



**Government of the District of Columbia**  
**ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3/4G**

Chevy Chase, Barnaby Woods, Hawthorne  
5601 Connecticut Avenue N.W. P.O. Box 6252 Washington, D.C. 20015  
3G@anc.dc.gov <http://www.anc3g.org> YouTube: ANC3G Office: 202.363.5803

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**Connecticut Avenue Reversible Lane Study**  
**Comments on DDOT's Proposed Alternatives**  
**Commissioner Randy Speck**  
**April 26, 2021**

The Commission adopted a resolution in October 2018, encouraging DDOT to conduct a study of traffic on Connecticut Avenue, but advised DDOT to include particularly “the impact that any changes may have on traffic patterns on streets other than Connecticut Avenue, including but not limited to Nebraska Avenue, Military Road, Reno Road, Nevada Avenue, and Chevy Chase Parkway.” The Commission further advised DDOT to “evaluate the impact of any changes on businesses and parking in the portion of Connecticut Avenue north of Military Road, including the possible backup of traffic to and through Chevy Chase Circle and the impacts of the resulting congestion on the Chevy Chase business district.”<sup>1</sup>

In January 2020, Commissioners Fromboluti and Speck met with DDOT to discuss the scope of the study and community outreach. We were asked to be on DDOT's Community Advisory Committee (CAC) beginning with an initial meeting on April 30,

<sup>1</sup> ANC 3/4G Resolution Requesting that DDOT Conduct a Comprehensive Study of Current Connecticut Avenue Traffic Patterns and Potential Changes, October 18, 2021, available at <https://bit.ly/3dgZquI>.

2020, and subsequent meetings on June 11, 2020, and October 20, 2020.<sup>2</sup> After those meetings, we offered comments to DDOT on its analyzes and proposed alternatives.

DDOT defined three primary project goals: (1) reduce vehicle crashes during peak periods; (2) improve safety/access for bicycles and pedestrians; and (3) assess the feasibility of removing the reversible lane operation.<sup>3</sup> The “guiding principals” were further expanded during the study to include:

- Quality of Life (accommodating the needs of people who live, work, and recreate within the Connecticut Avenue corridor, prioritizing the needs of corridor residents and businesses, and providing sustainable, resilient, and equitable transportation options for all modes);
- Safety and Vision Zero (alternatives should reduce the number of crashes and fatalities as compared to current conditions and should reduce vehicle speeds along the corridor);
- Traffic Operations (mitigate significant traffic impacts, to the extent feasible, when considering alternative concepts and understand diversions impacts within the corridor and mitigate, where possible);
- Parking and Loading (retain some level of parking and/or loading within commercial areas in the corridor);
- Pedestrians (integrate pedestrian improvements into each alternative concept);
- Bicycles (incorporate concepts that include a protected bicycle lane (PBL));
- Transit (include bus transit operational improvements as part of design concepts); and
- Right-of-way/Construction (any alternative must be constructed within the 60-foot curb-to-curb cross-section).<sup>4</sup>

I support the overall goals of the study, but the study results and the data presented do not always support its conclusions. Despite repeated, specific requests for data, some

<sup>2</sup> Some of the documents related to CAC meetings on are the study project’s website, <https://ddot.dc.gov/page/connecticut-avenue-nw-reversible-lane-safety-and-operations-study>.

<sup>3</sup> CAC Meeting #1 Presentation, April 30, 2021, Slide 23, available at <https://bit.ly/3dhnEF2>.

<sup>4</sup> CAC Meeting #3 Presentation, October 1, 2020, Slide 12, available at <https://bit.ly/3sl6evF>.

key information still is not available. As a result, the ramifications of DDOT's preferred alternatives are not well understood, and the real impact of the proposed changes is unknown at this stage. The issues that the Commission flagged in 2018 — the impact of changes on traffic on other streets and parking — have not been adequately addressed.

DDOT may have reached the right conclusions about which alternatives should be preferred, but it is not possible to make that decision based on the information DDOT has provided. There are strong advocates for adoption of Concept C with protected bike lanes in both directions, but DDOT needs to provide better analyzes and may need to begin with tentative steps that can be modified if they prove to be untenable in the real world. (DDOT's reduction in the number of lanes on Military Road in 2005, only to restore them later when mammoth backups occurred, should be a cautionary tale.<sup>5</sup>)

These comments will focus on four primary concerns: (1) inadequate data to support DDOT's conclusions; (2) the diversion of traffic under the proposed alternatives to other streets; (3) the impact from the elimination of parking and loading zones; and (4) inadequate consideration of the no-build management alternative.

