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**VIA EMAIL**

January 7, 2020

Dear Mr. Mohamed Dahir:

On behalf of the Eckington Civic Association (ECA),<sup>1</sup> I am submitting the enclosed comments on the Florida Avenue NE New York Avenue Intersection (Dave Thomas Circle) 30% design and the Florida Avenue 65% design, both of which were released in December 2019.

To summarize the comments that are articulated in greater detail below, ECA would like future designs to incorporate the following feedback:

1. Please ensure that local residents, who are growing in number, can safely make local trips without entering a vehicle.
2. Please continue the Florida Avenue cycletrack west through the intersection to Q and R streets NW so that DDOT can close a gap in the bike lane network.
3. Please expand the north sidewalk on Florida Avenue where the Amtrak, WMATA red line, and MBT bridges pass over the street.
4. Please incorporate the planned NY Avenue trail into the Dave Thomas Circle design.
5. Please take additional measures to reduce unsafe vehicle speeds on Florida Avenue and New York Avenue.
6. Please add a crosswalk at the west side of the intersection of second street NE and Florida Avenue.
7. Please design the connection between 1st street and Eckington Place so that the space can be closed on a temporary basis for community events, including farmer's markets, food truck pop-ups, etc., on weekends and other off-peak hours.
8. Please implement or respond to the ECA's previous requests for interim safety improvements at Dave Thomas Circle.

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<sup>1</sup> These comments were approved by the Eckington Civic Association at its meeting on January 6, 2020.

9. Please maintain elements of the Dave Thomas Circle 30% design that advance the needs of local residents.

**1. Please ensure that local residents, who are growing in number, can safely make local trips without entering a vehicle.**

Eckington and neighboring communities are surrounded by obstacles to movement by any mode. Many of these obstacles are the result of past DDOT or D.C. government decisions to prioritize thru traffic over local traffic. The obstacles include:

- The WMATA and Amtrak tracks, which eliminate alternative access between Union Market and Brentwood to the east and Eckington to the west. Until at least the late 1960s, a [bridge](#) connected these neighborhoods at T St. NE, but it fell into disrepair and was torn down. As a result of these decisions, all vehicle, pedestrian, and bike traffic between these neighborhoods must use Florida/NY Avenue to the south or an extremely indirect route via Rhode Island Avenue and 9th Street to the North. We are unaware of any DDOT plans to address this problem.
- Eckington is surrounded by other arterial roads that are unsafe and also present obstacles to movement. North Capitol Street and Rhode Island Avenue are just as unsafe as Florida and New York Avenues. DDOT and NoMa BID's recent [North Capitol Street Needs Assessment](#) identified numerous issues that are true for all of these corridors.
- Other mid-city facilities limit options for continuous east-west facilities, including Glenwood Cemetery, McMillan reservoir, the McKinley and Langley School Campus, the North Capitol Street underpasses, and the 395 interstate tunnel.

The neighborhoods of Eckington, NoMa, and Union Market are quickly becoming dense areas with a high concentration of residential and commercial space. According to the NoMA BID, 44,000 people currently live within "NoMa market area," and there is a [91,000 average daily pedestrian count](#). The current [development pipeline](#) for Eckington, NoMa, and Union Market will add at least 5,700 residential units and 2.6 million SF of office and retail space in the next few years. And that is only counting sites that have a plan that is currently being pursued--additional development could easily double or triple these numbers.

Driving is the option of last resort for a large percentage of local trips. [86 percent](#) of NoMa residents and employees walk, bike, or take public transportation to work. According to the latest census data, the same is true for about 60% of Eckington residents. Those numbers will increase with additional density. NoMA metro is one of the busiest WMATA stations and will only get busier. All public transportation users are walkers or bikers too. You have to get yourself to the station or bus stop. One of DDOT's central goals should be to encourage these numbers to be even higher, especially as these neighborhoods grow in the years to come.

Finally, the changes we are witnessing in the Mid-City are also happening along the New York Avenue corridor. DDOT’s approach to Dave Thomas Circle as a “Gateway” to the urban core of D.C. is outdated. A far better conceptual approach is the one identified by the Urban Land Institute’s excellent [Technical Assistance Report](#): an exchange, a place where neighborhoods come together.

