



Information Presentation

Commission Meeting: October 6, 2022

PROJECT**K Street Transitway**

Washington, DC

NCPC FILE NUMBER

7603

SUBMITTED BY

District Department of Transportation

NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER

20.00(40.00)45576

PRESENTER

National Capital Planning Commission Staff

District Department of Transportation

The purpose of this presentation is to present the most recent (90% design) K Street Transitway plans to the Commission. The project corridor, which extends between 12th and 21st Street, NW, in downtown Washington, DC, has been the subject of charrettes, concept studies and environmental reviews since the late 1990's. The project, which is finally underway, comes at a critical time when the downtown area and other business districts are facing great uncertainty. Increasing telework and consolidation of office space, along with a surge in office to residential conversions, will have long-term implications for the K Street area. As such, the transitway cannot simply be an infrastructure project; it must re-create K Street as a truly great place where workers, visitors, and residents can enjoy participating in urban life.

Currently, transitway plans show a reallocated K Street “cartway” (curb-to-curb) that includes dedicated median bus lanes, dedicated bicycle lanes, landscape medians, and general travel lanes. In addition, DDOT will also expand the sidewalk tree boxes and replace sidewalk sections where possible. DDOT will provide a project overview and NCPC staff will offer some comments for consideration as the transitway design advances. Following the meeting, staff will summarize staff and Commissioner comments in a letter to DDOT.

Planning History / Project Timeline

- **2003-2005** - DDOT K Street Transitway Feasibility Study
- **2004** - “A New Way on K” Charrette (sponsored by NCPC and the Downtown DC Business Improvement District (BID))
- **2008-2010** - K Street Transitway Environmental Assessment
- **2014-2017** - DDOT Union Station to Georgetown Streetcar Environmental Assessment
- **2020** - K Street Transitway 30% Design
- **July 2022** - K Street Transitway 65% Design / U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) Review
- **October 2022** – K Street Transitway 90% Design
- **December 2022** – K Street Transitway 100% Design / Public Outreach

NCPC and the Downtown DC BID, convened a charrette in 2004 to study how to transform K Street into a great urban boulevard. The charrette included a panel of nationally renowned planning, urban design, and transportation experts, who based on a series of stakeholder

interviews, formulated a design vision for the street's public (building-to-building face) space. The panel translated its vision into a series of design characteristics to help guide the city in its future planning efforts for the street, including:

- Robust landscaping / continuous tree canopy (a green boulevard);
- Active, vibrant, with a greater mix of uses (a civic place);
- Multi-modal (a transit corridor);
- Minimal service functions / access directly from the street (a prominent address); and
- Designed in an integrated manner.

Following the charrette, DDOT studied several strategies for improving cross-town mobility, which included separate transit lanes (a transitway) that would accommodate streetcar as part of a larger east-west line between Union Station and Georgetown. Since then, DDOT has revised the transit approach to focus on bus service.

PLANNING CONTEXT

K Street has long been a significant corridor within the District of Columbia, serving as a major east-west travel route; one of the original streets laid out in the L'Enfant Plan; and as an economic hub in the city. The transitway project comes at a critical time with changing regional and local travel patterns (influenced by a growth in teleworking); changing demands for downtown office and residential space; and during a time with renewed appreciation for being outdoors and enjoying public spaces. As such, the District is currently focused on improving its outdoor spaces in terms of their functionality, flexibility, and overall character with qualities that entice people to linger, socialize, and enjoy. The planned transitway project is an ambitious redesign of a K Street section to create a real multi-modal corridor, and K Street deserves an equally ambitious streetscape design as a great civic space that workers, residents, and visitors alike can enjoy.

FEDERAL INTERESTS

NCPC does not have a direct review authority over the transitway project under the National Capital Planning Act, as the project consists of traditional streetscape improvements fully contained within the right-of-way. Current project plans do not show any new buildings or structures other than redesigned medians, new pavement and markings, landscaping, reconfigured tree boxes, sidewalk pavers, and street furniture. However, based on the Commission's role as a planning partner with the District, NCPC has an interest in preserving the design quality of the District's public space. In addition, the Commission has an interest in the project based on its location within the historic L'Enfant City, as well as the project's location adjacent to three National Park Service (NPS) parks – Farragut Square, McPherson Square, and Franklin Park. Staff has considered these federal interests based on the policies set forth in the Historic Preservation, Transportation, and Urban Design Elements of the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*.

