



Eckington  
Civic Association

June 15, 2021

Mr. Ali Shakeri,

Thank you for presenting [DDOT's 65% design](#) for the intersection of New York Avenue, Florida Avenue, Eckington Place, and 1st Street ("Dave Thomas Circle"). The Eckington Civic Association appreciates the elements of this design that reflect [previous input from our members](#), including the addition of crosswalks, protected bike lanes that cross New York Avenue, new public spaces, and simplified, direct access between Eckington and NoMa.

While we are encouraged by the direction this project is taking, we have three outstanding concerns:

1. the 65% design fails to address dangerous vehicle speeds and in fact encourages higher vehicle speeds by including new designated turn lanes;
2. the project does not advance DDOT's sustainability goals because it includes no improvement to bus service along Florida Avenue and fails to close gaps in the low-stress bike network; and
3. DDOT has not made sufficient commitments for the maintenance of public spaces at the intersection or for the regular closure of Eckington Place NE and First Street NE to accommodate community events.

In many respects, our feedback boils down to a simple point: We would like to see DDOT embrace the fact that this intersection lies at the heart of neighborhoods that are quickly becoming one of the most dense urban areas in the city. We hope that DDOT will take additional steps to make this space look, feel, and operate more like a city plaza and less like a suburban interchange. In the pages below, we expand on each of these comments and propose specific solutions for DDOT to consider.

**The 65% design fails to address high vehicle speeds, the primary safety concern for all users.**

Our biggest safety concern continues to be design features of New York Avenue, Florida Avenue, and the proposed intersection that encourage high vehicle speeds. The theoretical posted speed limit for these roads is 30 and 25 miles per hour, respectively, but in practice, vehicles travel at speeds well over those limits. Such behavior poses a direct threat to all other

users of the road. A driver travelling over 30 mile per hour has a 50% chance of killing any pedestrian they hit; the risks to pedestrians fall off dramatically at lower speeds. These risks are not theoretical at this intersection. The Wendy's restaurant and other structures on the property at this intersection (where one of the future public spaces will be) has been hit at least four times in the last five years by cars travelling at excessive speeds.

When we asked that the city fund fixes to Dave Thomas Circle in 2019, we specifically requested that DDOT reduce the speed limit on New York Avenue to 25 miles per hour and increase enforcement of existing traffic laws, including through the use of automated technology. It is disappointing to see repeated requests for basic, proven safety interventions like these go unanswered. If DDOT wants this intersection to be used and enjoyed by local residents, DDOT needs to take much more aggressive steps to calm traffic on New York and Florida Avenues as well as at Dave Thomas Circle.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that DDOT consider:

- Lowering the posted speed limit on New York Avenue to 25 mph west of 4th Street NE;
- Enforcing the posted speed limit (preferably with automated enforcement);
- Reducing the number of exclusive turning lanes at the intersection to slow traffic, especially in off-peak hours where New York and Florida Avenues are less congested (and the large, open streets encourage drivers to speed);
- Reducing lane width on New York and Florida Avenues (not just at the intersection, but also in the blocks leading to the intersection);
- Adding rumble strips, especially on the westbound portion of New York Avenue that descends towards Dave Thomas Circle;<sup>1</sup>
- Adding protective bollards along the public spaces and curbs adjacent to New York Avenue and Florida Avenue to provide additional protection for pedestrians;<sup>2</sup>
- Incorporating visual cues, speed monitors, and other measures that have a proven ability to increase compliance with vehicle speeds that are appropriate for a dense, urban environment;
- Improving lighting at pedestrian crossings; and
- Enforcing law prohibiting drivers from "blocking the box."

