September 30, 2022

The Hon. Muriel Bowser
Mayor of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20004

RE: Serious concerns about the K Street Transitway; please restore to a “Great Street” design

Dear Mayor Bowser:

We are enthusiastic supporters of your bold bus priority program, and the vision for the K Street Transitway project that you shared in 2019. However, we wish to express our great concern about the changes to the K Street Transitway design reflected in the semi-final 65% design stage. This semi-final design was presented to the public in a meeting on March 24, 2022. We share the concerns raised by stakeholders and experts about this new version. We understand that the engineers have reached a 90% design, but do not believe that the major deficiencies in the new design have been corrected.

The semi-final design is an incredibly disappointing departure from the vision developed in collaboration over the last 20 years with District and federal entities, neighborhood and advocacy groups, transit riders, and property owners. This shared vision included designing the K Street Transitway as a Great Street in the Nation’s Capital that:

- Implements a high-quality and effective multimodal transit experience for transit users;
- Embodies the highest aspirations for sustainability and the environment;
- Creates a unified and high-quality streetscape for the entire right-of-way, from building face to building face, that will enhance the experience for all visitors, workers and residents within the K Street corridor, and, especially critical during these days,
- Supports Downtown’s Economic Vitality.

Below, we identify the important questions you should ask and highlight our specific and serious concerns about the current design of the transitway. See the attachment for a comparison of renderings.

Does the recent revision retreat from environmental responsibility and restoring DC’s historic tree canopy?

The latest design shows approximately a 50% reduction in the median tree canopy, and many other departures from high quality urban design and streetscape standards. In addition, at the public presentation, the presenter stated that additional trees could be removed if there were conflicts with utilities. These reductions in tree canopy are a retreat from DC’s 40% Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) Goal, a goal established in Sustainable DC in 2011.
The 4-Tree Street Section was a fundamental element for all parties during the 2010 Environmental Assessment (EA) process, with the expectation that the transit infrastructure would be designed in concert with the full tree canopy.

As now proposed, the 65% design shows a sparse tree canopy with a utilitarian aesthetic. We do not believe this spare approach will create the sense of place that draws people back, provide basic human comfort, address the heat-island effect in our city, or inspire private sector investment. Instead, this stripped down approach puts at risk the vitality of the corridor. Given climate change and rising temperatures, tree canopy and quality high-performance landscape and streetscaping are even more important than ever.

**Does it deliver effective transit?**
During previous design phases, the need for turn lanes and pullouts was evaluated and deemed unnecessary. The current design includes two left westbound turn lanes, and 5 bus pullouts whose value has not been defined. The inclusion of left turn lanes and bus pullouts adds pavement and significantly impacts landscape and environmental character and are of questionable value based on analysis in earlier designs which anticipated best practice operations and signalization. DDOT should provide updated proof for the need for turn lanes and pullouts.

**Does it support rider comfort and quality transit design?**
The earlier design included a customized bus shelter based on elements as part of the city’s ClearChannel contracts. However, the semi-final design proposed the use of the standard narrow-body shelter with minimal weather protection and seating, multiple advertising panels and guard rails which will not provide an enhanced rider experience.

**Does it promote multimodal connectivity and vision zero efforts?**
The design does not address accommodations necessary for Capital Bike Share and scooters, which are important transportation modes within our city. With the improvements limited to the carriage-way and curb-to-curb, opportunities to enhance pedestrian safety are not being fully addressed.

**Is it 21st Century infrastructure that inspires civic pride?**
The 2010 transitway design included a preliminary framework for public art and wayfinding. Yet the revised design fails to illustrate how DC-related commemorative works may be incorporated to reinforce the beauty and unique and diverse character of our city. The 65% design also doesn’t include details on street light layout and fails to illustrate how the street lighting can reinforce the character of a Great Street.

**Shouldn’t we ensure the transitway creates a Great Street?**
The K Street Transitway should be a worthy corridor within the L’Enfant Plan and a catalyst for a revitalized, vibrant, post-Pandemic downtown.
Pertaining to the 65% design, while we enthusiastically support the provision of a dedicated transitway and the inclusion of a center cycle track adjacent to the medians, we do not believe this must come at the expense of quality urban design and streetscape. Overall, the current semi-final design reflects an emphasis on roadway engineering at the expense of placemaking, with no sense of civic design worthy of our Capital City.

We ask your administration to reexamine the current state of the transitway engineering. We urge you to restore the project to be a collaboration of District, federal and corridor stakeholders, and to implement a “Great Street” from building face to building face that leverages quality infrastructure investment in support of economic development and an excellent transit rider experience. We ask that you welcome input from experts including NCPC, CFA, and leading urban design professionals.

We all believe the transitway can, and should, be a legacy project for the District, and it can be an example of high-quality multimodal transit and green infrastructure for the rest of the country. We ask that you ensure that the K Street Transitway fulfills its role as a Great Street in the L’Enfant Plan, and catalyzes a new beginning for this downtown corridor as it recovers from the Pandemic.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Cort
Policy Director

Stewart Schwartz
Executive Director

Cc: Director Everett Lott, DDOT
    Interim Director Anita Cozart
    Deputy Mayor Lucinda Babers
    Deputy Mayor John Falcicchio
    Downtown BID
    Golden Triangle BID
Attachment: Comparison of K Street Transitway 65% (2022) vs. 2020 boards

K Street Transitway 65% design (2022) vs. 2020 Boards
Coalition for Smarter Growth

Drawing of “Landscaped median” shows continuous tree canopy
From 2020 boards

65% design (semi-final) shows median trees spaced farther apart, not 30° on center. Does not show continuous canopy per earlier plans.
From 2022 65% design

**Turns & pullouts reintroduced:**
65% design (semi-final): Turn lanes & pullouts were added back in to 65% design which removes additional trees. Turn lanes and laybys were assessed previously and decided against.
From 2022 65% design

Further loss of trees may occur due to utility conflicts. The alternative it to require the utilities to move their facilities in the public ROW. From public presentation 3/24/2022 24:00:
https://ddot-co-k-st-transitway-dgis.hub.arcgis.com/pages/project-resources
“The trees & landscaping shown on these maps are dependent on utility conflicts that the project team are currently working through so the trees may decrease in the future due to utility conflicts.”