NCPC STAFF EVALUTATION

The K Street Transitway project is ambitious in its intent to better accommodate transit, bicycle, and people movement (over general traffic) by rethinking K Street's cartway, and the project should have an equally ambitious civic design with the qualities of a "great" street. The project comes at a critical time when the downtown area and other business districts are facing great uncertainty. Increasing telework and consolidation of office space, along with a surge in office to residential conversions, will have long-term implications for the K Street area. As such, the transitway cannot simply be an infrastructure project; it must re-create K Street as a truly great place where workers, visitors, and residents can enjoy participating in urban life.

Staff has prepared the following initial comments for Commission consideration after the presentation. These and other Commission comments will be included in a letter to DDOT following the meeting.

- Ensure a continuous tree canopy along the corridor. This should be achieved by maximizing the number of trees, providing a consistent spacing without gaps, and by using an appropriate tree caliper size. Laybys and other cut-outs should be reduced to the maximum extent feasible to allow more continual median widths and to maximize planting area along the corridor. New landscape areas should meet relevant standards for stormwater, native plantings, and maintenance.
- Use high-quality streetscape materials, transit shelters, and furnishings, commensurate with the importance and visibility of this highly visible District corridor. The material palette should be durable and reflect a long-term investment in public spaces as well as the transportation network.
- While the current project scope is primarily focused on the cartway, DDOT could take a more wholistic approach by also re-imagining adjacent sidewalk space that would transform K Street into more of a destination, with a greater mix of uses (including residential) and as a place for people to linger, gather, and enjoy.
- Staff encourages DDOT to continue working with the local BIDs, CFA, NCPC, and DCOP to ensure the K Street project meets the future needs of the city's downtown area, with better transit service, more robust landscaping, and the look and feel of a great street.

Staff notes that during the CFA's concept review of the K Street Transitway project in July 2022, the Commission expressed strong support for the deliberate placement of trees to define the corridor and to provide shade with a more consistent line of trees along the medians. See attached letter.

FOLLOW-UP / NEXT STEPS

Following the information presentation, NCPC staff will continue to work with DDOT, District Office of Planning (DCOP), Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), and other stakeholder agencies to continue to improve the project plans. DDOT intends to review the project during one or more future public meetings in December 2022.

ATTACHMENTS:

