

Government of the District of Columbia

Department of Transportation



Transit Delivery Division

Commissioner Peter Wood
Chairperson, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1C
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May 31, 2023

Dear Chairperson Wood,

In Fall 2021, the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) initiated a project on Columbia Rd NW between 16th St NW and Connecticut Ave NW to improve safety and bus transit operations. Through this project DDOT performed data collection and analysis and received valuable feedback from community members. This letter is to inform you that DDOT has selected a concept for changes to the roadway, explain how the concept was developed, and invite you to participate in the design process. The planning phase of this project has concluded, but public feedback will continue to be important in refining the details of this project so we can make a great project even better. This letter does not constitute a formal Notice of Intent (NOI) as required by the Administrative Procedure Amendment Act of 2000

Needs Assessment

As with all DDOT Bus Priority projects, this planning effort began with a needs assessment to evaluate the conditions on the corridor leading to bus delay and traffic crashes in the corridor. DDOT performed data analysis and field observations and collected over 100 public comments to develop an understanding of the problems on Columbia Rd NW. This analysis uncovered a few key findings:

- The most severe delay for buses on the corridor is east of 19th St NW in the northeast-bound approach to 16th St NW (see Figure 1). There is also significant delay on the southwest-bound approaches to Connecticut Ave NW and 18th St NW.
- The corridor has a high rate of bicycle crashes at more than 5 crashes per mile per year resulting in injuries. Most of them are caused by factors that would be directly addressed by a protected bike lane, including “dooring,” parked cars pulling into bike lane, and rear-end crashes.
- Public feedback received on the project during the needs assessment highlighted frustration with safety on the corridor. In particular, people noted being uncomfortable in crosswalks without traffic signals. Many people also said that bicycling feels dangerous

due to chaotic traffic patterns resulting from illegal parking and inadequate bike infrastructure.

- The commercial loading demand exceeds the available space. Commercial vehicles use about 1,500 linear feet of space on the corridor, but only 500' of the curbside is allocated for their use (see Figure 3). The overflow of commercial vehicles from designated locations into the center turn lane and general purpose (GP) travel lanes contributes to unsafe conditions resulting from poor visibility. It also causes travel delays for GP traffic and buses in the commercial areas of Columbia Rd NW between 17th St NW and Belmont St NW.
- Columbia Rd NW is 50' wide and the public right of way is constrained such that there is no way to fully meet all of the needs of the roadway's users. Any proposed alternative would need to balance the project goals (listed below), traffic operations, and the community's desire for more parking.



Figure 1: Two buses stuck in severe northeast-bound congestion on Columbia Rd NW approaching 16th St NW. The recommended alternative would provide a center running bus lane to bypass the queue and access the left turn lane above.

Based on what was learned during the needs assessment, three project goals were established that would drive the development and analysis of alternatives:

1. Improve safety for vulnerable roadway users.
2. Reduce bus travel time.
3. Better accommodate commercial loading and pickup and drop off.

As a result, this project includes bicycle and pedestrian safety measures in addition to bus priority treatments.

Preferred Alternative

After conducting a thorough evaluation of several concepts, DDOT will advance to design what was described as the “DDOT-preferred Concept” during the alternatives analysis. This design responds to the changes in the character of Columbia Rd NW from block to block (see Figure 2) and aims to balance the goals of the project and public feedback that has been received.

Preferred Alternative Description

The following items are key components of the recommended alternative:

1. **Bus lanes** – Proposed for approximately 800' on the northeast-bound approach to 16th St NW and 700' on the southwest bound approach to Connecticut Ave NW. These are among the most congested parts of the corridor and are without the dense retail

environment that often leads to bus lane violations. The northeast bound segment would be in the center of the roadway, (similar to a left turn lane) because all buses make a left turn from Columbia Rd onto Harvard St NW, which is expected to further reduce the bus lane's vulnerability to violations.

