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July 24, 2009

Mr. Faisal Hameed
Project Development & Environment
Transportation Policy & Planning Administration
District Department of Transportation
2000 14th Street, NW, 7th Floor
Washington, DC 20009

Re: Comments on K Street Transitway Environmental Assessment Scoping and Purpose and Need

Dear Mr. Hameed:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed scoping and purpose and need statement for the K Street Transitway Environmental Assessment. We appreciate the District's effort to reconstruct K Street in a more sustainable way, promoting transit and a "great street" streetscape that is commensurate with the street's iconic reputation. Additionally, we recognize that the District is competing for Federal stimulus money, and as a result, the extreme time constraints under which you are conducting your study. NCPC is eager to contribute to the planning and design process of this important project.

NCPC supports the proposed WMATA/Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Priority Corridor Network to serve future regional transit needs. The proposed regional bus network is consistent with our agency's *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Transportation Element* that "promotes a balanced, multi-pronged strategy to maximize federal employees' and facilities' access to the region's extensive transit system." NCPC agrees that an Environmental Assessment (EA) document should be sufficient for the project if the project does not include components for a future streetcar system.

NCPC has accepted FHWA's invitation to be a cooperating agency and offers the following comments regarding the *Draft Purpose and Need Statement* and scoping:

- K Street contributes significantly to the Historic Plan of Washington. Views along and across the rights-of-way are contributing elements of the National Register and District of Columbia designations. The alternatives should illustrate a range of landscape elements, including at least one with lower, more subordinate vegetation in the medians in relation to the street trees;

- There should be a detailed range of design alternatives (to include center transit lanes and curbside transit lanes) that can accommodate a range of transportation modes (Bus Rapid Transit, bicycles, and walking);
- The EA should consider for the study area the inclusion of both I and L Streets for traffic modeling purposes, since some of the future streetscape designs could significantly impact traffic along these adjacent streets. The greater degree to which the alternatives result in slowing down general K Street traffic, the greater the potential for traffic diversion onto adjacent roadways, and this diversion potential is critical to understanding the complete traffic impact of each alternative;
- It is our understanding based on DDOT's statement that the project will not utilize any National Park Service land, and that fact should be made clear in the EA;
- The Environmental Assessment should analyze how K Street is in a strategic position to provide an important future connection between the Metropolitan Branch Trail and Capital Crescent Trail;
- In developing the EA and the project, community involvement should be maximized throughout the design, NEPA, and Section 106 processes, due to the highly-visible nature of K Street, and its commercial and cultural significance to the city and region.

If the project includes components for a streetcar system, NCPC notes that the Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administration regulations "normally require an EIS... for new construction or extension of fixed rail transit facilities (e.g., rapid rail, light rail, commuter rail, automated guideway transit)" per 23 CFR 771.115(a)(3) and 49 CFR 622.101. Under the National Capital Planning Act, NCPC must approve the K Street Transitway project since the future proposed transitway is located largely within the Central Area of the District. As a result, the agency must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). If the project includes streetcar system components, NCPC will also require an EIS because of the project's potential visual and physical impacts on the public realm including the historic streets of the Washington City (the L'Enfant City in the District of Columbia). While the proposed project would potentially include only one segment of an overall streetcar system, the fact that the project would affect the open streets of the L'Enfant Plan is sufficient to require an EIS; in addition, that EIS would need to take into account the cumulative effects - that is, the entire streetcar system.

Since the late nineteenth century, there have been a series of legal prohibitions against overhead wires within Washington City (the L'Enfant City) and Georgetown, resulting in

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rights-of-way that are free of electric wires and that were free of overhead wires when streetcars were previously in use (see 25 Stat 793 at 797 [50 Cong. Ch.370, March 2, 1889]). The Commission has a federal interest in retaining and protecting the nationally recognized, characteristic, and significant vistas of the rights-of-way within the L'Enfant Plan, which is protected by listing in the National Register of Historic Places and in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites.

Some specific examples of vistas of rights-of-ways, reservations and historic properties that would be potentially impacted by overhead wires include:

- The view of Lafayette Park and the White House from 16th Street north of K Street.
- The view of Farragut Square and the adjacent intersection of K Street and Connecticut Ave from the north and the south.
- The view of McPherson Square and the adjacent intersection of K Street and Vermont Avenue from the north and the south.
- The view of Franklin Square and the adjacent intersections of K Street and 13th Street and K Street and 14th Street from the north and the south.
- The views looking north from Pennsylvania Avenue, toward K Street;
- Views of several historic properties along K Street and intersecting streets including the University Club, the Tower Building, the Benjamin Franklin School and the Southern Railway Building.

Once again, NCPD is very supportive of this effort to improve the K Street Corridor. If you have any questions regarding our comments or our submission requirements, please contact Michael Weil of my staff at (202) 482-7253 or michael.weil@ncpc.gov.

Sincerely,



David W. Levy, RA, AICP
Director, Urban Design and Plan Review Division

cc: Ms. Karina Ricks
District Department of Transportation

Ms. Harriet Tregoning
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