

Testimony of the DC Pedestrian Advisory Council  
Council of DC, Committee on Transportation and the Environment  
FY 2022 Budget Hearing, Department of Transportation

June 10, 2021

The DC Pedestrian Advisory Council (PAC) was established by the Pedestrian Advisory Council Establishment Act of 2009 “to serve as the advisory body to the Mayor, the Council of the District of Columbia, and the District agencies on matters pertaining to the improvement of pedestrian safety and accessibility.”<sup>1</sup>

While the Department has made progress, pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries continue to increase; over a quarter of major injuries—and more than half of fatalities—on DC roads in the first half of 2021 have been suffered by pedestrians.<sup>2</sup> While two years ago we were encouraged by what we called “the strengthened mayoral commitment to the District’s Vision Zero initiative,”<sup>3</sup> that commitment is challenged by this year’s failure to fund the Vision Zero Enhancement Omnibus Amendment Act. As we have said several times in recent years, “Effective implementation of Vision Zero requires a fundamental, systemic paradigm shift away from the traditional engineering standards that have ruled our lives for past decades.”<sup>4</sup> We continue to look forward to the District making that fundamental, systemic shift, and a DDOT budget that reflects it.

The 2014 moveDC plan emphasizes the importance of sidewalks, calling the pedestrian network “the very foundation of our transportation system.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, while the District has taken important steps in recent years to improve the condition and extent of its sidewalk network, pedestrian infrastructure remains underinvested-in in the District. This has direct costs to the District and its residents, including:

- A loss of independence for older adults, people with disabilities, and others who cannot safely use the sidewalk.
- Expensive, inconvenient paratransit service for people who are physically unable to get to bus stops.
- Injuries that can be life-threatening and life-altering, and lead to personal-injury lawsuits and potential future ADA actions.

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<sup>1</sup> DC Law 18-111, § 6061 (“Pedestrian Advisory Council Establishment Act of 2009”), DC Code §50-1931, 57 DCR 181 (Mar. 3, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> District Department of Transportation “Fatal and Injury Crashes Dashboard” as of June 4, 2021. [dcgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/a2f1cca5159e4c6eae197895d2e08336](https://dcgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/a2f1cca5159e4c6eae197895d2e08336)

<sup>3</sup> DC PAC, “2019 Performance Oversight Pre-Hearing Questions (Feb. 2019).” [drive.google.com/file/d/1NBA8OS8IH3YpRKpVp7gf-OW8Nnv2pZaY/](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NBA8OS8IH3YpRKpVp7gf-OW8Nnv2pZaY/)

<sup>4</sup> DC PAC, “Comment on the Vision Zero Enhancement Omnibus Amendment Act of 2019 (Sept. 1, 2020).” [drive.google.com/file/d/1f1wVnWzY67OSPTvy5g5vjLZYMouu3Nnl/](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f1wVnWzY67OSPTvy5g5vjLZYMouu3Nnl/)

<sup>5</sup> DDOT, MoveDC: The District of Columbia’s Multimodal Long-Range Transportation Plan (October 2014). Pedestrian Element, page P-1. [movedc-dcgis.hub.arcgis.com/documents/DCGIS::2014-movedc-part-2-plan-elements/](https://movedc-dcgis.hub.arcgis.com/documents/DCGIS::2014-movedc-part-2-plan-elements/)

- And more people choosing to drive, leaving less money in their pockets to spend at local businesses, increasing greenhouse gas emissions, and reducing safety for all roadway users.

All this happens despite the City’s stated commitments to multimodal travel, safety, equity, and sustainability, and despite the fact pedestrian travel is the primary mode of travel in the District when you take into account all trips: As recent figures from the Transportation Planning Board demonstrate, even during the traditional work week, non-work trips account for almost 75% of all trips in the DC metropolitan region, and walking is already the primary mode of one-third of such trips within DC. Rail and bus transit, which almost always involve walking as a secondary mode, accounted for 42.4% of weekday work trips, and walking is the primary mode of 13.9% of weekday work trips—meaning that a plurality of non-work trips, and a majority of work trips, each weekday involve walking.<sup>6</sup> And even people who drive must get to and from their cars, which usually involves using a sidewalk.