2. **Protected Bike Lanes (PBL)** – As previously noted, adding protection to the existing bike lanes and closing the gaps would address most of the bike crashes and injuries occurring on the corridor. Parking is currently available on both sides of Columbia Rd NW, but to make space for the PBLs, parking, and curbside space would only be possible on one side of the street.
3. **Conversion of Metered Parking to Loading Zones** – The existing demand for loading on Columbia Rd NW exceeds the amount of space available. It is therefore necessary to convert much of the remaining curbside space in retail-oriented segments of Columbia Rd from metered parking to commercial loading zones. Pick-up/drop-off (PUDO) is permitted within commercial loading zones, but priority must be given to vehicles with commercial loading permits. DDOT staff will continue to work with public stakeholders to refine the details of the proposal.
4. **Curb Extensions and Median Refuge Islands** – The corridor contains many unsignalized crosswalks where curbs extensions can be used to daylight intersections and shorten crossing distances to improve pedestrian safety and comfort. DDOT made many such improvements to the corridor in 2022. While those specific changes implemented in 2022 will not be preserved in order to accommodate the new roadway configuration, the themes of improved visibility and speed management will be incorporated into the whole design.

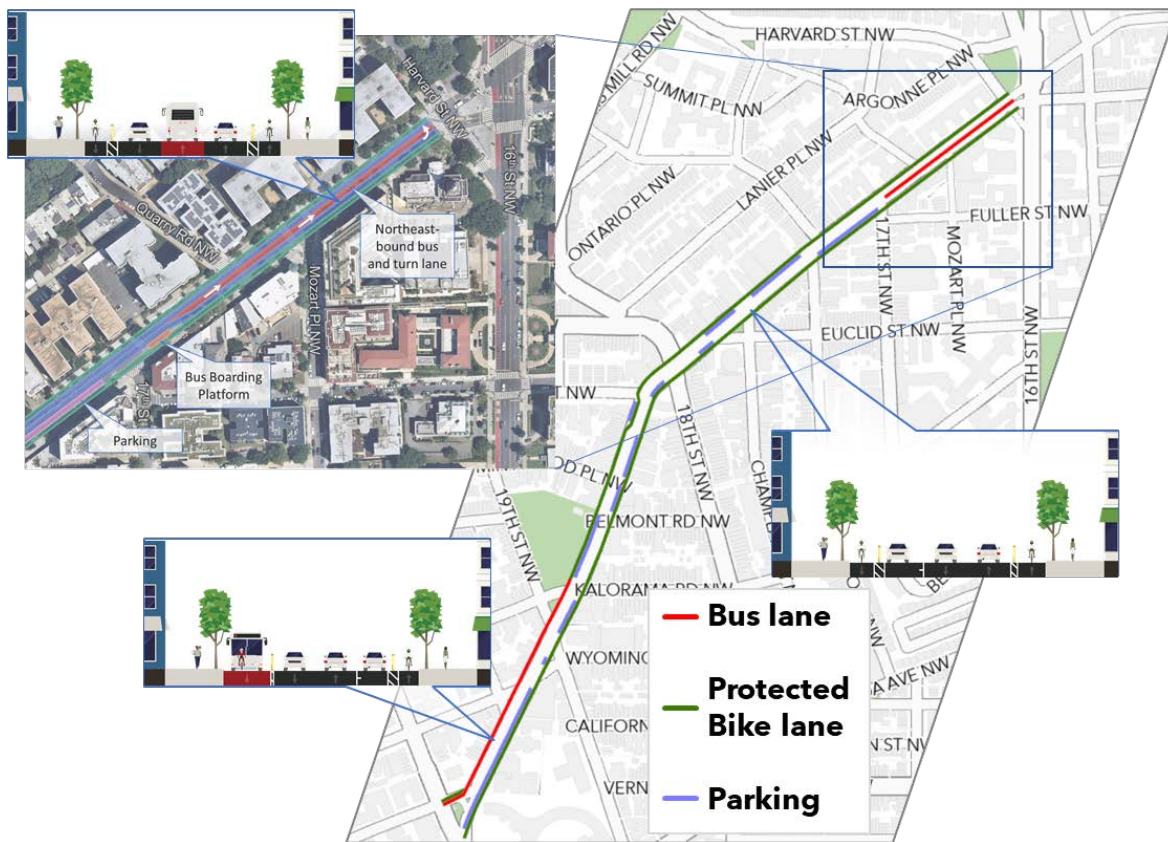


Figure 2: Location of parking, bike lanes, and bus lanes in the preferred alternative.

Traffic Analysis

Traffic analysis was performed based on 2019 traffic volumes for the preferred alternative, and the results indicate that travel time through the corridor is not expected to change substantially. The space for bicycle lanes and bus only lanes is mostly being provided by repurposing parking lanes, so the number of travel lanes will remain unchanged for nearly all of the corridor. No left turn restrictions will be introduced.

