



December 12, 2018

Director Jeff Marootian  
District Department of Transportation (DDOT)  
55 M Street, SE, Suite 400 Washington, DC 20003

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Dear Director Marootian:

On behalf of the citizens of the Penn Branch community, the Penn Branch Citizens Civic Association (PBCCA) would like to offer recommendations for improving the planned Pennsylvania Avenue – Minnesota Avenue SE redesign (henceforth: PennMinn Project), express concerns that we and some of our neighboring communities have about the current design, and request at least one additional design meeting with you and your team. We are expressing our recommendations and concerns in the interest of improving the safety and flow of multi-modal transportation while advancing the broader goals the city has laid out in the Great Streets Initiative, the Comprehensive Plan, and the small area plan. We welcome further discussion with you and your representatives, and we look forward to hearing from your office to schedule a meeting as soon as possible.

### **Recommendations**

1. DDOT hold at least one additional meeting with representatives from PBCCA and neighboring community associations to review the common concerns that have been raised during community meetings and discuss proposed solutions before a final plan for the intersection is approved and released for bids;
2. Improve traffic calming around the intersection by adding curb extensions, tree buffers along the full length of the roads, narrowing traffic lanes, and improving signage with flashing lights near particularly hazardous parts of the intersection;
3. Adopt measures to discourage traffic cutting through adjacent and parallel residential streets surrounding the intersection;
4. Reconfigure the bus stop plan to move the major stop on west-bound Pennsylvania Avenue one block east to integrate it with the current park area. In addition, add a curb-cut for a bus-only drop-off and pick-up lane similar to the area in front of the Potomac Avenue metro station;
5. Improve the overall conception and usage of the small park areas as transit hubs or other functional spaces since they are not well-suited for traditional recreation due to their proximity to a busy intersection with considerable vehicle-related emissions; and
6. Create a bicycle-specific pathway to navigate the intersection that allows safe passage for recreational and commuter bicyclists transiting from Anacostia Park or the Sousa Bridge through to the intersection of O Street and Pennsylvania Avenue SE.

## **Background and Additional Information**

On November 7, 2018 a DDOT team and associated contractors presented to the local community the near-final design for the PennMinn Project. Local Residents who live along the Pennsylvania Avenue SE corridor appreciate the opportunity to learn more about the project and to provide feedback. However, we have many concerns and a number of our questions were left unanswered at the presentation.

The PennMinn Project is one component of the Great Streets Initiative, yet it seems incongruent with key Great Streets goals. As you know, the program goals of the Great Streets Initiative are as follows:

1. Improve the quality of life in neighborhoods along the corridors, including public safety, physical appearance, and personal opportunity;
2. Support local demand for goods and services through economic development;
3. Expand mobility choices and improve safety and efficiency of all modes of travel; and
4. Attract private investment through the demonstration of a public commitment to Great Streets communities.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, DDOT has stated previously that the PennMinn Project is “designed to enhance safety at the intersection for pedestrians and transit users.” Based on the plans and explanations offered to our community last month, the proposed work does not meet either the goals of the Great Streets Initiative or the stated aim of the PennMinn Project Itself. In fact, the overall plan appears to have been designed without sufficient attention to how the redesign might impact economic development, multi-modal travel, and safety for all users along the corridor. Residents are frustrated that this intersection is being redesigned separately from the east and west feeder areas (including the I-295 interchange) that drive many of the intersection’s problems, there was not more creative and expansive joint planning with WMATA, the project seems disconnected from economic development plans for the corridor, and no effort is being made to improve the safety and ease with which local residents can cross I-295 and access Anacostia park

The entire intersection could and should serve as a gateway, signaling to eastbound drivers that they are exiting the freeway environment of the I-295 interchange and entering a community with adjacent residences, retail facing the street, and people walking and biking to get around their community. Narrow sidewalks adjacent to multiple lanes of traffic, double turn lanes, and overly wide travel lanes articulate a different message -- one that seems to put the interests of residents, pedestrians and cyclists last.

## Community Engagement

We are only aware of two public meetings to explore the redesign: April 27, 2017 and November 7, 2018. Residents who attended the first meeting did not believe that their feedback had been incorporated sufficiently into the plan presented at the November 7, 2018 meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> P. 6, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/178784918/Pennsylvania-Ave-Minnesota-Ave-SE-Intersection-Improvement-Project-Environmental-Assessment>

### Inadequate Traffic Calming

From 2015 to 2017 there were over 300 crashes along the Pennsylvania Avenue SE corridor from Alabama Avenue to the I-295 interchanges.<sup>2</sup> Although the new medians and crosswalks across Pennsylvania Avenue SE will reduce the time to cross, roadway medians are not intended to reduce automobile speed. Curb extensions, roadway lane narrowing, and signage with flashing lights should be utilized in conjunction with the new crossing plan to make the area safer for all commuters, including pedestrians, cyclists, and other drivers. There are safety upgrades for pedestrians, including raised cross walks and more ability to call lights to cross, but these changes seem inadequate given how much traffic flows through the intersection. There does not appear to be a 'buffer' zone between the sidewalk and the street on the north and south side of Pennsylvania Avenue SE by the gas stations closest to I-295. Trees adjacent to the street are a proven traffic calming measure and should continue throughout the corridor. Overall, residents remain concerned that planners have an inadequate understanding of the high volume of aggressive drivers who exit I-295 into the residential quarter without measures in place to reduce speed.

