

Testimony by Marlene Berlin, Transportation Advocate
D.C. Senior Advisory Coalition
DC Council Committee on the Environment, Transportation and Public Works
Budget Hearing on the Department of Transportation
April 25, 2011

Madam Chair and Council Members:

I am presenting testimony for the Senior Advisory Coalition which is a group representing 26 organizations <http://www.iona.org/advocacy/senior-advisory-coalition> providing services to seniors and advocating for their needs. The Coalition is particularly concerned with the transportation budget as it pertains to sidewalks, which are crucial to the mobility of seniors, whether they drive, use mass transit or walk to visit friends, do shopping, engage in community activities, attend houses of worship, and deal with their medical needs. And not only seniors benefit from a well-maintained sidewalks all residents do.

There are three objectives in the capital budget for transportation:

- “Ensure the District’s current transportation infrastructure and streetscapes are in acceptable condition
- Increase non-vehicular transportation modes to meet the mobility and economic development needs of the District
- Improve the safety of pedestrian, cyclists, and vehicles throughout the District.”

All three objectives require a major focus on sidewalk infrastructure. In order to maintain at least “good” sidewalk conditions there needs to be a systematic process in place in assessing the conditions of sidewalks. Then there needs to be a transparent and effective process to build and maintain a sidewalk network that connects residents to their neighborhoods other forms of transportation. This is necessary for all of us to be able to age in place. And let us not ignore the positive impact of sidewalk infrastructure on economic development. Sidewalks are basic to the sustainable city the Mayor wants. We do not have a system to enhance and maintain our sidewalk infrastructure at this time. And such a system will need budget support.

This lack of assessment is evident by DDOT’s response to the question by this committee about frequency of sidewalk assessments: “Frequency varies based on service requests.” In the same document DDOT states that federal roads are assessed every year, local roads every 2 years. This lack of priority for sidewalks is exemplified by the current and much publicized pothole attack with no corresponding sidewalk equivalent. We all know that dangerous sidewalk conditions exist and people are getting injured as a result, which opens the city to the threat of lawsuits. Until there is money in the budget for regular assessment of sidewalks, like roads, we will not have the kind of maintenance and network needed to meet these three objectives mentioned in this budget.

We have 1320 miles of sidewalks, and in FY11 there was \$1.5 million spent on resurfacing/improving sidewalks with 3.5 miles of sidewalks completed/improved, .265% of sidewalk miles. Now looking at the 436 miles of federal roads, \$9.5 million was spent in FY11 on repaving/improving 25cl miles, which is

5.7% of road miles. DC has 598 miles of local roads, and 42 cl miles were repaved/improved with \$5.4 million, 7% of road miles. In essence, sidewalks compared to roads get only 10% of the funding that roads get for repair and improvements, and then get only 5% of mileage repairs and improvements compared to roads.

In addition to maintenance, there are still significant sidewalk gaps. There are no performance measures in the budget on filling sidewalk gaps. In Ward 3, significant sidewalk gaps hinder connecting to Connecticut Avenue, and getting to the Tenleytown Metro Station.

In this year's budget there is \$1.15 million specifically designated for sidewalks. To put this in perspective, the Downtown Business Improvement District has asked DDOT to devote \$3 million for sidewalk improvements, within their boundaries. I realize that there may be pockets of other moneys in this budget that support sidewalks, and I would like to see that teased out, but \$1.5 million is a paltry sum given the miles of sidewalk we need to maintain. I suggest DDOT look to San Francisco in how it has mapped its sidewalk infrastructure, which is on its website, and its plans for improvement. DDOT needs to support such a systematic approach to building and maintaining its sidewalk infrastructure.

Given these budget objectives, we do not have the program or funding in place to improve and maintain our sidewalk infrastructure. I would recommend funding the following:

- Two year regular assessments of sidewalks and a transparent plan accessible on line to assess DDOT's progress,
- A plan for ramping up to a goal of at least 5% of the miles of sidewalks improved and maintained a year,
- Systematic process of closing of sidewalk gaps with clear, transparent priorities,
- Sidewalk "pot hole" attack annually

Also, I would like to see this key performance indicator included in the budget : The number of sidewalk "pot holes" filled within 48 hours will be 96%, just like roads.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.