

Why is DC Funding the Bike Lobby?

Testimony of Lee Meyer
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Council Budget Hearing

My name is Lee Meyer and I am President of SaveConnecticutAve.org. The residents of wards 3 and 4 and the businesses along Conn Ave applaud DDOTs decision to cancel the installation of bike lanes and instead focus on actual measures that will make Conn Ave safe. All roads don't need all modes.

I want to talk about the Deputy Mayor for Operations and infrastructure's (DMOI)'s Trail Ranger Grant to the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA). While I believe the trail rangers provide a valuable service, I question why we pay WABA to administer this important function via a grant. I believe that the trail rangers should be employees of DPW with whom they work closely. That would not only be more efficient but would also give the city greater control over their activities. As I hope you know, under the Trail Rangers grant, besides paying for the trail rangers, the city pays 37% of WABA's advocacy directors' salary and benefits, 12.5% of their communication director salary and benefits, 100% of the Vision Zero Directors salary and benefits, \$9,000 for stickers and temporary tattoos, and over \$8,500 per

year for WABA's email marketing and Salesforce subscription.

Included in this grant is something called the "Fall Gear Stipend". WABA uses this money to purchase REI clothing including silk socks, \$155 sneakers, \$135 boots, lunches delivered by Door Dash, and other questionable items. DMOI and DDOT paid WABA over \$1.26 million dollars in 2023 and those funds allow them to use their membership dollars to lobby the Council and the mayor's administration. DC is WABA's largest source of funding and without taxpayer money, they would not have the oversized influence that they have today. In 2022 the DC Board of Ethics and Government Accountability declared WABA, which is supposed to be a 501c3 organization, a lobbyist organization.

WABA needs to rely on its membership to fund its lobbying and marketing efforts and not on the DC government. In this era of budget austerity, it's time to defund WABA. The Trail Rangers Grant and the \$32 million dollars that has been earmarked for protected bike lanes in 2024 should be used to fund public transportation and sorely needed core social services that serve the public good and not just a small, vocal, special interest group.

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