

## CAPITOL HILL RESTORATION SOCIETY



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Sanjay Kumar, P.E. by mail and email to: [sanjay.kumar@dc.gov](mailto:sanjay.kumar@dc.gov)  
Program Manager, Anacostia Waterfront Initiative  
DC Department of Transportation  
IMPA/District Department of Transportation  
55 M Street, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20003

Subject: Barney Circle and Southeast Boulevard Transportation Planning Study

Dear Mr. Kumar:

As requested at the public meeting concerning this study held on February 21, 2013, the Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS) submits comments concerning the study. Shauna Holmes, Chair of the CHRS Historic Preservation Committee, and Beth Purcell, Chair of the CHRS Environment Committee, participated in the meeting, including the small group discussion.

### Summary

DDOT has not yet made the case that this \$20 million project is needed, or that it is the best use of DC taxpayers' money available for transportation projects. As public meetings continue, however, certain aspects are clear: that any connection to M Street, SE should be for pedestrians and bicycles only, and that there should be no "park road" between Barney Circle and Independence Avenue.

### Current conditions on 1300, 1400, 1500 blocks of L Street, SE.

This is a residential rowhouse neighborhood. Thirteenth, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets, SE dead-end at L Street SE. These blocks are very quiet, with low volume of vehicle traffic, according to two residents who participated in the February 21 meeting. As a result, children can play in the streets fairly safely. L Street, SE runs roughly parallel to the Southeast Freeway, which is lower than the elevation of L Street.

### Southeast Boulevard

The boulevard would be at the same elevation as L Street, SE. Traffic would be closer to the residential area. On the other hand, additional green space may result from this design. CHRS, and we suspect, many others in the community want more information. There was not enough time on February 21 to fully explore all the issues. This is not intended as a criticism of the meeting. This is a complex topic, has the potential to greatly change the lives of residents, and needs careful attention.

### Use of area under the proposed Southeast Boulevard

At the February 21 meeting, there was discussion of potential uses for the paved area under the proposed boulevard, including intermodal links.<sup>1</sup> CHRS believes that DDOT has not yet identified a viable use for this area. People attending large events in Washington often arrive by charter busses, which park at the RFK Stadium lots, and then people walk to the Stadium-Armory Metro. It is difficult to see the need for duplicating this intermodal connection under the boulevard.

DC government does not have a good track record in responsibly handling areas where vehicles can be parked. In the 2000s, DC government tried to move the auto impound lot to RFK Stadium, and dropped the idea only after then-Ward 6 Councilmember Ambrose objected. There are junk DC government vehicles stored on Reservation 13. Ivy City residents had to go to court to prevent DC government from parking busses at historic Crummell School. Other neighborhoods have struggled against trash transfer stations.

### Only pedestrian and bicycle connections to M Street, SE

The presentation on February 21 asked participants to explore whether there should be pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle connections from L Street to M Street (across the Southeast Freeway).<sup>2</sup> We believe that pedestrian and bicycle connection would benefit everyone, and make the waterfront more accessible. Only one access would likely be built. Fourteenth Street runs directly from the Potomac Avenue Metro to L Street, and is one possibility.

However, a vehicle connection would be a disaster for this neighborhood. Instead of a quiet, safe place, there would be substantial vehicle traffic, noise, pollution, and danger to pedestrians, including neighborhood children. The two neighborhood residents were appalled at the prospect, and we agree with them.

### No "Park Road"

Currently, there is a narrow paved road running from Barney Circle to RFK Stadium (RFK Stadium Access Road). Vehicle access is barred, and this road is seldom used; it has been

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<sup>1</sup> It appears that it would be difficult for neighbors to see the area under the boulevard. So, that if busses were parked there and illegally idling, few could see and report this.

<sup>2</sup> We understand that DC government approved certain street closings near the Cohen Co.'s proposed project near M Street, SE, which may affect any connection from L Street across the Southeast Freeway.

opened for vehicle access during certain RFK events. For these reasons, it is safe and enjoyable to walk and bicycle here, on this part of the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail.

