

DC Council – Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Public Oversight Hearing on BAC, PAC, MAAC, and DDOT
February 27, 2023
Testimony of Ashton Rohmer

My name is Ashton Rohmer, I live in Ward 6, and although I am an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner, I'm here as a private citizen and not as a representative of ANC 6D. I'd like to extend my congratulations to Councilmember Allen for your appointment as committee chair – you have big shoes to fill but know you'll be a steadfast advocate for safe streets like your predecessor Councilmember Cheh. There are a lot of things I could discuss today given that we're failing on our Vision Zero goals – the urgent need for ubiquitous protected bike lanes and fully accessible sidewalks, for all street corners to be daylighted to improve sightlines and provide more scooter and bike parking, for 24/7 dedicated bus lanes to meet the needs of low-income riders and care-givers, to require off-street ADA parking in all new developments to both ensure adequate parking for residents with disabilities and no battles between, say, ADA parking and protected bike lanes. Fortunately, I know so many advocates are calling attention to these important matters today, so I'd like to focus on something else.

In Southwest, we've been lucky to have some major safety projects implemented such as a protected bike lane that will ultimately stretch from the Wharf over to Navy Yard along I Street. Some local stakeholders, including an elementary school and a church, have raised concerns. While it is important to ensure safety issues are addressed – and I know such a conversation is ongoing – the fact that the project has long been such a heated topic made me curious about the way DDOT is approaching these projects despite having seemingly productive avenues to proactively address community concerns and needs through their Safe Routes to School program and Active Transportation branch. DCPS data shows that 63% of students live within about a .5-mile radius of the school. This got me wondering – does DDOT know where all the students are traveling from? How are they all getting to school? What barriers do they face in getting to school safely and reliably? Does the precarious nature of their trips impact their attendance? Is DDOT being responsive to those barriers? From the perspective of the church, how are their members getting to church? Would older members benefit from a program that provides training and tricycles – even e-trikes – so that they aren't limited to vehicular travel for services?

These questions relate to a broader set of issues, such as climate, public health, equity, and social capital impacts that persist so long as we're not doing everything we can to move away from cars. This is to say nothing of the horrific epidemic around child fatalities resulting from vehicular violence. The solution to this is not sending more dangerous cars to schools when the most students are out and about.

So let me be perfectly clear, we must rapidly scale up the deployment of street safety measures that shift space from the movement and storage of cars to enable more community-friendly means of transportation. As we do so, however, DDOT should ensure they have adequate and coordinated staff within their Safe Routes to School program and Active Transportation branch to more proactively partner with other District agencies like DCPS and DPR and to engage with communities to explore active transportation initiatives for those who may be most reliant on car travel without adequate support. In this way, volunteer initiatives like walking and biking buses could be strengthened and rolled out District-wide so that our most vulnerable road users can safely get to crucial neighborhood institutions and services. Perhaps this proactive outreach will even speed the implementation of critical safety projects because they will be seen as a welcome change to the built environment rather than as an inconvenience to our most ruinous mode of transportation – we really can't wait any longer. Thank you.