

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3B
GLOVER PARK AND CATHEDRAL HEIGHTS



February 11, 2021

Mr. Everett Lott
Interim Director
District Department of Transportation
55 M Street SE
Washington, DC 20003

RE: Bicycle and Corridor Study on New Mexico Avenue/Tunlaw Road/37th Street Corridor

Dear Director Lott:

On behalf of our Commission and community, we want to express our thanks to the members of the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) staff for participating in our January 21 ANC3B public meeting, including Bike Specialists Mike Goodno and Gilberto Solano, Active Transportation Branch Manager George Branyan, Climate Advisor Catherine Teebay, and Donise Jackson, our Ward 3 Community Engagement Specialist and Program Analyst.

Mr. Goodno and Mr. Solano presented two alternatives for bicycle infrastructure on the existing bike route on the New Mexico Avenue, Tunlaw Road, and 37th Street corridor, which runs the full length of ANC3B. Mr. Goodno indicated that additional alternatives could be considered and invited the community to provide additional options.

ANC3B is known as a Commission that bases its decisions on information and analysis. We take into account the range of views on each issue, and do not take a position until we have weighed the facts, considered the options, and balanced the effects of various choices. As a foundation for additional discussion, we would like to emphasize two essential points:

1 – Any significant changes to the bicycle infrastructure in a transportation corridor should be evaluated in the context of the nature and use of the facilities in the corridor for all modes of transportation as a system to meet mobility and safety needs, including needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and users of transit and other motor vehicles.

2 – As in any DDOT study of transportation alternatives, a study of potential changes to the infrastructure should include a range of options for the location and design of the facilities, assessed by their contribution to relevant performance goals and measures for users of all modes of transportation in the area and impacts for the community, compared to the baseline case (current conditions/"no change").

We would be pleased to talk further with DDOT planners about the overall interests and priorities for transportation in the Commission area and in the New Mexico/Tunlaw/37th Street corridor in particular, develop a framework for studying the local transportation system and how it can work to meet mobility and safety needs

for all modes and user groups, and in that context evaluate a full range of options available for addressing safety and mobility for bicyclists and others using the New Mexico/Tunlaw/37th Street corridor.

It would be highly unlikely that our Commission could support proposed changes in the infrastructure on a major roadway through our area unless a thorough study has been done of how the overall transportation network functions for all modes using that corridor—walking, bicycling, micromobility devices, personal and for-hire automobiles, freight and delivery trucks, commercial and other vehicles—as well as where there are needs for proving the infrastructure, operations and safety on the corridor; what alternatives are available to meet the needs, and what the alternatives would mean for the full range of transportation users, residents in the area, and other stakeholders. Such a study should include each of the modes of transportation that share the local street network and affect the ways people and goods move in the neighborhood and to and from other parts of the region.

The DDOT Livability Study for Rock Creek Far West conducted in 2019, which covered all of ANC3B, flagged several specific intersections for attention, including intersections along or near the New Mexico/Tunlaw/37th Street corridor. In our recommendations for the Livability Study, ANC3B supported a full study of potential safety and mobility improvements on or near that corridor to improve safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, and others using that corridor. The intersections of Tunlaw and Davis Place as well as Tunlaw and Fulton Street and Tunlaw and 37th Street have all been the subject of requests for safety investigations in our ANC, as well as nearby intersections of Calvert Street, 37th Street and Wisconsin Avenue and other intersections on Wisconsin that could be affected by traffic diverted from Tunlaw. The Final Report for the Livability Study, published in October 2019, echoed most of the concerns raised by our ANC and recommended a full corridor study on New Mexico, Tunlaw, and 37th Street, with bicycle infrastructure improvements as part of that larger study. Those recommendations established a starting point for assessing potential mobility and safety improvements in our Commission area., and we continue to expect and hope that DDOT will carry out its commitment to conduct a multimodal corridor study before moving to recommendations on bicycle infrastructure.

