

## DC Budget – A Question of Priorities

We are told we have a tight budget this year. Mayor Bowser has called for program cuts and new taxes. But in fact, the District budget is rich. The real problem is our priorities.

DC needs affordable housing. We need to compensate teacher helpers for their work caring for our children. By contrast The DC Council and particularly Council-member Charles Allen, who chairs the Transportation Committee, wants to buy us a bike.

Do we really need a Council that prioritizes giving us a bike? According to Council-member Brooke Pinto, who introduced the bike rebate to get us to use the expensive network of bike lanes DC. But it is doubtful that a free bike will change our habits. In a tight budget season, we have a rebate program that can't be justified.

There are other questionable budget items. The city pays for competing transit systems that cannibalize one another. We fund Metro and WMATA. The Circulator is being cut. But the streetcar on H St. NE will cost \$260 million this year. City funds are wasted on competing transit systems while urgent needs go wanting.

Chair Allen has a driving concern for Vision Zero, a program that was started 10 years ago to improve traffic

safety and reduce the number of fatalities. This safety program under his leadership morphed into a bike program, so that when the fatalities go up, he calls it proof we need more bike lanes. The truth is that DC bike lanes, lane closures and removal of parking cause confusion, congestion, and frustration and may be a cause for a rise in fatalities. Protected bike lanes are dangerous. They are called 'protected' to lull us into thinking they are safer, but people have been killed in protected lanes.

I will be candid. Unlike the city, I do not have millions of dollars to squander. If I had a vision for 10 years that produced opposite results, I'd change the vision. Clearly a government office that cannot achieve its goal after 10 years is not worth the cost. Something is terribly wrong. It is Allen's job, to question the budget. Are bike lanes causing the fatalities? Shouldn't we abolish the Vision Zero office and pay the teacher helpers and provide affordable housing instead.

A more direct safety program would be for Allen to propose bike regulation. Bike regulation is what we need for safety, isn't it? Biking is the only mode of transit in DC that is unregulated. That is untenable. Some behavior is patently dangerous, whether by drivers or bikers. Bike regulations should be required, and Allen should take the lead - certification to ride a bike in the city streets, registration and insurance. Then we can punish bikers and drivers alike.

Mayor Bowser and DDOT Director Sharon Kershbaum deserve our thanks for their courage in standing up to the bike ideology. Their comprehensive review of bike lanes, lane closures and removal of parking is welcome and should yield budget savings. What started as a safety program morphed into a bike program. We cannot allow that.

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