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Good morning. My name is Julia Robey Christian and I'm testifying on behalf of CHAMPS, Capitol Hill's Chamber of Commerce.

I want to thank the Office of Planning, DDOT and these committees on the important planning work needed to make sure DC's Streetcar System succeeds.

I'd like to focus my comments today on both the experience and needs of local small business, as well as its impact on what we've seen most closely, the H street and Benning Road line.

The planning report is excellent, but speedy implementation of streetcars on the H Street and Benning Road route remains a priority.

We already see, and have seen for the last decade, the economic impact that adding a new transit connection can have on a retail corridor struggling to return to its full potential. Connecting Ward 7, Ward 5, and Ward 6 to Union Station and downtown is a pivotal connection for neighborhoods, but also to the economic growth of these commercial corridors and the jobs that will be created. The Office of Planning study captures that very well.

But we've also seen over the last decade that the future of streetcar also brings speculation and major developers creating both a risk, and an opportunity, to small and locally owned businesses. The OP report does a great job of outlining this risk in terms of affordable housing. It recommends that the city be strategic and intentional in thinking through how to protect housing and preserving affordable housing, as property values increase and more people want to live closer to this vital transit link. I believe we need to be just as intentional in thinking through the risk to our small businesses as well – not necessarily to keep things exactly as they are or have always been, but to have strategic thinking engage the local businesses to help them grow and adapt to the new economic opportunities that come with improved transportation choices for their patrons.

Let's be clear. The streetcar itself isn't a job creator. Sure there will be the handful of operators that run the streetcars and operations. But the real impact is the economic development in terms of new businesses and job creation that come with this transportation improvement. In just the last 2 years, over 50 businesses have opened on H Street NE. Several more have expanded their footprint. These are daytime retail businesses like pet stores, home goods, and apparel; service-oriented businesses like fitness studios, vet clinics, and salons; as well as arts and entertainment venues. These local businesses are the job creators – hundreds of jobs; mostly from the surrounding and nearby neighborhoods. The streetcar is a vital link that connects neighborhoods to these business corridors and enables the job creation we all want to see.

A concern I have is the follow through of the city on its implementation. While the 37-mile system is ambitious and we want to support big thinking, we also need to deliver on promises to build and develop community support for that plan. For the H Street and Benning Road line, we've had a 2010 start date, a 2011 start date, a 2012 start date, and now a 2013 start date. The city has to recognize that the business community and neighborhood needs to have certainty and confidence – this line is a promise that was made to the businesses and people that have invested their lives and treasure into revitalizing a re-merging commercial corridor. For the city to create the type of community support that is needed to make the investment in 37 miles, deadlines can't keep moving... start dates can't keep postponing... we need certainty to show business, their investors, and neighborhood leaders that the city is going to get this done and to invite them to be a partner in its success.

Thank you very much for your hard work and I'd be delighted to answer any of your questions today.