



DC PRESERVATION LEAGUE

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The mission of the DC Preservation League is to preserve, and protect the historic and built environment of Washington, DC, through advocacy and education.

Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Council members:

On behalf of the DC Preservation League (DCPL), I am writing in opposition to the proposed legislation # B18-0823 "Transportation Infrastructure Amendment Act of 2010." DCPL is very much in favor of bringing streetcars back to the city, but feels that the introduction of overhead wires to do this will negatively impact the character of the historic streetscapes, viewsheds, and buildings within the L'Enfant Plan and compromise the integrity of historic neighborhoods across the city. The return of a streetcar system to the city will affect its character for decades to come and should be thoroughly considered for positive and negative impacts it will have on the way people live, work, and visit the Nation's Capital.

The 1791 L'Enfant Plan for the City of Washington is nationally significant, and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1997. The plan is bounded by Florida Avenue from Rock Creek, NW to 15th Street, NE; then south to C Street, and eastward to the Anacostia River—the same boundaries established more than 200 years ago. In addition, the city includes forty-six areas designated as historic districts under the City's preservation ordinance. The proposed streetcar system will run through, or adjacent to roughly thirteen of those districts.

A system proposed to be powered by overhead wires will require substantial support structures along the routes. These new structures will be incompatible additions to these historic districts. DCPL does not feel that the District has sufficiently studied the impact of overhead wires on the L'Enfant city, its significant vistas and historic neighborhoods. We ask that Council direct the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to thoroughly study the options of a system without overhead wires. This direction should also include a comprehensive plan for the desired streetcar system, providing residents a better understanding of what this system will mean to them and their communities. It is possible that funding for such a study might be available through foundations such as the Ford Foundation, which just announced its commitment of \$200 million for smart growth planning.

DCPL is further concerned about the letter dated May 14, 2010 from Gabe Klein, Director of DDOT, to Chairman Gray in response to his questions. In response to question 11(b), the letter states that "DDOT recognizes the unique nature of the District's monumental viewsheds. DDOT is committed to operating a system that can run wireless for limited distances across monumental viewsheds, such as the Mall, 16th Street, and other areas with clear sightlines of key monuments or memorials..." While these viewsheds are critical, they are not the only vistas that are important to the L'Enfant Plan and the character of our city.

The [application](#) for listing the L'Enfant Plan in the National Register of Historic Places states: "All vistas except those among Mall sites are axial along a street or avenue: the vista is calculated as the area between the farthest points on a straight alignment. Generally the historic vistas can be considered to terminate at the historic boundary of the L'Enfant Plan and are considered a critical element of the plan." A listing of significant viewsheds is included in the above-cited document on pages 28-29.

DCPL supports the District's effort to provide suitable and productive transit systems that are sustainable and user-friendly. We cannot however support the *ad hoc* planning of a system that will negatively impact the character of DC's historic buildings and neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca A. Miller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Rebecca Miller
Executive Director

cc: The Honorable Adrian Fenty
Harriet Tregoning, Director, DC Office of Planning
David Maloney, SHPO
Gabe Klein, DDOT