### **Data that Does Not Support DDOT's Conclusions**

**Crash Data** — After the June 11, 2020 CAC meeting, I advised DDOT that its data did not support the conclusion that reversible lanes contribute to crashes. DDOT compared the percent of crashes during reversible lane operations — 44% — with the percent of time that the lanes were reversible — 15%.<sup>6</sup> This is not a useful comparison since much more traffic is concentrated during the reversible lane operations. For instance, if 44% of the traffic occurs during reversible lane operations, it would be reasonable to conclude that crashes may be related to higher traffic volume, not reversible lanes.

I asked DDOT in June and again in October for data on the total average daily traffic volume during reversible lane operations and the total average daily traffic volume

<sup>5</sup> In December 2005, DDOT re-striped Military Road to reduce the number of traffic lanes in an effort to reduce speeding. ANC 3/4G Minutes, December 12, 2005, available at <https://bit.ly/3dj9jYD>, page 110. After a six-month trial period, DDOT found that traffic backed up from 27th Street, NW as far as 16th Street, NW, and there was “substantial opposition” to the changes, so DDOT reversed the changes and restored the prior configuration. ANC 3/4G Minutes, October 23, 2006, available at <https://bit.ly/3toyIpo>, page 36.

<sup>6</sup> Existing Conditions Report, June 2020, Figure 35, page 54, available at <https://bit.ly/3dwi3aI>. “A smaller portion of pedestrian (32%) and bicycle (20%) crashes occurred during reversible lane operations.” Existing Conditions Report, Table 21, page 53.

during non-reversible lane operations. DDOT never provided that data. Instead, DDOT has continued to cite the misleading comparison of crashes and hours of reversible lane operation.<sup>7</sup> When compared with other corridors without reversible lanes, the crash frequency on Connecticut Avenue falls between some that are lower and some that are higher,<sup>8</sup> suggesting that other factors — e.g., traffic volume — may be more responsible for crashes than reversible lanes.

**Bike Usage** — DDOT’s projections of bicycle ridership are also unreliable because they are based on dubious assumptions. DDOT’s consultant, VHB Metro DC, attempted to project the increase in bicyclists’ use of Connecticut Avenue if DDOT installs protected bike lanes.<sup>9</sup> The study projects that protected bike lanes would create a more than ten-fold increase in bicycle traffic, but that estimate depends on at least three questionable postulates: (1) that total bike usage would be 20 times that number of Capital Bikeshare trips based on a limited city-wide sample from 2016-2017; (2) that bicyclist from as far as four miles away would reroute their trips to a Connecticut Avenue protected bike lane; and (3) that widely varying increases in bike volumes at only two locations could be averaged to project how many new bicyclists would be induced to use the Connecticut Avenue protected bike lanes. Variations in any of these assumptions could dramatically impact DDOT’s expectations about how many bicyclists will use new Connecticut Avenue protected bike lanes.

**Future Vehicle Volumes** — DDOT faces a formidable challenge to project traffic volumes through 2045 when it is impossible to predict how commuter patterns may change permanently as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As DDOT acknowledges, its analysis of future traffic patterns “does not consider potential mode shifts that may occur in the study area such as additional transit or Metro ridership” and “does not consider potential changes such as more people working from home as a direct result of dynamics created by pandemic conditions.”<sup>10</sup> DDOT simply assumes that pre-pandemic traffic

<sup>7</sup> Connecticut Avenue NW Reversible Lane Operations and Safety Study Public Meeting No. 1, April 1, 2021, page 35, available at <https://bit.ly/3g6ebT0>. In this public presentation, DDOT reported that 46% of crashes occurred during reversible lane operations, but the actual figures from the five-year study period (2015-2019) shows 401 total crashes resulting in injury, 177 (44%) of which occurred during reversible lane operations.

<sup>8</sup> Connecticut Avenue NW Reversible Lane Operations and Safety Study Public Meeting No. 1, April 1, 2021, page 35, available at <https://bit.ly/3g6ebT0>.

<sup>9</sup> CAC Meeting #3 Presentation, October 1, 2020, Slide 17, available at <https://bit.ly/3sl6evF>. The more complete VHB study was provided to the CAC but is not on DDOT’s website.