The traffic analysis also evaluated the feasibility and potential benefit of many operational details for the preferred alternative that went beyond what was previously evaluated in the concept development. Some of these items affect traffic circulation and curbside regulations and will and will require focused public outreach in the future, but others are just components of the improved safety and transit operations of the project:

1. The eastern limit of the project is 16th St NW, but the traffic analysis evaluated the extension of the PBL to 15th St NW in order to connect with the existing bike facility there. This will have effects on parking between 15th St NW and 16th St NW on Columbia Rd NW and Harvard St NW and will need community feedback before moving forward.
2. Ontario Rd NW, north of Columbia Rd, could be converted to one-way, northbound to simplify the traffic signal operations at Columbia Rd and reduce delay for people walking, biking, driving, and riding the bus. (Ontario Rd NW is not aligned where it crosses Columbia Rd and therefore currently requires two separate phases for each side of Columbia. Conversion to one-way would allow both sides to run concurrently in one phase.) This would also allow for parking on both sides of Ontario Rd NW. This will affect neighborhood circulation and will so community feedback will be needed before moving forward.
3. The eastbound left turn from Columbia Rd NW to Harvard St NW is very difficult for buses due the short gaps to make the turn. The traffic analysis confirmed the feasibility of extending the amount of time available for the permissive left turn phase (indicated with a flashing yellow arrow) to include the time when 16th St NW has a green light for north-south travel.
4. The westbound right turns at 18th Street are to be fully time-separated from westbound bicyclists and north-side pedestrians, Adams Mill Road, and Columbia Road NW. This change will protect bicyclists from high volumes of right turning vehicles that exceed the DDOT Bicycle Design Guide threshold for when signal protection is required.

Parking Impacts

Parking utilization and demand for loading and PUDO is very high on Columbia Rd NW. However, the implementation of this project would reduce the amount of parking provided on the corridor in order to make space for the protected bike lanes and bus lanes. Figures 3 and 4 provide details on changes in the number of on-street parking spaces. Overall, there would be a reduction from about 200 spaces on Columbia Rd NW to approximately 100. Most metered parking is proposed for conversion to commercial loading zones that operate from 7 AM to 7 PM on weekdays in order to align with the space and operating requirements for loading that were identified in the needs assessment phase of the project. However, comments received during the alternatives analysis from the public and Adams Morgan Partnership Business Improvement District (AMPBID) suggest there is a desire to preserve more resident-only and metered parking. DDOT staff will continue to work with stakeholders to further refine the curbside regulation on the corridor and nearby streets to best meet the community's needs.

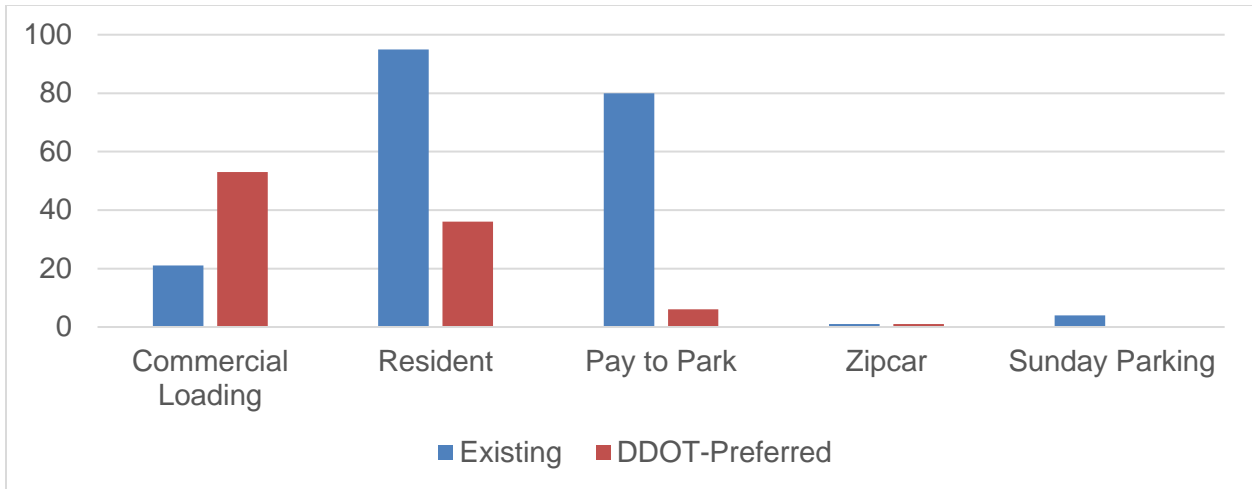


Figure 3: The total number of parking spaces on Columbia Rd NW would be reduced from about 200 to 100.