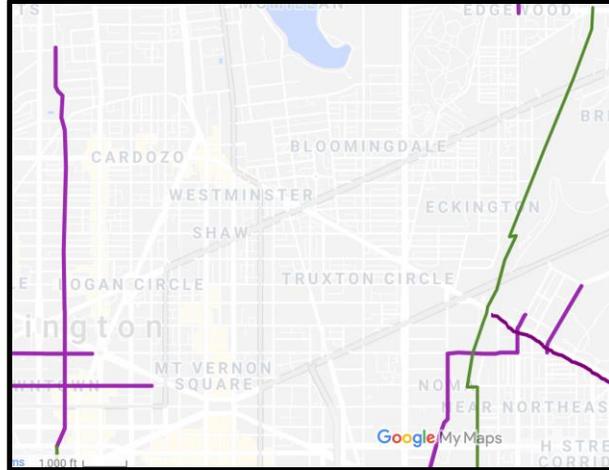
**2. Please continue the Florida Avenue cycletrack west through the intersection to Q and R streets NW so that DDOT can close a gap in the bike lane network.**

There is currently no safe way to travel east-west on a bike through the mid-city, and this intersection is a prime opportunity to close that gap. Establishing a protected and connected bike lane network is critical to meeting the city’s safety and environmental goals. The recently released [Sustainable DC 2.0 Plan](#) calls on the city to “increase biking and walking to 25% of all commuter trips in all wards.” DDOT’s Move DC [bicycle element](#) calls for a reduction in the number of bicyclist injuries and for more and better bicycle facilities. DDOT’s [Mid-City East livability study](#), which is six years old and has barely been implemented, calls for this gap to be closed as well, albeit by continuing the Q street bike lane across Florida Avenue and North Capitol Street.

Below is a clip from DDOT’s [bike map](#). There is currently no safe route for cyclists to travel east-west through this area of the city. The R and Q street bike lanes do not cross Florida Avenue or North Capitol Street. Florida Avenue, North Capitol Street, and New York Avenue are significant barriers because they are among the [most dangerous corridors in the city](#).



This is a map of a similar area from the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (modified to include the recently installed Florida Avenue NE lanes). As you can see, there is a substantial gap in the protected bike lane network across the middle of the city.



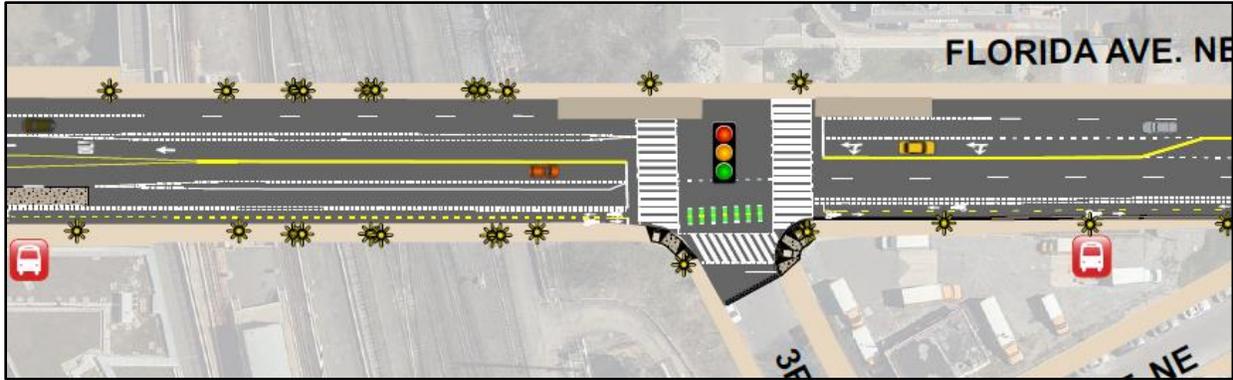
The easiest way to fill this gap, with zero impact on residential parking, is to replace one of the five vehicle lanes on Florida Avenue between Q street NW and Dave Thomas Circle with a protected bike lane.

**3. Please expand the north sidewalk on Florida Avenue where the Amtrak, WMATA red line, and MBT bridges pass over the street.**

The current sidewalk on the north side of Florida avenue is dangerous because of the proximity of cars that travel at high speeds directly next to the sidewalk. The current sidewalk width is also inadequate to accommodate existing and future pedestrian traffic.



The usable sidewalk space is even smaller than it appears because no one in their right mind will walk within a foot of a vehicle travelling at or alongside them at 25 miles per hour (or more).



Unfortunately, the 65% design for Florida avenue does not address this shortcoming whatsoever. Instead, it prioritizes three eastbound lanes on Florida avenue instead of expanding the sidewalk to accommodate higher pedestrian volumes.

DDOT should remove the curbside lane and convert it to an expanded sidewalk that can handle additional pedestrian traffic. Recall that this is the only direct pedestrian route between Eckington and Union Market. It is not clear that removing a lane would impair vehicle flow. The current design already takes an eastbound lane for the cycletrack.

There are multiple ways to shift lanes midblock. DDOT is already shifting lanes at the half block in the east and westbound directions. In addition, the centermost westbound lane at 3rd and Florida could be converted to a straight only lane. This would force vehicles to make left turns at the prior intersection at Florida and 4th street, which could have safety benefits. Left turns that are not on their own cycle at 3rd and Florida could be dangerous because of the cycletrack and the reduced visibility caused by the overpass.

The alternative accommodations that DDOT could provide pedestrians are likely to take decades to build and will be extremely expensive. They are: rebuilding the Amtrak, MBT, and Red line overpasses or building a new pedestrian bridge between Eckington and Union Market. The cost of taking a vehicle lane to build an adequate sidewalk for this area of the city (if there is one) is significantly lower than these alternatives.

