



Testimony of

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Before the  
Committee of the Whole  
Committee on Libraries, Parks, Recreation, and Planning  
Committee on Environment, Public Works, and Transportation  
Council of the District of Columbia

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Chairman Brown, Chairwoman Cheh and Chairman Wells, thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing. I am here today as a representative of the Sierra Club's Washington, D.C., Chapter, on behalf of our 3,000 members in the District of Columbia.

The Sierra Club supports land use and transportation policies that will make D.C. a more sustainable and energy-efficient city. This means linking up our neighborhoods with a network of convenient transit options, clustering mixed use development around Metrorail stations and along Metrobus and future streetcar routes, and re-designing our streetscape to make it safer and friendlier for bicycling and walking. By giving our residents convenient and inexpensive alternatives to driving, we can take cars off our

streets thereby reducing traffic congestion, giving us cleaner air to breathe and reducing carbon dioxide emissions, which contribute to climate change.

The District's planned 37-mile network of streetcar lines will mark an important step forward for our city toward meeting these goals. Streetcars will fill an important void in our existing transit system, connecting our neighborhoods in a way that Metrorail currently does not. Streetcars will bring new and improved transit options to corridors served by Metrobus routes that struggle to meet high demand. Streetcars will also help promote greatly needed economic development in neighborhoods across the city.

We would like to commend the D.C. Office of Planning for releasing the *District of Columbia Streetcar Land Use Study Phase One* report, which thoroughly analyzes the land use, fiscal and pedestrian benefits of D.C.'s 37-mile system. This report presents a compelling case for how the streetcar system would transform the District into a more livable and sustainable city in the coming years.

The report shows that building the streetcar system would bring an additional 72,000 D.C. households within a quarter mile of a streetcar line, and this expanded access to transit would mean that more than 50% of D.C. households would be within a quarter mile of a streetcar line or Metrorail station. It states that 100,000 residents along the planned streetcar corridors do not have access to an automobile so streetcars would improve their mobility.

The streetcar system presents a real opportunity to invest in strengthening the District's economy by incentivizing real estate investment and attracting new jobs and residents along the streetcar routes, thereby increasing our tax revenues. The report projects that:

- the streetcar system would add \$5-7 billion to the value of existing real estate and lead to an additional \$5-8 billion in new development;
- attract 6,300-7,700 new jobs and 4,000-12,000 new households to D.C.; and
- add \$238-291 million per year in revenue to the D.C. government's budget.

Not only would the streetcar system improve D.C.'s fiscal environment, it would also provide D.C. residents with greater economic opportunities by attracting new jobs and offering an easy way to get to those jobs. It also would help reduce residents' transportation costs by providing a convenient alternative to owning and operating an automobile, which can save the average person more than \$8,400 per year, according to the report.

Another important benefit the report highlights is that streetcars present the opportunity to improve walkability. Each transit trip begins and ends with a walk, which can provide many benefits, ranging from improving an individual's health through physical activity, to improving one's sense of safety as more people are walking, and supporting local businesses and helping support historic commercial districts across the city.

Streetcars offer the opportunity to take cars off of our roads, reducing energy use and the resulting air pollution and climate change emissions that threaten our future. They offer D.C. a more sustainable and livable future that so many of us are working toward.

Before I conclude, I would like to raise one challenge the report acknowledges and that is the potential for displacement. The report estimates that the streetcar system could raise housing values and rents 5-12%, and it identifies housing affordability as an issue that should be addressed. Although it concludes that this increase “appears unlikely to cause widespread displacement[,]” it presents several strategies to mitigate these effects. We believe it is important for the D.C. government to implement such strategies to address this challenge as early in the planning process as possible before real estate values begin to appreciate significantly. We want a sustainable future, but we also want to live in an inclusive city that provides affordable housing near quality transit so that those who need transit most have access to the housing, transportation, education and jobs that they need to succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.