#### The Sidewalk Repair Process: Insufficient and inequitable...still.

Two years ago, we wrote to this Committee’s FY 2020 DDOT Budget Hearing about problems with the Department’s process for identifying, evaluating, and repairing sidewalk problems. As we said then, “We need a proactive process to identify concerns, and timely repairs....Similar to pothole palooza, we would like to see [a regular, annual] aggressive repair campaign for sidewalks.”<sup>7</sup>

We wrote again in January 2020 that the Department should request “funding [for] a robust, proactive inspection and repair program, [which] would result in all sidewalks and crosswalks (marked or unmarked)...being inspected on a routine, cyclical basis to identify and address repair needs, ADA compliance issues, and other needed improvements.”<sup>8</sup> The current 3-1-1-based system is both insufficient and inequitable; it not only takes far longer to fix problems in sidewalks than in roadbeds, it misses needs that don’t get reported, which are likely to be concentrated in particular neighborhoods of the District where, for reasons such as access to technology, available time, and trust in government, people are less likely to report. These are often the same areas where people are most likely to die in traffic violence.

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Joh, Transportation Planning Board, “2017-2018 Regional Travel Survey Briefing: Initial Findings Of Observed Daily Trips (October 21, 2020).” [www.mwcog.org/file.aspx?D=Dw%2fgnMYLOCdyKXzDtqFr5zupoggDaIxTusmHeFT279s%3d&A=3BIHilyfPdBpX5WzE5Z0ZTC1VrmJiPdHzo1IX15BHZo%3d](http://www.mwcog.org/file.aspx?D=Dw%2fgnMYLOCdyKXzDtqFr5zupoggDaIxTusmHeFT279s%3d&A=3BIHilyfPdBpX5WzE5Z0ZTC1VrmJiPdHzo1IX15BHZo%3d)

<sup>7</sup> DC PAC, “Statement for the...Budget Oversight Hearing for The Department of Transportation (April 11, 2019).” [drive.google.com/file/d/1PptEUApG-1f7HORJuXCFWCM9069k3AVO/](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PptEUApG-1f7HORJuXCFWCM9069k3AVO/)

<sup>8</sup> DC PAC, “Letter to Dir. Marootian Regarding FY '21 Budget Recommendations (Jan. 2020).” [drive.google.com/file/d/1VxaPv8srWi6KSCet7lWqpBpNV0VXkUBt/](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VxaPv8srWi6KSCet7lWqpBpNV0VXkUBt/)

Much as DPW sends its refuse collectors on regular routes, but gets 3-1-1 requests for missed pickups and overfull street-corner trash cans, 3-1-1 should be a route for residents to submit additional problems missed by a regular DDOT inspection force.

#### Automated Traffic Enforcement: Necessary, but not sufficient

As we have also said repeatedly in the last several years, the PAC believes that automated traffic enforcement (ATE) is a key tool for helping the District fulfill its commitment to Vision Zero. However, the program suffers from a public perception problem that hampers its implementation in DC. We believe that the District could change this public image in part by dedicating at least 50% of net ATE revenue to Vision Zero-related efforts—don't just catch people driving dangerously, use the funds on permanent infrastructure that will prevent people driving dangerously.<sup>9</sup>

#### Safe Accommodations

We have also repeatedly addressed DDOT's problems respecting Safe Accommodations, the requirement in DC law that when a sidewalk or bike lane must be closed, as near an equivalent replacement as possible must be provided.<sup>10</sup> Nearly eight years after this Council unanimously passed the requirement into law, whether DDOT will require accommodations on a given project, let alone enforce them, seems to be arbitrary at best. We have suggested DDOT request more funding to enforce safe accommodations, but this would not fix DDOT's problem writing these requirements into its permits—or the lack of permits required of District agencies, which DDOT then can't enforce the regulations against. It can be particularly exasperating when, as a 3-1-1 request for a broken sidewalk is finally addressed, one is forced to walk in traffic because the Department has failed to provide safe accommodation around its own work site.

#### Conclusion

PAC has focused on the same message for years: “Unless we as a city are ready to change how we view and use our streets, we will not eliminate traffic deaths and serious injuries....Our streets must be designed to protect everyone from death and serious injury, even if this means that people driving will not be able to travel as quickly or conveniently as they might like.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> DC PAC, “Testimony at Vision Zero Omnibus Bill Roundtable (May 13, 2021).” [drive.google.com/file/d/1DJ2rDlajhh9KZX9hBtntvzC1\\_U11wQuw3/](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DJ2rDlajhh9KZX9hBtntvzC1_U11wQuw3/)

<sup>10</sup> DC Law 20-49 §3 (Bicycle Safety Amendment Act of 2013), DC Code §10-1141.03(f) and §10-1141.04, 60 DCR 15148 (December 13, 2013); 24 DCMR § 3315, 61 DCR 10577 (October 10, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> DC PAC, “Testimony at Vision Zero Roundtable (Sept. 27, 2018).” [drive.google.com/file/d/oBy58YTubhf4fcWRPeE5xeTQ2eG01QkpPMFF0cHEzbmVabm5R/](https://drive.google.com/file/d/oBy58YTubhf4fcWRPeE5xeTQ2eG01QkpPMFF0cHEzbmVabm5R/)