

The Lost Carrot - Let's Fix Public Transit First

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DC Council Hearing on WMATA Today

In its haste to remove cars from DC streets, DC planners are putting the cart before the horse. They acknowledge the purpose of recent radical road designs is to make driving frustrating and to nudge DC residents to choose public transit. The problem is that DC does not have reliable public transit. Better to improve public transit as a positive incentive first.

DC residents complain that they have no bus service or that it does not arrive on time. Today, you may have to cross a bike lane to board a bus.

I attended a meeting organized by WMATA and DDOT on the plan to remove traffic lanes from George Avenue. I asked the project leader, "Isn't that going to cause congestion?" He replied without hesitation, "Yes." The plan is designed to frustrate drivers and nudge them to use public transit. At a meeting of a civic association, where residents complained bitterly that new road designs cause traffic to back up a mile, the DDOT spokesperson said the design was intended to slow traffic, ostensibly to make streets safer.

On Christmas Eve at the intersection of C St. and 16th St., NE, where DC had just completed a road design to

make the intersection safer, a motorist ran down and killed a pedestrian walking on the sidewalk. Upon closer inspection, we can say the new design is bizarre. It removes a traffic lane and narrows the road, just a block from the DC Stadium circle where traffic often is speeding. The telltale sign that the new road designs are unsafe is that the curbs are marked with tire tracks. Motorists are confused by the new configuration. Putting obstacles in the roadway and creating confusion are not safety measures.

Some time ago, city planners discovered that by using a carrot-and-stick method they could influence behavior and avoid the process of public approval. Somewhere along the way, DC planners lost sight of the carrot part of the equation. Bike lanes and road design in DC show that city planners have a firm grasp on the stick part of the equation while losing the carrot part – world class, reliable public transit.

DC Safe Streets Coalition was established to push back on the installation of protected bike lanes and road designs because they are making the streets more dangerous. We ask DC to regulate biking with registration, insurance and safety gear. And today, we are adding a new goal, that DC improve public transit if you want us to give up driving.

Last year WMATA declared a budget shortfall and demanded half a billion dollars from DC taxpayers or cut

service. Between WMATA cutting service and DDOT making driving frustrating, DC residents have no good options.

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