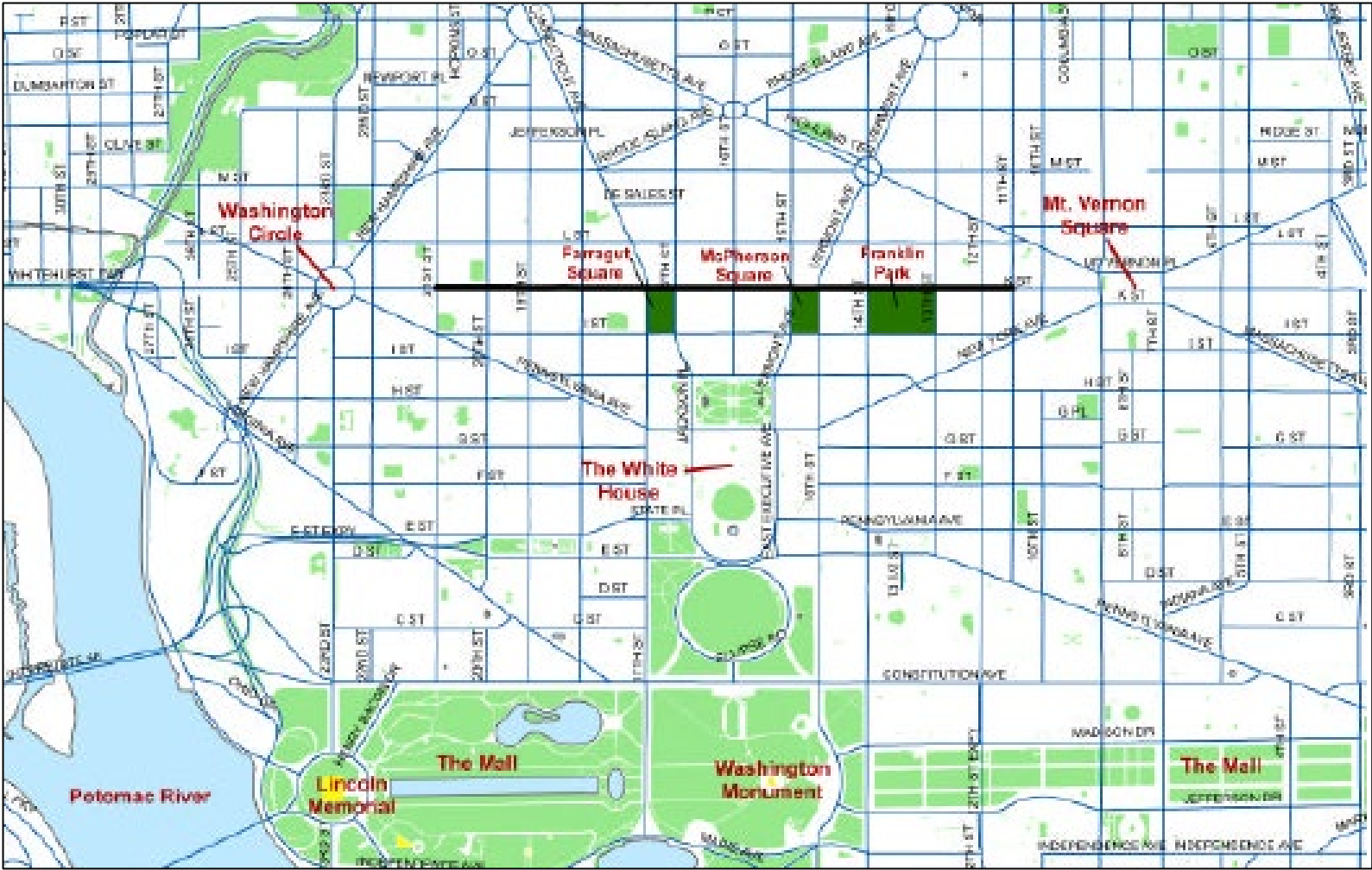
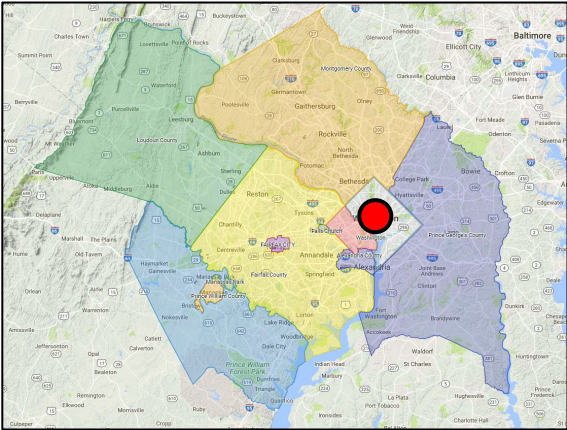
- NCPC Introduction / Comment Slides
- U.S. Commission of Fine Arts review letter
- Golden Triangle BID / Downtown DC BID comment letter

K Street Transitway

National Capital Planning Commission / District Department of Transportation (DDOT)

Information Presentation

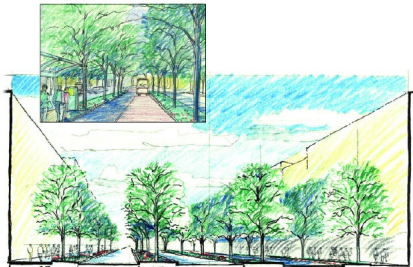
Project Location



Project Timeline



DDOT K Street Transitway Feasibility Study
2003-2005



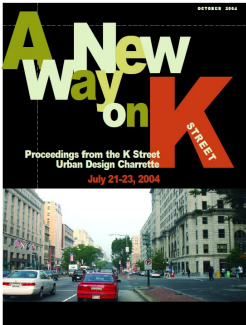
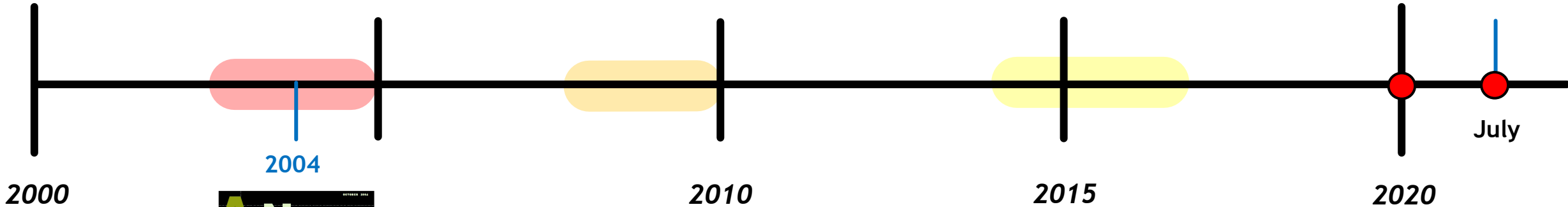
K Street Transitway EA
2008-2010