**4. Please incorporate the planned NY Avenue trail into the Dave Thomas Circle design.**

The current Dave Thomas Circle design makes no attempt to incorporate the New York Avenue trail that is called for in the Move DC [Bicycle Element](#) and that has been developed further in the [New York Avenue Streetscape and Trail Concept Report](#). The Move DC plan calls for the trail to go all the way to North Capitol Street--through Dave Thomas Circle. The redesign of Dave Thomas Circle should include plans to connect the trail that DDOT has identified in its long-term planning documents and has been pursuing in recent concept studies.

**5. Please take additional measures to reduce unsafe vehicle speeds on Florida Avenue and New York Avenue.**

DDOT's presentation materials did not explain what efforts would be made to address safety at Dave Thomas Circle. In fact, the addition of turning lanes could reasonably be expected to encourage faster, not slower vehicle speeds. As the Eckington Civic Association and others have noted in previous correspondence to DDOT, speed appears to be a significant factor, especially in the most violent crashes that have occurred at this intersection.

For this reason, DDOT should consider:

1. Reducing the vehicle speed to 25 miles per hour on New York Avenue between North Capitol Street and Bladensburg Road;
2. Installing speed cameras directly before the intersection on both New York and Florida Avenues;
3. Adding other visual and physical cues to encourage drivers to slow down before they enter the intersection (as the ULI TAP recommends).
4. Add off-peak parking on New York and Florida Avenues as the ULI TAP recommends (note that DDOT already allows off-peak parking on New York Avenue west of North Capitol Street, so vehicle flow along the corridor would not be compromised)
5. Eliminate designated turn lanes to reduce pedestrian crossing distances as the ULI Tap recommends.

**6. Please add a crosswalk at the west side of the intersection of second street NE and Florida Avenue.**

DDOT's current plans do not currently call for a crosswalk to be added on Florida Avenue between the Eleanor and Five Guy's restaurants. Pedestrian convenience should be prioritized this close to a metro stop in a dense residential and commercial district. A pedestrian should not be made to cross three times where you could install a crosswalk and allow them to cross once.

**7. Please design the connection between 1st street and Eckington Place so that the space can be closed on a temporary basis for community events, including farmer's markets, food truck pop-ups, etc., on weekends and other off-peak hours.**

The buildings that directly face Dave Thomas Circle are likely to see significant change in the coming decade. It is important that DDOT imagine a facility that is an inviting place for people to gather for events like farmer's markets and food truck festivals. The ability to close this street to traffic on a temporary basis could transform it into a community amenity rather than a congested eyesore. Ultimately, streets are public spaces, not just thoroughfares. It is not hard to

imagine this space being activated the same way the city has activated squares adjacent to other high-volume roads--witness the square at Columbia Heights and the park at City Center, two facilities that have been successfully activated even though they are located on streets with high traffic volumes.

**8. Please implement or respond to the ECA's previous requests for interim safety improvements at Dave Thomas Circle.**

The ECA has twice written to DDOT to request interim safety improvements at Dave Thomas Circle—once in 2018 and once in 2019. We have yet to receive a response to these requests.

In the meantime, the conditions this intersection continue to be life-threatening. For the third time in two years, a vehicle recently caused structural damage to a building at the Wendy's at the intersection. The ECA continues to request that DDOT pursue temporary safety measures at the intersection while it works on a full redesign of the facility.

**9. Please maintain elements of the Dave Thomas Circle 30% design that advance the needs of local residents.**

Finally, the ECA is grateful the elements of the Dave Thomas Circle 30% design that are responsive to previous community concerns. For those reasons, we request that you preserve the following components of the design as you move forward:

- Direct vehicle, pedestrian, and bike lane access between Eckington and NoMa
- The installation of missing crosswalks at the intersection
- The closure of the entrance to O street from New York Avenue and 1<sup>st</sup> Street NE.

Thank you for your attention to these matters,

Conor Shaw  
President  
Eckington Civic Association

cc: Jeff Marootian, Director, District Department of Transportation  
Kelly Jeong-Olson, Community Engagement Specialist – Ward 5, District Department of Transportation  
Kenyan McDuffie, Ward 5 Council Member  
Charles Allen, Ward 6 Council Member

Mary Cheh, Ward 3 Council Member and Chair, D.C. Council Committee on  
Transportation and the Environment  
Ryan Linehan, ANC Commissioner for 5D01  
Cortney Segmen ANC Commissioner for 5E03  
Sylvia Pinkney, ANC Commissioner for 5E04  
Drew Courtney, ANC Commissioner for 6C06  
Dominique Chestnut, Ward 5 Liaison, Mayor's Office of Community Relations and  
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Rachel Maisler, Chair, DC Bicycle Advisory Council  
Robin-Eve Jasper, President, NoMA BID  
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