For several years, since at least the Middle Anacostia River Crossings Transportation Study (2005), DDOT has mentioned constructing a 1.6 mile road for vehicles from Independence Avenue to Barney Circle, passing along the Anacostia River, through the RFK Stadium property, and next to Reservation 13 and Congressional Cemetery. By DDOT's estimates, 5,000 vehicles a day would use the park road.<sup>3</sup> CHRS believes, as do many in the community, that this would be a commuter road running through our neighborhood. This estimate appears very low, and further traffic studies are needed. It would destroy wildlife habitat, and increase noise and pollution. It would also destroy this section of the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail, one of DC government's outstanding accomplishments. The planning documents for the small group discussions clearly show an exit off the new Barney Circle leading to a "park road." DDOT representatives were asked on February 21 about plans for the "park road" and they said that this road is still under consideration. Our small group objected to the park road and crossed out the park road exit, and we understand that other groups did as well. CHRS opposes any park road, and opposes any changes or upgrading of the RFK Stadium Access Road.

- The park road is not needed for development of Reservation 13. The developers' detailed responses to the RFI for Reservation 13 contemplated access to Reservation 13 only from 19<sup>th</sup> Street, Independence Avenue, and Massachusetts Avenue extended (as well as other nearby extended streets). There is no park road on any of their proposals. See DMPED December 2008 Reservation 13 public meeting materials. These developers were willing to invest hundreds of millions of dollars, based on the existing streetscape, and without any park road.
- We also note that the National Capital Planning Commission requires that Massachusetts Avenue, SE terminate in a circle, on the west side of the river.
- RFK Stadium is already accessible by vehicle from 17<sup>th</sup> Street, SE (which is two-way from Barney Circle to Potomac Avenue). See "More Changes Ahead for 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge," Washington Post, March 10, 2013, p. C-2.
- In addition, DDOT has announced publicly that it may turn 17<sup>th</sup> Street and 19<sup>th</sup> Street NE and SE into two-way streets. If so, there will be additional access to RFK Stadium from these streets. And, there would be no need for any exit to from Barney Circle.

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<sup>3</sup> DDOT's Middle Anacostia River Crossings Transportation Study, (2005) p. 6-4, "Project 9: RKF Stadium Access Road Resurfacing/Rehabilitation," discusses "... opening the existing RFK Stadium Access Road for daily traffic. ... This roadway is seen by some as a viable option for providing access to the Capitol Hill area, Independence Avenue and Kenilworth Avenue via the East Capitol Street Bridge. Several issues currently make this project difficult to implement. First it is estimated that if opened to everyday commuter traffic, the access road would carry approximately 5,000 vehicles per day." The report notes that the road would need to be widened and partially realigned, and continues, "At this time it is uncertain if an agreement could be reached among the numerous stakeholders who utilize the access road to implement the necessary improvements." The estimated cost in 2005 was \$1,132,000. This estimate appears very low.

### More important transportation projects are not fully funded

There are more important transportation projects than the Southeast Boulevard.

- Pennsylvania – Potomac intersection. DDOT is undertaking a Pennsylvania-Potomac Avenue SE Intersection Pedestrian Safety Study. As DDOT correctly pointed out, pedestrian safety at that intersection needs to be improved. The first of several public meetings was held on January 31, 2013. At the January 31 public meeting, in response to a question, DDOT representatives stated that only \$3.3 million was committed for this important project, although DDOT hoped to obtain FHWA funding. However, DDOT's materials distributed on February 21, state that the Southeast Boulevard is a \$20 million project (which may or may not be funded).
- Pennsylvania – 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> Street intersections. There were multiple public meetings in 2009 on alternatives to improve these intersections, resulting in a 50-page Urban Design Study issued in January 2010. See [www.capitolhillsquare.org](http://www.capitolhillsquare.org). The alternatives are well-thought out and deserve consideration and attention from DDOT.

Our tax funds would be better used to improve safety at these Pennsylvania Avenue intersections.

### Other comments

- The project would have far-reaching effects on residents on L Street, SE between 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Outreach to these residents must be improved. Email is not enough.
- Congressional Cemetery should be added as a cultural resource. The cemetery, a national landmark, directly borders the project area. [www.congressionalcemetery.org](http://www.congressionalcemetery.org).
- DC Department of the Environment should be added as a stakeholder.
- Future planning documents should clearly mark the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail.

Sincerely,

*Janet Quigley*

Janet Quigley  
President

cc:

Anacostia Waterfront Initiative

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