DDOT Union Station to Georgetown Streetcar EA
2014-2017



30% Design 2020
65% Design 2022



NCPC/DBID Charrette

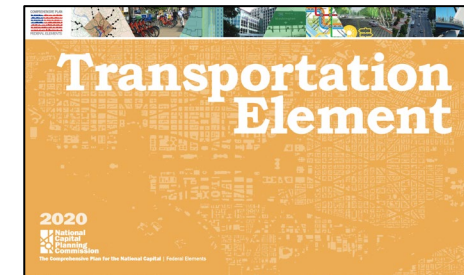
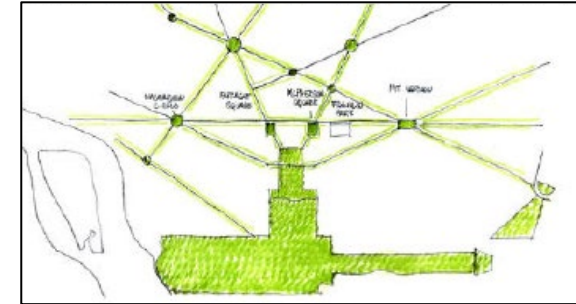
“A New Way on K” Charrette

- NCPC and Downtown DC BID convened a charrette to discuss the need and desire to transform K Street into a great urban boulevard.
- Charrette consisted of a panel of nationally renowned planning experts, who based on a series of stakeholder interviews, formulated a unified design vision for the street.
- Panel translated its vision into a series of design characteristics that DDOT could use to help guide its future planning efforts for the street.
- Design characteristics included:
 - Robust landscaping / continuous tree canopy (a green boulevard);
 - Active, vibrant, with a greater mix of uses (a civic place);
 - Multi-modal (a transit corridor);
 - Minimal service functions / access directly from the street (a prominent address); and
 - Designed in an integrated manner.

Federal Interests

- Design quality of the District's public space.
- K Street as a historic L'Enfant Street.
- Three National Park Service (NPS) parks adjacent to project area – Farragut Square, McPherson Square, and Franklin Park.
- Federal interests based on the policies that are set forth in the Historic Preservation, Transportation, and Urban Design Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.

K Street Transitway Project



DISTRICT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

K Street Transitway Project

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) Submission

July 7, 2022

- Ensure a continuous tree canopy along the corridor. This should be achieved by maximizing the number of trees, providing a consistent spacing without gaps, and by using an appropriate tree caliper size. Laybys and other cut-outs should be reduced to the maximum extent feasible to allow more continual median widths and to maximize planting area along the corridor. New landscape areas should meet relevant standards for stormwater, native plantings, and maintenance.
- Use high-quality streetscape materials, transit shelters, and furnishings, commensurate with the importance and visibility of this highly visible District corridor. The material palette should be durable and reflect a long-term investment in public spaces as well as the transportation network.

- While the current project scope is primarily focused on the cartway, DDOT could take a more wholistic approach by also re-imagining adjacent sidewalk space that would transform K Street into more of a destination, with a greater mix of uses (including residential) and as a place for people to linger, gather, and enjoy.
- Staff encourages DDOT to continue working with the local BIDs, CFA, NCPC, and DCOP to ensure the K Street project meets the future needs of the city's downtown area, with better transit service, more robust landscaping, and the look and feel of a great street.

U.S. COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS 17 MAY 1910

401 F STREET NW SUITE 312 WASHINGTON DC 20001-2728 202-504-2200 FAX 202-504-2195 WWW.CFA.GOV

28 July 2022

Dear Mr. Lott:

In its public meeting of 21 July conducted by videoconference, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed a concept design for the new K Street Transitway, to be located along K Street between 12th and 21st Streets, NW. The Commission approved the concept with the following comments and recommendations.

The Commission members observed that the proposal would be an improvement over the current conditions of K Street, potentially softening the relatively harsh context of extensive pavement within such a broad street right-of-way. Expressing strong support for the deliberate placement of trees to define view corridors and to provide shade, they recommended establishing a more consistent line of trees along the medians and maximizing the extent of natural landscape. For the development of the proposal, they recommended improving the clarity of the design, particularly at potential points of conflict among pedestrians, bicyclists, buses, and general traffic to address safety. They commented that wayfinding signage would be an important component of the design, as well as lighting to enhance nighttime safety, particularly for the bicycle lanes.

