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DDOT's Connecticut Avenue Reversible Lane Study
Comments on Concerns Regarding Concept C
Commissioner Connie K. N. Chang
April 25, 2021

I am sharing my views on DDOT's Connecticut Avenue Reversible Lane Study after having (i) reviewed the proposed draft resolution prepared by Commissioners Gore and Zeldin for the Commission's consideration at our Public Meeting on April 26, 2021; (ii) considered Commissioner Speck's draft comments that was posted on the ANC 3/4G website as well as Commissioner Higgins' concerns expressed via email to the Commission; and (iii) read DDOT's Existing Condition Report (June 2020) and presentation slides, and other related materials. I share my view to serve as background for my expected vote on April 26, 2021 at the ANC 3/4G Public Meeting.

For me, the most important consideration in support of Concept C is equity for bicyclists. As a matter of public policy, we should make this important corridor bicycle friendly b/c it's less polluting, better for health, and it's time.

Whether or not we retain or stop reversible lane operations, roadway use should be equitable across the four main categories of users--vehicular, transit, cyclists, and pedestrians. Right now, pedestrians and cyclists are the most vulnerable. Designated bike lanes protect not only cyclists, but also drivers and pedestrians, if designed properly. To me, this should be the starting point. Cyclists should be afforded the protection they need and pedestrians who have right of way should be able to cross intersections safely.

If more people bike to work, to shop, to play because it is safer with protected bike lanes and if it's true as some have argued that with designated lanes for cars and for bikes allow traffic to flow not more slowly, but more efficiently, then we should aim to make this possible.

On the issue of data, we have lived through an incredible year and many lives have been turned upside down. Old habits have died hard and new habits have been born. In years past, when many people argued for telecommuting, many organizations were not supportive. During this crazy year, people who could work from home did and their productivity did not take a nosedive as feared. Telecommuting may be a permanent fixture in our working lives. Fewer people may drive to work downtown, and it could also be the case that others who take public transit might drive (or, cycle) to avoid crowds.

I don't know what data we expect DDOT to come up with that will illuminate what the future will bring. Prior established patterns may be highly unreliable. Projecting bike usage is equally as futile as projecting future vehicle volumes. What we do know is many more people have been biking and it stands to reason that this trend will likely continue.

Here are my further thoughts on expressed concerns/objections to Concept C:

(1) Are crashes during reversible lane hours related to higher traffic volume or due to having reversible lanes?

In reading the section, "Comparison of Connecticut Ave NW Crash Data to Districtwide Principal Arterials," of the Existing Conditions Report (June 2020; starting on page 64), that compared CT Ave with non-reversible lane principal arterials and ones with fewer than 250 crashes reported over the five-year study period of 2015-2019, Figure 46 shows that CT Ave has considerably more crashes than elsewhere.

Also, on p. 6 of the Existing Conditions Report, a May 2011 article and study published in the Institute of Transportation Engineers journal that evaluated the operations of reversible lanes in DC was mentioned. The study compared CT Ave (w/reversible lanes) with Mass Ave and Wisconsin Ave (both nearby and without reversible lanes) and concluded that CT Ave w/only 40% more traffic had 3x as many crashes as Mass Ave, and that 35% of these crashes occurred when reversible lanes were in effect, significantly higher than other arterials studied. The study concludes that "the higher crash rate can... be attributed to the District's tradition of not using mast arms for overhead reversible lane control signals due to aesthetic reasons." Since the Commission on Fine Arts is opposed to overhead signage, it's not clear to me how reversible lanes can continue.

(2) Concerns about ending reversible lanes where 4 lanes are in use during rush hour versus 2 lanes in one direction.

In reading the section, "Connecticut Avenue NW Lane Utilization," of the Existing Conditions Report (June 2020; pp 13-14), where data had been collected during the AM/mid-day/PM peak hours. It appears that for the AM peak period, 64% of drivers use the center lanes (lanes 2,3) vs 36% using the outside lanes (lanes 1, 4) in the 4-lane

southbound direction, and for the PM peak period, 74% use the center lanes (lanes 2,3) while only 26% use the outside lanes (lanes 1,4) in the 4-lane northbound direction.

The tables on page 14 disaggregate these statistics by road segment and for Military Rd NW and Nebraska it seems to me that the two center lanes would be able to accommodate the traffic on the outside lanes.

I am, of course, worried about dispersion of traffic to adjoining streets where children/students may be walking to school, which would affect constituents in my district. Since we don't know if the traffic levels will be the same or not given our year long and likely longer battle with COVID and its variants, it's difficult to know how bad this problem may be.

(3) Concerns about adding protected bike lanes and how it affects traffic flow.

For over a decade, I was a reverse commuter, driving from NW DC to MD on CT Ave. The main problems I encountered were (i) poor signage/lack of mast arms for inexperienced drivers during reversible lane operations who were in the wrong lane or who tried to make left turns in the wrong lane; (ii) cyclists traveling in the same lane and the worry I had that they would crash or be hit by me or another vehicle; and (iii) traffic lights that were not synchronized that caused traffic backups unnecessarily.

Reducing the travel speed from 30 to 25 isn't going to change much. Tables on p. 29 of the Existing Conditions Report (June 2020) show that vehicles have been travelling at speeds below 25 mph during AM/mid-day/PM peak hours. Having a designated bike lane, though, will increase safety for all, and having synchronized traffic lights will help reduce unnecessary traffic backups.

(4) Concerns about diversion of traffic.

Residents in my district as well as residents living near other arterials like Mass Ave or Reno Rd could be negatively impacted by vehicles taking a different route than CT Ave, but the question is volume. How many vehicles? I don't know and I don't want to stop progress from being made b/c of what MAY happen. Again, this pandemic is nothing we have ever seen and it's guesswork as to how bad traffic may be. And, if traffic is bad, people will change their behavior. Commuters may decide to take public transit. Commuters may decide to ask their supervisors to come into work earlier or later. Commuters may decide to telecommute.

Changing the design of CT Ave will absolutely change how people commute. And, if we care about equity for bicyclists and the environment, then we will have to bear the consequences. I do hope that we apply pressure on DDOT to work hard to prohibit entry during rush hour onto certain streets and employ measures to slow traffic on side streets so that different choices can be made. And, of course, we must push the District to raise confidence in our public transportation system so that it's a viable option.

(5) Concerns about decline in parking spaces.

I suggest that the Commission continue the Parking Task Force work that former Commissioner Jerry Malitz led. Over the past few weeks, I have spoken to zoning experts, Alex Krefetz of Chevy Chase Main Street, among others. I welcome more of us to work together to make sure the parking study that DDOT has engaged in as part of its CT Ave reversible lane study results in effective solutions, and that private parking lots in mine and Commissioner Peter Gosselin's districts (e.g., PNC and new Chase Bank (formerly Circle Liquor)) that require BZA zoning exemptions b/c the lots are zoned residential can be used more widely by the public. There are lots of ideas we could explore together, including making better use of technology (e.g., apps are available for drivers seeking parking spaces).