



**Testimony of
The Committee of 100 on the Federal City**

**PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING ON
FY 2009-2010 SPENDING AND PERFORMANCE BY
THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

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Chairman Graham and Members of the Committee:

I am Meg Maguire, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Committee of 100 on the Federal City. The Committee has been a long and active supporter and advocate of mass transit and we appreciate the opportunity to testify today on two transportation issues – Metro and streetcars.

First, we are alarmed about the dysfunction and disrepair of Metro. Metro should be a top priority for city, regional and federal funding, management restructuring, staff and operator training. We ask the Mayor, the Department of Transportation and the DC City Council to ramp up your regional leadership, to challenge Maryland and Virginia to greater cooperation, and to seek long-term federal commitments for funding of this once-proud system. Our city cannot afford the ripple effect of negative consequences from Metro's failure – more traffic on our clogged streets; more air and noise pollution; higher concentrations of CO2 emissions; and loss of mobility and accessibility for our residents, including our children who travel to school and many activities all over the city. ***Investment in Metro needs to be our #1 public transportation priority until we restore the system to a safe, reliable and modern condition.***

Second, we have fundamental planning questions about streetcars, the newest proposed member of the DC transit family. Neighborhood and citywide bloggers are abuzz with skepticism and support, serious questions and snide dismissals. Everyone has an opinion but there are few shared facts. Many of the routes seem promising, but others – like 8th St., SE and NE that is mostly residential with frequent buses – really don't make sense. The Comprehensive Plan calls for streetcars in underserved areas, yet much of the proposal places streetcars in areas well served by other mass transit. It is no wonder that people are confused and irritated.

The 2005 DC Transit Improvements Alternatives Analysis stated in very general terms how streetcars could complement our transit system, but since

then virtually no additional planning studies have been published showing how this system would actually operate. We now have three streetcars sitting in storage, uncertain when the city will launch them; or how the city will power, staff or service them.

In an attempt to separate the wheat from the chaff, members of our Subcommittee on Transportation have surveyed the entire three-staged proposed route. We are preparing a report that we can share with you in about six weeks. Further, we are working with the Capitol Hill Restoration Society to investigate highly promising propulsion technologies that do not require overhead wires. (Monte Edwards will address these technologies in his report.)

The more we learn, the longer is our list of questions that Council needs to address:

I. Cost/Revenue

- What will each capital component of the system cost – tracks, streetcars, stanchions, wires and passenger stops?
- How many support facilities such as storage yards, maintenance facilities, turn-around areas will the completed system require? How big will they be? What is at these locations now and what will it cost to acquire and develop them state-of-the-art maintenance facilities?
- What would be the required staffing for each stage of the project? How much would this cost?
- What are the rider and revenue assumptions for each line in the system?

II. Operations Along Routes

- Where will the tracks be laid along all of the streets? How will the streetcar affect parking and freight off-loading along each street? How will passengers safely enter and exit cars?
- Where will the cars turn around on each route? Right now, tracks just abruptly terminate, and it is unclear from any materials how they loop.
- How will the streetcars climb steep grades such as the H St. Bridge? In areas of steeper topography, will the cars be able to get up hills?
- How will the streetcars operate on narrow streets? Will they go just one way? Or will there be two sets of tracks in the street?
- Is the newly configured 11th St. Bridge strong enough to have streetcars with extenders going in both directions at the same time? It doesn't appear to be so from the plans.

III. Propulsion Technologies

- With the well-developed and tested propulsion technologies on the market that meet the requirements under Buy America, and that are ideally suited to DC's legal commitment of clearing our streets of overhead wires, ***why is DC settling for an inferior, 20th century technology of catenary wires? Why are we not using our power to work with vendors to show what the 21st century streetcar can be in our world-class city?***
- Has DDOT sat down in an open and transparent way with a variety of vendors and laid out the challenge that ***we will accept only the best for this city, and we will reward the***

vendor that can power our streetcars without overhead wires and get the job done quickly.

- We hear from our city officials that they have settled on one course, one vendor and one approach. It leads us to ask, what has been promised and what is still on the table for discussion?

IV. Office of Planning Study

- Will the two-year, \$2 million Office of Planning study announced at Wednesday's hearing focus on implementing the Comprehensive Plan visions for the neighborhoods adjacent to streetcars? Will a thoughtful and nuanced approach be adopted to height and mass, unlike what we have seen proposed for the area behind Union Station?

V. Overhead Wires

The Committee of 100 has adopted a resolution against overhead streetcar wires. Other citizen's organizations have either signed on or are considering doing so. Likewise, the Capitol Hill Restoration Society and Stanton Park Neighborhood Association have adopted resolutions opposing wires. We oppose overhead wires, not just in a narrowly framed iconic federal snapshot, or in upscale historic neighborhoods.

The term "view shed" protection is being misused as if we are willing to be horses in blinders, only able to look straight ahead. If you haven't done so, travel the proposed streetcar route and look at the various intersections in all four directions. We believe that you will be struck as we are by the very long vistas on all of the wide streets – K St., Rhode Island Ave., Benning Road; by the bustling activity of reviving neighborhoods along 14th St. and Georgia; and by the huge potential of new development along Rhode Island Avenue. Many streets have trees, but the tree canopy will never meet to obscure the wires or the stanchions on which they rest. Further, wires are now just slender and straight. Streetcars must turn corners and get around curves. We have attached three sketches of how these wires will look at intersections.

We especially bridle at the notion that somehow overhead wires should blight Anacostia and H Street as the first-out-of-the-gate locations. Don't these areas deserve to be free from stanchions and wires – to look as good as the Federal City? And does Brookland really want more wires along Michigan Avenue when the city still has not removed the old utility wires? **We believe the city is selling our neighborhoods short and that there are other technologies that can be deployed here and now. Therefore, we oppose overhead wires along the entire streetcar route.**

Almost every conversation about streetcars these past few months begins with, "In Portland they do so and so..." I love Portland too, and of course, we can and should learn from this and every other city, especially Charlotte, NC that plans a large wireless extension to its system. But we can be even better than they are, adopting more advanced technologies for the future.

Our nation's capital must be a showcase in every way – from Metro to Metrobus, from Great Streets to streetcars, from expansive view shed protection to neighborhood preservation and sound economic development. We ask the City Council to settle for nothing but the very best streetcar system for *all our neighborhoods*. Thank you.

OVERHEAD STREETCAR WIRES AT INTERSECTIONS

Diagrams courtesy of *Reducing the Visual Impact of Overhead Contact Systems, TRB, 1995.*