In their discussion, the Commission members observed that the K Street Transitway is presented as a stand-alone proposal, and they raised concerns about the lack of documentation regarding the conditions of adjacent streets and the project's impact within the context of the neighborhood, which they requested be included in future presentations. However, acknowledging that the transitway has a more limited scope than what was originally envisioned as a crosstown corridor with streetcar service, they concluded that this project will elevate the quality of K Street and the associated modes of transportation, potentially serving as a pilot project for other parts of the city.

The Commission looks forward to further review of this important infrastructure project. Please continue to consult with the staff which, as always, is available to assist you.

Sincerely,



Thomas E. Luebke, FAIA
Secretary

Everett Lott, Director
D.C. Department of Transportation
250 M Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003

cc: Gerard Baxter, JMT
Adrienne Ameel, Kimley-Horn
Adrienne McCray, Lee & Associates



To: Everett Lott, Director, District Department of Transportation

CC: The Honorable Brooke Pinto, Ward 2 Councilmember
John Falcicchio, Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development
Sharon Kershbaum, Deputy Director, DDOT
Matthew Marcou, Chief of Staff, DDOT
Dawit Muluneh, Interim Chief Project Delivery Officer, DDOT
Robyn Jackson, PE, DDOT; Huntae Kim, PE, DDOT; Wayne Wilson, PE, DDOT

From: Leona Agouridis, Executive Director, Golden Triangle BID
Gerren Price, President & CEO, DowntownDC BID

Date: September 9, 2022

Subject: K Street Transitway 90% Design-Comments

Thank you for DDOT's continuous engagement with the DowntownDC and the Golden Triangle BIDs throughout the development and design of the K Street Transitway Project. For the past twenty years, both BIDs have been stalwart partners to DDOT and together we have realized truly transformative projects. We know the K Street Transitway is no exception and look forward to working with you and your team to help realize a project that benefits the entire District, and its many visitors, workers, small businesses, and property owners.

That said, a bold vision for K Street and our downtown is more critical today than ever before as the DC downtown recovery is lagging the rest of the District. A laser-focus on the central business district in the wake of the pandemic's devastating economic impact is essential not only for the neighborhood's recovery, but for the entire District of Columbia. K Street, once rebuilt, must be a place that is not only easy and convenient for people to travel *through*, but also desirable to travel *to*.

While we are submitting our comments on the 90% design, it cannot be overstated that the project requires additional time for planning and collaborating with property owners, businesses, BIDs, and stakeholders. In the Golden Triangle, 22.7% of office space is unleased (7.8 million SF) and the number is rising, retail on the ground floor is hobbled, and just over a third of workers come to the office on an average weekday. In the DowntownDC BID, 16.4% of the office space is unleased (10 million SF), the retail vacancy rate is approximately 21%, and 38% of the office workers come to the office on an average weekday. Any new plans for K Street need to reflect a vibrant, welcoming, and well-designed place for all and *must* support the recovery and vibrancy of our BID areas.

In April 2019, Mayor Bowser laid out a transformative vision for the K Street Transitway describing a project that included dedicated bus lanes, redesigned sidewalks, protected bike lanes, new landscaping, public art, and stormwater retention, and other features. The project has since devolved from a holistic building face-to-building face approach to a less comprehensive curb-to-curb approach. The current design does not live up to the original vision articulated by the Mayor.

We are requesting that the District pause planning on the K Street Transitway project to allow for additional review of the issues in the attached comments on the 90% design. In addition, we have heard serious concerns across our community of stakeholders that tearing up K Street in the coming years will further prevent people from coming back to the office and undermine downtown recovery.



We are asking for additional collaboration and information, including:

- **LANDSCAPING & GREEN SPACE.**
 - An additional meeting with Lee and Associates and the project team to review the planting designs, expected maintenance, tree planting plans, and additional opportunities for green space.
- **STAKEHOLDER COORDINATION.**
 - The BIDs request that the DDOT project team meet with its stakeholders in to separate meetings to review:
 - The 90% design; and
 - The traffic modeling that was done for K Street.
- **CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS.**
 - Construction impacts on this project will be significant and they have the potential to undermine the recovery of downtown. We ask that construction timing be strategic and sensitive to recovery and the return to office. The BIDs request more information and substantial coordination in advance of and during construction to minimize negative effects to the businesses and buildings along this corridor.