<sup>10</sup> Learning Room: Traffic Analysis & Parking, Connecticut Avenue NW Reversible Lane Operations and Safety Study Public Meeting No. 1, April 1, 2021, slide 37, available at <https://bit.ly/3v2wrRs>.

conditions will return, and traffic volumes will be driven primarily by regional demographics. While that is one potential scenario, it is not the only — or perhaps even the most plausible — scenario. It might be more prudent to acknowledge a range of future traffic possibilities.

### **Impact of Traffic Diversion**

Either of DDOT's preferred alternatives — Concepts B and C — would significantly reduce the number of lanes available for vehicles during rush hours using reversible lanes.<sup>11</sup> Thus, if traffic volumes traveling to the central city remain the same or increase, as DDOT predicts, congestion is likely to be substantial during rush hours with significant backups at intersections and vehicle diversion to alternative routes that were not designed for commuter traffic.

While DDOT attempted to predict how traffic would be diverted from Connecticut Avenue to other streets, it did not examine how increased congestion would affect the L1 and L2 bus routes on Connecticut Avenue. Hopefully, transit will be an ever growing means of commuting downtown, but if the bus routes are clogged by backed up traffic, they will not attract riders, and those who have less mobility and cannot bike or walk will have no alternative but to drive. Before making a substantial change, as proposed, DDOT needs to understand the impact on all modes of transportation, particularly the Connecticut Avenue buses.

I also remain concerned about the impact of proposed Connecticut Avenue changes on surrounding streets in our ANC, including Chevy Chase Parkway, Nevada Avenue, Utah Avenue, 41st Street/Reno Road, and Linnean Avenue. DDOT conducted a traffic analysis of some expected impacts from the elimination of rush-hour traffic lanes on Connecticut Avenue.<sup>12</sup> It predicts that under Concept B, 1920 vehicles will be diverted to secondary streets and under Concept C, 3890 vehicles will find their way through the surrounding neighborhoods. It is not possible to accurately predict where those vehicles will go because mapping apps will send drivers on whatever route will reduce travel time, including neighborhood streets.

<sup>11</sup> Concept B would have three lanes in both directions during rush hours and two lanes in both directions in off-peak hours, with a parking lane on each side. Concept C would have two lanes in both directions at all times with left-turn pockets and a protected bike lane on either side. ~~With reversible lanes, there are four lanes for inbound or outbound traffic during rush hours, with off-peak the same as Concept B.~~ Connecticut Avenue NW Reversible Lane Operations and Safety Study Public Meeting No. 1, April 1, 2021, pages 42, 44, and 46, available at <https://bit.ly/3g6ebT0>.

<sup>12</sup> DDOT did not analyze some possible alternate routes, e.g., Linnean Avenue. DDOT said that they did not consider those routes significant.

Some of DDOT's modeling results are puzzling. For instance, it predicts a decrease in peak-hour traffic volume on Nevada Avenue but an increase in volume on Broad Branch Road,<sup>13</sup> even though Nevada feeds into Broad Branch Road when it crosses Nebraska Avenue. More logically, vehicles using Broad Branch Road will access it using Nevada Avenue, thus avoiding the predicted congestion on Connecticut Avenue. Similarly, it seems unlikely that rush-hour traffic volumes on Nebraska Avenue and Utah Avenue will decrease since they are reasonable alternative routes for commuters seeking to avoid congestion on Connecticut Avenue.

Any traffic volume increases on streets like Chevy Chase Parkway and 41st Street/Reno Road — which DDOT predicts — will be problematic.<sup>14</sup> These streets are primarily residential, were never designed for heavier volumes, and already have some dangerous intersections that will get worse with more traffic (e.g., Chevy Chase Parkway and Military Road, Reno Road and Harrison Street, Reno Road and Military Road). DDOT has not proposed any measures to mitigate the increased volumes on these streets, and there may be no steps that would make them safe with the projected additional traffic.

### **Impact on Parking**

Concept C would eliminate a substantial number of existing parking and loading spaces on Connecticut Avenue — 321 fewer parking spaces and six fewer loading spaces, including 40 to 50 fewer spaces in our ANC between Livingston Street and Nebraska Avenue.<sup>15</sup> DDOT has also suggested that it might extend the protected bike lanes further north of Livingston Street as far as Northampton Street or Chevy Chase Circle, which could eliminate 48 additional metered spaces serving our retail businesses.<sup>16</sup>

Parking to serve our business corridor is already scarce, and adoption of Concept C would further exacerbate that problem. While DDOT has made efforts to get feedback

<sup>13</sup> Connecticut Avenue NW Reversible Lane Operations and Safety Study Public Meeting No. 1, April 1, 2021, page 71, available at <https://bit.ly/3g6ebT0>.

