but progress has been too slow. We have less than a mile of a dedicated bus lane for the whole city (on Georgia Avenue), and a limited number of traffic signal priority (TSP) and queue jumps at intersections. This record does not compare favorably to leading cities around the country (see graph on miles of bus lanes).

For high ridership routes, we need to accelerate needed treatments and investments including: dedicated transit lanes, effective enforcement of those lanes, all door boarding, faster fare payment, traffic signal priority (TSP), queue jumps, rationalized routes and stop spacing. We ask that you continue to support the funding, policy and personnel that DDOT needs to plan and implement priority bus service called for in moveDC. MoveDC focuses on 47 miles of dedicated transit lanes for High Capacity Transit (streetcar and bus), 22 miles of High Capacity Transit in shared lanes, along with WMATA’s 10 D.C. Priority Corridor Network plans for high ridership routes.

Source: Active Transportation Alliance, Speeding Up Buses, 2018. <http://activetrans.org/sites/files/SpeedingUpBuses.pdf>

DDOT has indicated that it is forming an interdisciplinary team to plan and implement bus lanes and service improvements. This new focus is essential to taking bus priority plans that have languished and expedite their implementation. Fast reliable service will not only win back riders, it will build the foundation for the city’s new era of an equitable, sustainable, and growing economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

ⁱ P. 172, https://bustransformationproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/20190118-Bus-System-Today_FINAL.pdf