We are a small ANC, with five Commissioners and just over a half a square mile in area. All five Single Member Districts include, border, or are within one block of the New Mexico/Tunlaw/37th Street corridor. Because the neighborhood is bordered on three sides by National Park Service lands and the U.S. Naval Observatory, there are only two through streets running generally north-south in ANC3B: Wisconsin Avenue, an arterial, and the New Mexico, Tunlaw and 37th Avenue corridor, which is categorized as a minor arterial north of Calvert Street and south of that is categorized as a collector. Only two streets within ANC3B run east-west through Glover-Archbold Park: Cathedral Avenue and again New Mexico/Tunlaw. For that reason, almost any change on the New Mexico/Tunlaw/37th Street corridor affects virtually every other street, because people going any distance to or from the local streets in Glover Park or Cathedral Heights in ANC3B have to use one of those larger streets. Each of those major streets in our area also has to accommodate all modes of transportation that people depend on, including transit, bicycles, delivery and service vehicles, private motor vehicles, as well as pedestrians.

Within ANC3B, 10 large apartment buildings or condominiums are located on the New Mexico/Tunlaw corridor north of Calvert Street. South of that there are more than 160 residences along Tunlaw and 37th Street in ANC3B (north of Whitehaven Parkway), most of which are row houses. Some are owner-occupied and some are rentals, including several rented to students at the nearby universities, much as is the case on 37th Street south of Whitehaven Parkway. Before COVID-19, that corridor, particularly south of Calvert Street with so many residential properties generated a considerable volume of vehicle traffic and curbside parking, as well as package deliveries, contractors and other service vehicles. The volume of deliveries has increased with growth in online orders, meal deliveries, and home improvement projects during the COVID-19 emergency. At the January 21, 2021, ANC3B public meeting, the DDOT Bike Specialists indicated they had not considered how delivery vehicles and other loading or unloading would be accommodated in their proposals for reconfiguring bicycle infrastructure on the corridor, if there would not be any parking lanes. They also had not considered the effect of their proposals on bus service.

Our ANC area is highly dependent on Metrobus for public transit service, since we are not served by Metrorail. WMATA operates 30-series buses on Wisconsin Avenue, as well as N-series buses on Massachusetts, Cathedral, and New Mexico Avenues in Cathedral Heights. For interior Glover Park, essential bus service is

provided by the D2 which uses Tunlaw and 37th Street between Benton Street and Whitehaven Parkway. (Prior to COVID-19, the D1 provided weekday rush hour service along that route as well, and also used Tunlaw Road north of Calvert Street, for its first stop.) On the part of Tunlaw and 37th used by the D2 buses, there are 5 Metrobus stops, 2 on the east side of the street for outbound buses and 3 on the west side of the street for buses heading inbound to Dupont Circle.

During the COVID-19 emergency, transit operations and transit travel patterns have changed, as many of the usual Metrobus services have been eliminated or dramatically reduced. Some people have been working at home while others have found it necessary to drive to work. Many residents have indicated they would like to return to using transit when service is available, and both the ANC and the community have been urging WMATA to restore previous levels of Metrobus service. If road capacity is reduced or fewer residents have access to motor vehicles, more residents would be likely to use transit if it is available. That would require an increase in bus service. Before COVID-19, Metrobuses in our area were operating nearly at capacity, and were often forced to leave groups of prospective riders waiting at bus stops hoping to catch the next bus. But at the same time, WMATA has repeatedly proposed reductions in the local bus services as a cost-saving measure. Reducing or removing important transit services will not work to meet District transportation, land use, or environmental goals. The ANC has long urged WMATA to increase service to our area as a way to accommodate demand and continue to build transit use. We also would emphasize that transit planning must be coordinated with overall growth and planning for use of transportation infrastructure and resources, to meet demand and ensure that transit service has the capacity and reliability to attract riders. To achieve that goal will require that WMATA purchase more buses and offer more frequent service. We would like to see DDOT support the community in reaching that goal.

Effective bus service in the District also requires sufficient road capacity. On the busiest routes, WMATA is developing dedicated bus lanes. On Wisconsin Avenue, with two driving lanes in each direction and a parking lane for the bus stops, buses have the ability to use multiple lanes and not block other vehicle traffic when they stop to pick up or drop off passengers. When a bus or a delivery vehicle stops in a traffic lane to make a pick-up or drop-off, that blocks the street for all traffic moving in that same direction, leading to congestion, travel delays and additional safety problems. Repeated stops, on a street with a series of bus stops, especially for a route with fairly frequent service during peak times, can also cause traffic to shift to using other nearby streets. Before COVID-19 with the combination of the D1 and D2 service, there were buses scheduled every 6 to 8 minutes at peak times on the route along Tunlaw and 37th Street, picking up multiple passengers at each stop.