<sup>14</sup> Connecticut Avenue NW Reversible Lane Operations and Safety Study Public Meeting No. 1, April 1, 2021, page 71, available at <https://bit.ly/3g6ebT0>. DDOT's estimates for diversions to these streets appear to be low considering their close proximity to Connecticut Avenue.

<sup>15</sup> Connecticut Avenue NW Reversible Lane Operations and Safety Study Public Meeting No. 1, April 1, 2021, page 64, available at <https://bit.ly/3g6ebT0>. DDOT's analysis does not separately identify the eliminated parking spaces between Jennifer Street and Nebraska Avenue, the southern border of the ANC, so the number of eliminated spaces is estimated.

<sup>16</sup> Chevy Chase Neighborhood Parking Task Force Report, Fall 2018, page 8, available at <https://bit.ly/2QOaHtt>.

on this aspect of its proposal from businesses south of Livingston Street, it has not made a similar effort with the businesses north of Livingston Street in our commercial district. At a minimum, DDOT should work with Chevy Chase businesses to address their concerns about parking. For instance, as part of this project and to alleviate some concerns, DDOT could work with the community to open the currently restricted surface parking lots — e.g., at PNC Bank, behind Blue 44 and the Fishery, at Safeway, behind the CVS, behind Magruder’s, and at Wells Fargo Bank — more broadly to all patrons of neighborhood businesses.

Moreover, this area — as well as the entire study area — is designated as a Future Planning Analysis Area on the Generalize Policy Map in the Comprehensive Plan, and the Chevy Chase section of Connecticut Avenue is the subject of an ongoing Small Area Plan effort. DDOT should not proceed with any plans to extend the protected bike lane without close coordination with the community-led Chevy Chase Small Area Plan.

### **Inadequate Support for Eliminating the No-Build Management Alternative**

DDOT eliminated all possible alternatives from further consideration except Concepts B and C. In general, there were good reasons for eliminating Concepts A and D.<sup>17</sup> The no-build management option was eliminated based on DDOT’s representation that it “would require [Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices]-compliant overhead signage and signals; not supported by [the Commission on Fine Arts] and [State Historic Preservation Office].”<sup>18</sup> DDOT did not provide any documentation on the control devices that would be necessary for the reversible lanes — which have apparently never been in place for the reversible lanes and, thus, have been out of compliance with the Manual — or any formal expressions of non-support from the Commission on Fine Arts or the District’s Historic Preservation Office. Before eliminating the no-build management alternative, DDOT should provide documentation of its discussions with the Commission on Fine Arts and the Historic Preservation Office and their formal conclusions that overhead signage and signals are unacceptable.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Based on my review of the DDOT study, I have reached these conclusions and recommendations:

<sup>17</sup> Concept A would retain reversible lanes, add protected bike lanes on both sides, and remove all parking; Concept D would retain reversible lanes, add a two-way protected bike lane on one side, and eliminate all parking. Connecticut Avenue NW Reversible Lane Operations and Safety Study Public Meeting No. 1, April 1, 2021, pages 43 and 49, available at <https://bit.ly/3g6ebT0>

<sup>18</sup> Connecticut Avenue NW Reversible Lane Operations and Safety Study Public Meeting No. 1, April 1, 2021, page 39, available at <https://bit.ly/3g6ebT0>

1. The study goals and guiding principles are widely shared and supported;
2. The reported study data does not adequately support DDOT's conclusions, and further data collection/disclosure and analysis is necessary;
3. More emphasis needs to be places on identifying and mitigating unintended and never fully predictable adverse consequences;
4. DDOT should defer any final determination about the future design of Connecticut Avenue until it has a better understanding of the likely impacts, including particularly the long-term effects of the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic;
5. Concept C has an advantage over Concept B by providing protective bike lanes, which may be a desirable long-range addition to support safety and multimodal transportation, but it comes with a number of drawbacks, e.g, greater congestion on alternative routes and elimination of parking; and
6. If DDOT does proceed with its proposed alternative, it should do so cautiously, recognizing that there could be significant unexpected adverse consequences, and it should be prepared to identify and make rapid modifications to correct problems as they appear.