

Testimony to the Council of DC
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Public Roundtable on The Surge in Traffic Crashes, Fatalities,
and Injuries in the District and the Urgent Need to Fully Fund the
Vision Zero Enhancement Omnibus Amendment Act
May 13, 2021

My name is J. Swiderski; I am an Adams Morgan resident and the Ward 1 representative to the Pedestrian Advisory Council. In addition to joining my colleagues in our organization's testimony, I have some additional personal comments to add.

As I wrote to this Committee's post-pandemic transportation roundtable seven weeks ago, the desperate need to stem climate change, and protect our environment generally, demands that we not simply give in and return to the car-centric mobility of the recent past. As my friend Rachel Maisler told this committee in February, if we want to keep those folks who discovered bikes during the last year riding, the answer is simple: "Give us more safe places to ride. . . whatever it takes."¹

We need more, wider, and more connected sidewalks and bike lanes, all across the District, and we need DDOT to be less timid about proposing and pushing for them. A good rule is "1 of each before 2 of any"—that is, before any road gets a second lane, it should have a bus lane or bike lanes.² Conversely, we should be looking at any road that already has multiple lanes in each direction and make one into a bus lane or space for people walking and cycling.

And yet, examples across the city show how DDOT plans first and primarily for automotive traffic still, and then bikes and pedestrians get to nibble around the edges, if there's anything left over. In some cases, bikes and pedestrians are forced to fight for scraps at the edge of massive suburban-style highways even in the heart of our city, as at Dave Thomas Circle or on 11th Street Southeast at the edge of the Navy Yard, where a seven-lane road will get a protected bike lane by shaving off part of the sidewalk.³

DC's 2015 commitment—*Mayor Bowser's* commitment—to [Vision Zero](#) calls for lower speeds and safer places to ride, and DC's repeated commitments to lowering traffic, pollution, and drive-alone modeshare all *require* taking space from cars and dedicating it to making it safer and more comfortable to use non-automotive modes. And yet we still see projects like the reconstruction of Massachusetts Avenue west of Dupont go forward without any rethinking of the space. As DDOT's engineer said⁴ during the project meeting in February after several questions about the lack of bike lanes, "We're reconstructing the existing roadway, not planning for the future." Indeed.

¹ <https://twitter.com/infinitebuffalo/status/1365363568154193922>

² <https://twitter.com/jehiah/status/1373996419573547009/>

³ <https://twitter.com/coreyholman/status/1379968496650584066>

⁴ <https://twitter.com/infinitebuffalo/status/1364364990501834757>

This goes beyond funding. DDOT needs to get serious about Vision Zero, about safe accommodations, and about its own long term plans and to train its staff, starting, apparently, at the top, on what they mean broadly and for the specific projects they are working on.

In 2016, Linda Bailey, then the Executive Director of the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), wrote⁵ that “Elected officials should be champions for safe street designs.” The record and rising number of “lives lost is a wake-up call, yet we know how to stem this epidemic. Better design will save lives and make our streets safer.” Mayor Bowser hired her to be DDOT’s Vision Zero Director, but as the Department’s continuing record shows, on Safe Accommodations, on the Eastern Downtown Protected Lanes, and so many more projects and regulations collecting dust on shelves, the rest of us still need you on this Council to be our champions. We need you to demand more of this Administration.

⁵ “Statement: 35,092 traffic deaths is a call to action.” Aug 31, 2016. <https://nacto.org/2016/08/31/traffic-deaths/>