DDOT's 2007 Glover Park Transportation Study noted that the transportation network in Glover Park is constrained by narrow streets and the shortage of both street capacity and parking capacity. Current travel is distributed among the arterials, collectors, and local streets generally in proportion to their capacity, but changes such as lane closings or street closings on a major street can lead to traffic diversions that overwhelm other parts of the system. At pre-COVID-19 levels, local streets have limited capacity to absorb additional traffic during peak times, including Wisconsin Avenue, Calvert Street, and W Place in Glover Park, Fulton and Garfield Streets in Cathedral Heights, and Cathedral Avenue. All those streets are already subject to requests for traffic safety investigations, so any effects of diverting traffic from New Mexico, Tunlaw and 37th Street onto those streets would have to be considered in assessing proposals that could change travel patterns and capacity on that corridor.

With a transportation issue in particular, all parts of the system across all modes have to work together and should be considered in a comprehensive and holistic way. That is the mandate for the MoveDC Long-Range Plan for the District, and the basis for all other planning, and that is what is required for considering a change in a major corridor such as New Mexico/Tunlaw/37th Street. We believe that is also what the DDOT Livability Study for Rock Creek Far West was calling for in recommending a full corridor study for the New Mexico/Tunlaw/37th Street corridor.

DDOT is a primary source of the types of information needed to conduct a broad-based analysis of current and expected conditions in the local transportation system as well as mobility and safety needs in our community. The agency has the access and capacity to gather and compile data such as vehicle counts on the associated streets, use of bicycles and other micromobility vehicles, transit ridership, patterns of goods deliveries and pedestrian movements, projected future travel demand, and also incidence and causes for crashes, injuries, and

other traffic safety concerns. We would welcome the opportunity to work with DDOT to gather any additional information at the community level that might contribute to a complete assessment of movement patterns and mobility and safety needs on the New Mexico/Tunlaw/37th corridor.

As the local ANC, our starting focus is our own Commission area, but we understand that the corridor also serves two other ANCs, ANC2E in Burleith-North Georgetown, and ANC3D serving the area across Glover-Archbold Park. We would be pleased to work with the DDOT planners and others in District government as well as residents, other ANCs, community organizations, businesses, and other stakeholders, to collect additional information needed to complete the requested corridor study and also share the information, engage community residents, hear their perspectives and collect comments.

The Final Report of DDOT's Rock Creek Far West Livability Study estimated that a full corridor study for the New Mexico/Tunlaw/37th Street corridor would cost approximately \$440,000. The agency does not appear to have done that level of information gathering and analysis to date. If the available funds are not sufficient, we would be pleased to recommend to the Mayor and Council that the necessary funding be set aside for that work.

In summary, we urge DDOT to:

1 – Conduct a comprehensive study of the New Mexico/Tunlaw/37th Street corridor, considering its condition, use by various modes, projected changes in demand including for transit and bicycles, the safety record and causes of safety risks, and specific approaches for improving mobility and safety for pedestrians and users of other modes, especially at “hot spot” intersections.

2 – Based on that framework, identify and evaluate potential alternatives for improving mobility and safety for bicyclists on that corridor while also addressing needs of and effects on pedestrians, residents, and those who using other forms of transportation on that corridor. Alternatives should be evaluated and compared to baseline conditions in relation to transportation goals and performance measures, and impacts on the community and residents.

As Commissioners, we try to consider all interests and elements of the local transportation system and work to get investments and operations that support equitable, reliable service for the full range of users, across multiple modes and trip purposes. We hope we can work together to meet that goal in this instance, as we all supported in the Livability Study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Brian Turmail
Chairman

This letter was approved by a vote of 5-0 at a duly noticed public meeting of ANC3B on February 11, 2021, at which a quorum was present. (Three of the five Commissioners constitute a quorum.) By this vote, the Commission also designated the Chairman or his designee to represent ANC3B on this matter.

cc. Councilmember Mary Cheh
Mike Goodno
Gilberto Solano
George Branyan
Donise Jackson
Ted Van Houten
Cole Wogoman