**The 65% design continues to underinvest in bus and bike networks--clean transportation modes that are critical to the city's sustainability goals.**

In addition, we would like to see DDOT do more to prioritize bus and bicycle traffic--both of which are key to reducing congestion and meeting the city's sustainability objectives. DDOT's current design does not adequately advance DDOT's own sustainability policies, goals, and strategies. DDOT's recently updated Move DC Plan [states](#), for example, that "DDOT will

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<sup>1</sup> Note that to the extent that sound pollution is an issue, the buildings directly adjacent to New York Avenue are already sound-proofed to protect residents from the noise of Amtrak rail and other projects.

<sup>2</sup> Precedent for the use of bollards can be found at the SW corner of Union Station, where pedestrian spaces are protected from vehicle traffic by bollards.

manage and promote a transportation network that supports economic vitality and opportunity, reduces emissions and strengthens resilience in the face of climate change, especially in historically underserved neighborhoods that may experience greater impacts.” DDOT has also [identified both New York and Florida Avenues](#) as transit priority corridors.

Unfortunately, the current design contains zero improvements to bus infrastructure and continues to fail to close significant gaps in the low-stress bike lane network. These issues can and should be addressed in conjunction with this project while DDOT is focusing resources on this intersection.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that DDOT consider the following improvements:

- Installing bus lanes on Florida Avenue between 8th Street and North Capitol Street;
- Analyze and explain how bus lanes could be introduced to New York Avenue;
- Extend the north/south cycletrack that passes through the intersection along Eckington Place so that it connects with the planned Harry Thomas Way protected bike lanes<sup>3</sup> and with R street (the lowest-stress east-west bike route in the mid-city);
- Extend the Florida Avenue protected bike lanes west to Q and R street (and thereby close a significant gap in the low-street bike lane network);<sup>4</sup>
- Provide additional protections for bike lane users at the intersection, including by bringing the bike lane up to sidewalk height and/or protecting the bike lane with crash-rated bollards.

**DDOT needs to take additional steps to ensure the success of the new public spaces at the intersection.**

Finally, we respectfully request that DDOT make design changes and public commitments with community organizations to ensure the success of the new public spaces that are being created at the intersection. Enjoyment of public space is not possible without protection from traffic violence, and we urge DDOT to view enhanced safety features as part of the city’s investment in public spaces.

But safety is just the bare minimum. We also need a plan for the regular maintenance of these spaces and a commitment that the Eckington Place/First Street connector will be closed on weekends and holidays to accommodate community events.

For these reasons, we request that DDOT:

- Commit to closing the Eckington Place/First Street NE connector every Saturday, Sunday, and Federal Holiday from 8 am to 2pm;

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<sup>3</sup> DDOT has indicated that protected bike lanes will be installed on Harry Thomas Way in FY 2021 in its [20x22 bikeways list and map](#).

<sup>4</sup> Florida Avenue currently has five lanes between Q street NE and Dave Thomas Circle even though it has fewer lanes elsewhere along the corridor. Installing bike lanes along this stretch could be accomplished with minimal investment and would have the side-benefit of calming traffic.

- Fund regular cleanup and maintenance of the public spaces in partnership with NoMA BID;
- Ensure that the design makes the closures of Eckington Place First Street for farmers' markets and other regular events simple and easy for community organizations like the ECA, BID, Eckington Parks and Arts and others; and
- Incorporate fitness equipment and play structures into the public space design.

## Conclusion

We appreciate that the city is moving forward with this project on an aggressive timeline for a project of this scale; however, it is also critical to ensure that we get this design right. Local communities deserve a safe intersection that maximizes investments in sustainable forms of transportation and that accommodates the need for well-maintained and easy-to-use public spaces. We hope that DDOT will be our partner in delivering world-class public spaces to our community and put greater emphasis on the human experience of this intersection.

Sincerely,

Conor Shaw  
President  
Eckington Civic Association<sup>5</sup>

cc: Everett Lott, Acting Director, DDOT  
Linda Bailey, Vision Zero Director, DDOT  
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Maura Brohpy, President and CEO, NoMA BID  
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<sup>5</sup> At a meeting of the ECA on June 14, 2021, members unanimously approved this letter to DDOT.