



## Government of the District of Columbia Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B

*By Electronic Mail*

[DATE]

Councilmember Mary M. Cheh  
Chair, Committee on Transportation and the Environment  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Re: Oversight of the District Department of Transportation:

Dear Councilmember Cheh:

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B, at a duly noticed public meeting, with a quorum being the “majority of the total number of commissioner positions currently filled in Commission 4B,” at its May 26, 2020, meeting voted with X Yeas, X Nays, and X Abstentions to send to the Committee on Transportation and the Environment this letter about oversight concerns regarding the functioning of the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) during the term of the Commission.

Both Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B (acting as the Commission) and individual Commissioners have experienced difficulties ensuring that the District Department of Transportation acts to fulfill its mandate and the needs of our constituents. The Department has failed to act in accordance with the Mayor’s Vision Zero Initiative or even the Department’s own announced plans and objectives. These problems exist throughout all phases of project initiation, management, and execution.

**Project initiation and data gathering:** As the elected officials closest to our communities, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners are often the first conduit for neighborhood traffic, transportation, and safety concerns. When problems or concerns are brought forward, Commissioners in Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B have attempted to address them through a variety of communications and actions directed toward DDOT. These have included communications with DDOT Ward liaisons, the DDOT Director, various professional, and program staff and supervisors; communications with Council staff and representatives of the Mayor’s Office of Community Relations and Services; public petitions; scheduled walk-throughs; 311 reporting through the Office of Unified Communications; feedback on the DDOT Livability Study process; and DDOT’s Traffic Safety Assessment process. Unfortunately, none have proven particularly effective.

Particularly concerning has been the continued ineffectiveness of formalized reporting

mechanisms - 311 reports and traffic safety assessments. Both, frankly, are “black holes.” When confronted with an urgent issue - often involving the immediate safety of constituents - Commissioners utilizing these reporting mechanisms get no feedback, timelines so long that they are useless, incidents closed without clear resolution (or no resolution at all), and an unclear prioritization of received requests. Without a transparent and clear process for request processing and prioritization, Commissioners resort to the other informal means described above to “lobby” for projects in their area, whether they are new construction or merely attempts to get existing infrastructure fixed.

These processes undoubtedly further inequities that exist in our transportation system. Communities with more wealth and power will inevitably succeed in prioritizing their projects over those with fewer resources. This dichotomy exacerbates the difficulties in obtaining maintenance for existing infrastructure that is pedestrian or bike focused, where roadways have a more clearly defined maintenance and rehabilitation schedule.

Similar issues exist in DDOT’s long-term planning processes. Livability studies, when complete, are useful “ammunition” for organizations, individuals, and Commissions to lobby for the study results that they like, but there’s no clearly articulated mechanism for implementing the results presented at the end of the process.

Project initiations have become even more difficult during the coronavirus emergency. Despite the increased number of community members using our roads by methods other than cars and [reporting](#) suggesting that auto speeds are rising with decreased traffic on our roads, DDOT appears to be slow in taking advantage of the opportunity to further both infrastructure and Vision Zero goals. In fact, Commissioners have reported that DDOT has informed them that they have suspended traffic counts and other data collection due to irregular traffic patterns during the public health emergency, which has prevented progress on requests for new infrastructure like stop signs.

**Project notification to construction:** Per the [recent report](#) from the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, DDOT is one of the agencies that struggles with providing adequate notice to Commissions about actions within a Commission area. Beyond that, the primary method for providing notice to Commissions, the Notice of Intent (NOI), is unclear and minimally useful due to the lack of clear timelines for implementation.

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B has repeatedly passed resolutions in support of projects outlined notices it has received, often urging completion of the project expeditiously due to community interest and support. However, projects then have an undetermined timeline and sit uncompleted for unknown reasons. DDOT is not transparent with the process once the NOI timelines are complete, and it is often unclear how they prioritize and time completion of projects that the Commission has supported.

Additionally, per the DC Code, Commissions that do not weigh in on a particular project are not signaling disapproval, but DDOT has often interpreted the decision not to weigh in that way. For that reason, the Commission has gone back to notifications provided to past Commissioners and passed resolutions on projects that DDOT noticed but never moved forward with. While DDOT should engage with and seek Commission support, failing to act after not hearing from a Commission continues the perception that DDOT is prioritizing projects based on political input, not based on an assessment of the safety needs of communities.

**Project construction to completion:** The Commission has also encountered challenges with

ensuring that DDOT completes projects according to plans that the community and the Commission have reviewed and approved. DDOT has partially completed projects on several occasions in our Commission area and then moved on. Several of these projects remain partially completed after years, despite Commissioner attempts to push for completion. On occasion, DDOT representatives will respond that projects are completed according to their internal metrics, forcing Commissioners to document the incomplete work and compare them to DDOT's own plans to demonstrate that the project is not actually complete.

Additionally, DDOT allows contractors to change significant portions of major projects once construction has begun without informing the community and the Commission of the changes. These changes and half-completed projects force Commissioners to act as unpaid project oversight for DDOT to ensure that our neighborhoods get what DDOT has agreed to deliver.

To summarize, our Commission's interactions with DDOT have been characterized by opacity, unclear standards and timelines, and half-finished projects and requests. Significant labor is expended by Commissioners at every stage. DDOT cannot be trusted to initiate projects on their own, even projects that are initiated by community-driven processes, projects that have gone through Commission review without objection, and projects that merely consist of basic infrastructure maintenance. DDOT's notification process is wholly separate from actual construction timelines and prevents communities from planning around new infrastructure or moving on to advocate for new improvements in their neighborhoods. When DDOT finally does begin construction, they require significant on-the-ground handholding to ensure that they execute agreed-upon plans and do not abandon projects before completion.

These failures lead to an inability to execute upon agreed-upon goals that are necessary to achieve the Mayor's Vision Zero goals or to ensure that our community infrastructure is in good repair. The political nature of these processes exacerbates infrastructure inequities in our Commission area and across the District.

We encourage the Committee to engage in aggressive oversight to ensure that DDOT is reforming their processes to ensure project notification, initiation, and construction are executed with fidelity to the Department's mission and goals, and equitably across the District. DDOT's lack of consistent communication and spotty adherence to its own procedures and proposals has forced Commissions to engage in oversight. However, Commissions are not equipped, funded or staffed to engage in proper and complete oversight which exacerbates inequities across our city, so we ask for your assistance and oversight.

The Commission also voted with X Yeas, X Nays, and X Abstentions to appoint the Commissioner for Single Member District 4B01, Evan Yeats, or any member of the Executive Committee in his absence, to be authorized to communicate this resolution and represent ANC 4B in communication with regards to this matter.

Sincerely,

Evan Yeats, ANC 4B01 Commissioner

cc: Members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment  
Jeff Marootian, Director, District Department of Transportation  
Lucinda M. Babers, Deputy Mayor for Operations and Infrastructure