### Lack of Biking Infrastructure

As a matter of equity, given the lack of biking infrastructure in east of the river communities, it is imperative that the city better integrate the needs of all transit users into this intersection improvement plan. Although improving multi-modality is listed as one of the projects needs and goals, planning for cyclists is not only insufficient, it is completely absent. There is not a single bicycle-specific improvement or piece of infrastructure noted in the most recent design presentation. Many cyclists, both casual and daily commuters, utilize the corridor to commute to the Potomac Avenue metro and to downtown via Capitol Hill, as well as to access the trail connections in Anacostia Park. Cyclists would continue to share the sidewalk and crosswalks with pedestrians, wheelchairs, and strollers. This is not consistent with how cyclists use public space. Given the development already occurring along Pennsylvania Avenue SE, expecting bicyclists to safely mix with an increasing number of pedestrians is unrealistic.

DDOT's own Bicycle Master Plan (2005), calls for bicycle infrastructure along Pennsylvania Avenue SE:

The Plan identifies Twining Square (referred to as L'Enfant Square in the Study/Pennsylvania and Minnesota Avenues, SE) as one of five key intersections with complicated traffic patterns that need improved bicycle access.<sup>3</sup>

There is already an existing unmarked paved combined pedestrian/cyclist trail from the Maryland border to Branch Avenue SE along Pennsylvania Avenue SE. The unmarked trail is the bare minimum width for what qualifies as a mixed-use trail. Cyclists use it infrequently because it is too dangerous to cross intersections along the corridor. There are also no plans to improve the crosswalks that cross the on and off ramps at I-295. Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons (RRFBs) are a

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<sup>2</sup>Data provided to authors by Mark Segreaves, from mayor's report (November 2018).

<sup>3</sup> P. 43, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/178784918/Pennsylvania-Ave-Minnesota-Ave-SE-Intersection-Improvement-Project-Environmental-Assessment>

proven way to make crossings safer and should be installed on all crossings at the I-295 on and off ramps. The combination of a raised crossing and flashing beacons would provide a significant safety barrier between the park, bridge, and the community.

In the proposed intersection redesign plan there is an expectation that cyclists will use sidewalks and crosswalks into Anacostia Park to get to their destination, despite a central element of cycling-friendly planning which is to provide direct routes for cyclists to reduce travel time and pedestrian-bicyclist user conflicts. The crosswalks and sidewalks are not wide enough for pedestrians and cyclists to have their own lanes. Raised crosswalks provide additional visibility for pedestrians, but unless they are wide enough to accommodate a separate lane for pedestrians and cyclists, the slope will be more dangerous for individual cyclists and bikes with carts attached. In combined crosswalks for pedestrians and cyclists, cyclists who bike on crosswalks lose their right of way to pedestrians, further increasing travel time and reducing pedestrian safety.

There is significant Right of Way (ROW) available along Twining Square and in the block between Minnesota Avenue and 27<sup>th</sup> Street to build a separated and protected bike lane or some other mechanism to allow cyclists to pass through the Pennsylvania Avenue – Minnesota Avenue SE intersection safely without having to mingle with pedestrians and other users of the sidewalks. Building a protected lane and connecting it to a sharrow-marked O Street SE would go a long way towards providing safer access for cyclists.

#### Traffic Flow through Neighborhoods

Residents are concerned that the plan will route traffic onto 27<sup>th</sup> Street SE which is immediately adjacent to an elementary school. In addition, cyclists who travel along the northern side of the corridor use O Street SE rather than the Pennsylvania Avenue SE sidewalk to travel to and from the Sousa bridge. O Street SE intersects with both 27<sup>th</sup> Street SE and Pennsylvania Avenue SE. Increased automobile traffic on 27<sup>th</sup> Street without sufficient plans for pedestrians and cyclists will make the area more dangerous. Indeed, the presentation boards indicated that this crucial feeder area from 27<sup>th</sup> Street SE is not being considered as part of the project.

#### Bus Stops

As part of the plan, one bus stop in L'Enfant Square would be merged with **the** stop in front of Thai Orchid's Kitchen, meaning that even more people would clog the narrow sidewalk as they wait for the bus. A second bus stop that is located within the square would be moved to Minnesota Avenue SE in front of homes. Homeowners were not consulted in advance. There are concerns that the location of the bus stops on Pennsylvania Avenue SE would continue to clog sidewalks and hinder economic development in that block and along the corridor. Suggestions were made to move the stops one block east and integrate them into the L'Enfant square park plan (see next section for additional detail). Furthermore, the addition of advertisements on the side of the bus stop shelter on the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue SE impedes the vision of drivers who plan to turn onto Minnesota Avenue SE, creating a potential safety hazard for pedestrians and cyclists crossing Minnesota Avenue SE.

## Parks

Residents are underwhelmed by the plans for parks and thought the Twining Square north park could be better utilized as a centralized transit hub. Residents and frequent transit users from our and other communities support creating a curb cut into the L'Enfant park area, for example, to increase space for transit users to wait for the bus, get buses out of the busy traffic lanes when dropping-off and picking-up passengers, and remove chokepoints on narrow sidewalks in front of key commercial buildings. In the summer months the Twining Square south park typically operates as a public space for an indigent population that some consider loitering. Illegal activity has also been identified to occur in front of the abandoned car wash, which is adjacent to Twining Square south. It is unclear how the current plan will transform the land into safe, useable park space for the entire community.

It is our hope that future improvements will allow *all* residents—those who use buses, pedestrians, local residents who drive, and cyclists—to safely travel through the corridor. Without adequate vision, coordination, and political will, the corridor will be left with infrastructure that fails to improve the lives of those who have the right to that public space, particularly the most vulnerable: children, seniors, and the disabled.

Thank you, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Shannon Thomas, President  
Penn Branch Citizens Civic Association