

Councilmember Charles Allen: DDOT Does Not Listen - DDOT Director Kershbaum Takes the Stand Today

The leading proponent of bike lanes on the DC Council, Charles Allen noted at the Council Oversight Hearing Wednesday last week (Feb. 5) that witnesses both for and against bike lanes were in agreement on one thing: DDOT does not listen. Today, February 11, as DDOT Director Sharon Kerschbaum takes the stand, Allen pledged, "I will ask her about that."

Last night at a meeting of the Queens Chapel Civic Association (QCCA), a community roiled by DDOT safety projects, DDOT community relations representative Tyler Williams explained that DDOT had removed traffic lanes at dangerous intersections to make them safer. Residents at the meeting complained bitterly that DDOT's road changes at the intersections on Rhode Island Ave. at Eastern Avenue and at Bladensburg Road are causing mile-long congestion, are impossible to navigate and are more dangerous. They asked DDOT to revisit the sites. Ms Williams replied, "Yes, they've been installed more than six months and are due for an inspection." Residents asked why DDOT road planners do not come to civic meetings in advance of changes. They expressed their frustration driving and engaging with DDOT.

The problem is that DDOT does not ask the question when it plans to remove traffic lanes, where will the traffic go? That critical question is part of the planning process, not an afterthought.

It is hard to believe DDOT's assurances that road diets are proven to be safer when we see with our own eyes, it is not so. On Christmas Eve a pedestrian was run down and killed by a speeding car at the intersection of C St. and 16th St., NE where DDOT had recently installed one of the more bizarre road modifications in the city. At least for one pedestrian walking on the sidewalk that night, the road was not safer. It was fatal.

There is a deadly contradiction between DDOT's professed goal of safer streets and what it's doing to traffic. As DDOT begins a new five-year plan, DC Safe Streets Coalition asks DDOT to pause installation of protected bike lanes, undertake a comprehensive review and commit to community engagement. At the hearing last week, our Coalition further asked the Council itself to shoulder its responsibility for safer streets. Biking is the only mode of transit in DC that is unregulated. It's time for the Council to regulate biking in DC, requiring registration, licensing, insurance, certification and protective gear.

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Feb. 11, 2025