There are approximately 20,000 people that live within a quarter mile of the project corridor, in addition to the thousands of people that visit area businesses on a daily basis. The reduction of parking is necessary in order to implement the safety and transit benefits of the recommended alternative, which will save lives, improve access to the neighborhood, and benefit thousands of people every day.

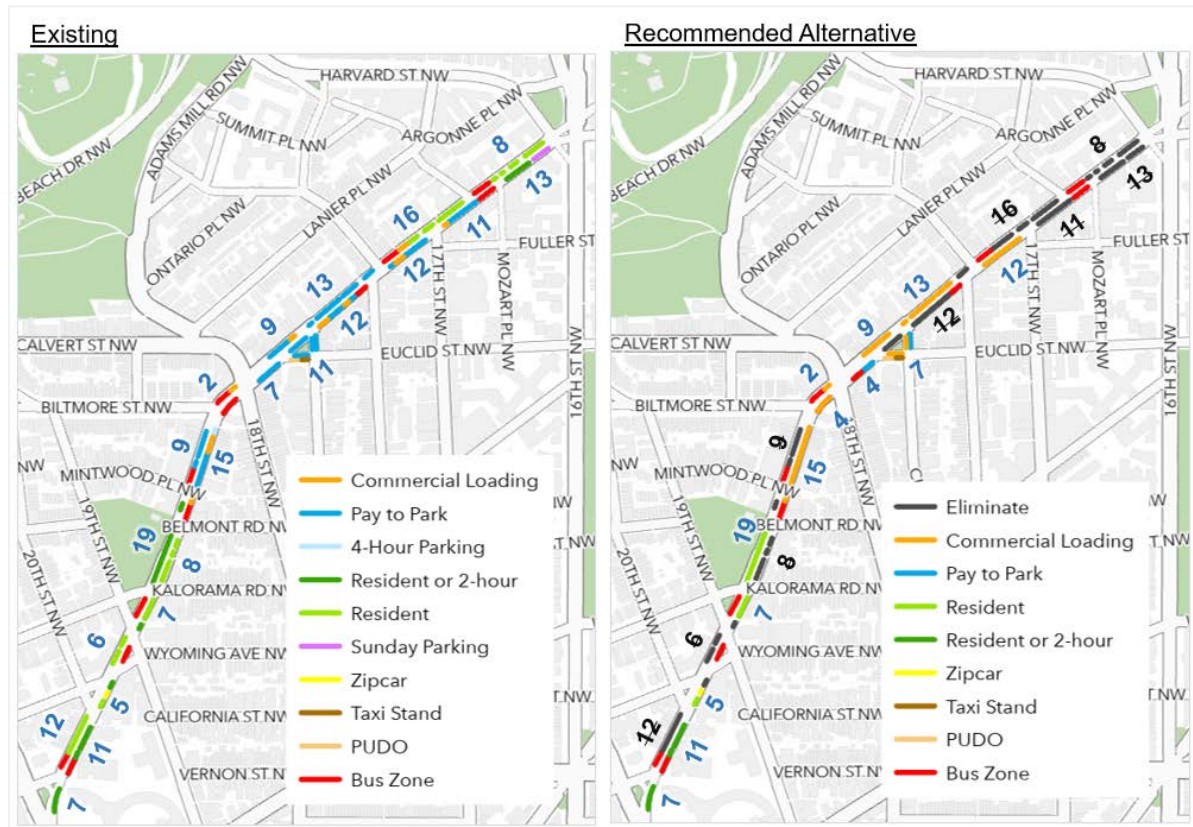


Figure 4: Expected changes to curbside regulations resulting from implementation of the preferred alternative.

Public Engagement Timeline

On December 2, 2021, DDOT initiated public engagement on the project by sending a letter to the ANC 1C chairperson that provided an overview of the public engagement process and an invitation to participate. AMPBID, DDOT, District Council, and Executive Office of the Mayor (EOM) staff were copied on the letter.

Phase 1: Needs Assessment

The purpose of the first phase of community engagement is to learn from the community whether our understanding of the corridor, based on data analysis and site visits, is consistent with the experience of community members.

- In March and April 2022, DDOT staff presented at monthly meetings of the ANC 1C Planning, Zoning, and Transportation Committee and the AMPBID board of directors to understand if their experience in the corridor is consistent with DDOT analysis (see attachment 2). The presentation content focused on the findings of analysis and examples of design interventions that may address issues in the corridor. Staff also requested feedback from commissioners and residents on issues they have experienced on Columbia Rd.
- In April 2022, DDOT staff hung posters at bus stops through the corridor to inform bus riders of the ongoing planning process and encourage them to call, email, or submit feedback through a form on the project website.

Outcome: DDOT received 114 comments through the website and several more emails and phone calls during the needs assessment phase. Most feedback indicated that the corridor is unsafe for biking and walking (see Figure 5). Comments noted that illegal parking contributed to poor visibility at crosswalks and blocked bike lanes. There was some concern expressed about congestion and slow buses, but it was less frequently noted than the safety issues that people described.



Figure 5: Many survey respondents reported feeling unsafe in the unprotected, intermittent bike lanes on Columbia Rd NW.

Phase 2: Concept Development

The purpose of the second phase of community engagement is to collect feedback and arrive at consensus on what changes should be made to the corridor to alleviate problems identified during phase 1. DDOT staff presented the outcome of our evaluation of the technical components of six different alternatives, including a “preferred concept.”

- In July and August 2022, DDOT staff again presented at monthly meetings of the ANC 1C Planning, Zoning, and Transportation Committee and the AMPBID board (see attachment 3). The presentation included a summary of public feedback received and

the needs assessment before describing the six different proposals. The presentation also included a detailed description of the impacts on parking of the preferred concept.

- In October 2022, flyers were distributed to all residences and businesses along the corridor that described the preferred concept and encouraged them to provide feedback.
- In October 2022, a follow-up meeting was held with the AMPBID board where they expressed their concerns about the proposed reduced parking and the conversion of metered spaces to commercial loading zones.

Outcome: DDOT's proposal for the corridor mostly generated positive feedback and community support, but many expressed concerns about the loss of parking. Below is a summary of feedback received from different sources:

- **Ward 1's Councilmember Brianne Nadeau** sent a letter in support of the DDOT preferred concept, but with a separate bus lane and PBL on the southwest bound approach to Connecticut Ave NW. This change is not being pursued because it would completely eliminate curbside access through a section where there is limited alternative space available for essential curbside activities like loading, deliveries and PUDO.
- **ANC 1C** issued a unanimous resolution in support of the preferred alternative.
- **The AMPBID Board of Directors** issued two resolutions regarding the project. The first resolution expressed support for protected bike lanes but expressed opposition to the reduced parking and conversion of metered parking to loading zones. The second resolution requested that DDOT provide additional metered parking on blocks adjoining Columbia Rd NW in commercial areas and provide better signage so people can find that parking. The AMPBID board provided DDOT with a detailed map of where they would like changes to curbside regulations. DDOT has committed to continue working with the AMPBID to address their concerns in balance with the needs of residents and preserving the safety of the corridor.
- **Online and via email**, about 70 people submitted comments on the alternatives. Most people that commented, over 70%, supported the proposed changes. Those opposed most often cited the reduction of parking on the corridor. The Kalorama Citizens Association submitted a resolution opposing the protected bike lanes based on their analysis of parking and traffic operations impacts.

DDOT staff will continue to coordinate with stakeholders to make sure that the curbside regulations for the remaining parking are optimized to best meet the community's needs.

NEXT STEPS

DDOT staff will begin to advance the design of the recommended alternative and phase 3 of community engagement, “concept refinement.” DDOT staff will also schedule one or more meetings with a working group from the ANC, AMPBID, and DDOT’s Curbside Management Division to develop the details of the curbside regulation. Upon completion of the 30% design, an NOI will be issued, and the environmental review process will begin. Updates and briefings will continue to be offered to the ANC and AMPBID at each design milestone, but the NOI will be the last formal comment period for the project. Construction is planned for 2024.

Sincerely,



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