

DATE: December 8, 2009
TO: DC Citizens' Groups
FROM: Committee of 100 on the Federal City
SUBJECT: Invitation to Sign Petition Against Overhead Wires on DC Streetcars

Streetcars are coming to DC. DDOT held eight neighborhood meetings in October/November 2009 to unveil the new 37-mile long system. Delivery on three streetcars, stored for the past two years in the Czech Republic where they were purchased, is anticipated by mid-December 2009. Billed as a "demonstration project," the first installation will occur in Anacostia on a line running from MLK Avenue across the 11th St. Bridge, eastward on M St., SE and terminating one block west of Nationals Park. Tracks are now being laid along Benning Road and H St., NE for the second phase of the project.



The Committee of 100 strongly supports mass transit improvements – Metro, Metrobus, the Circulator – and increased facilities for bikes and pedestrians in DC and the wider region; and we have long opposed the expansion of highways through and around the city. But we cannot support what we believe to be an antiquated streetcar technology that can operate only on overhead wires barred from the old city of Washington in 1889 by an Act of Congress that remains in effect today. *Around the world, cities are installing streetcar systems that are **not powered by overhead wires**.* We are concerned that the city is making an irreversible and self-perpetuating commitment to an outmoded system of unsightly overhead wires, their supports and other appurtenances.

Four years ago, in October 2005, the *District of Columbia Transit Improvement Alternatives Analysis* recommended "... an interconnected surface transit system that includes Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), streetcar, and local bus components." However, the Analysis did not deal with four critical planning components: 1) visual impact of overhead wires on neighborhoods throughout the city; 2) legal implications of the 1889 law prohibiting overhead wires; 3) comparison of streetcar technologies in use and those in development around the world to determine the most advanced system for the nation's capital; and 4) inter-connection with other streetcar systems in development in VA and MD. Further, while the Analysis offers financial projections, it in no way constitutes a business plan based on current revenue projections. We call on DDOT to close these information gaps before proceeding to implement the streetcar plan.

Washington, D.C., is a special city. It should be in the forefront of urban development, not an "also ran" in the adoption of obsolete technology. We invite your organization to join us to ensure that our city makes the very best choices possible about this important transportation investment.

**RESOLUTION AGAINST THE INTRODUCTION OF
OVERHEAD STREET CAR WIRES IN
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

December 2009

WHEREAS:

- The District of Columbia Government has made a decision to introduce a 37 mile, \$1.5 billion dollar new streetcar system on to the streets and avenues of the city; and
- Since 1889 an Act of Congress has barred overhead wires for such purposes in the old city of Washington, yet the new system will be powered by overhead “catenary” wires carried on poles and structures on the streets throughout the city, both old and new; and
- The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) in carrying out its duties to protect the Federal interest in Washington, has informed District representatives that it would defend the Congressional act prohibiting wires in the L’Enfant plan streets; and
- Both federal law and the placement of the L’Enfant Plan on the National Register of Historic Places reinforce a bar on wires and the various supporting structures which might impose on the streets and avenues; and
- Washington is a planned city with vital vistas and views that make it unique in the world, and those views are located around the entire rim of the District’s topographical bowl; and
- Many of Washington’s important historic and non-historic districts and neighborhoods are not within the old city but deserve protection from unsightly overhead wires used to power streetcars:

THEREFORE, the undersigned associations and organizations, hereby resolve that the public interest requires the District to take the following preparatory steps before taking any official action to introduce a properly designed streetcar system to the District of Columbia:

1. Conduct a study of streetcar systems that use power sources that are not dependent on overhead wires including systems in use in Europe, the United States and the hydroley system being installed in Charlotte, NC;
2. Demonstrate how all of the streetcar’s component parts are to work together, including but not limited to, numbers and size of cars; power plants, garages, marshalling yards and storage facilities; connection with other streetcars in development at our borders in VA and MD; and updated, current revenue projections sufficient to cover both capital expenditures and operating costs over the life of the system;

3. Give the public a meaningful role in determining the scoping for the EIS required by the National Capital Planning Commission, including but not limited to:
 - The size of streetcars in relation to the size of the streets down which they are proposed to be routed;
 - The noise of the streetcars measured against other traffic noises, including buses, trucks, and cars;
 - The impact of the streetcars on street parking;
 - The fiscal impact of the system on anticipated capital and operating projections for the District of Columbia; and
 - The impact of the proposed overhead wire system on street trees along the routes for which the system is planned.

Regardless of the location of overhead wires in or outside the old city of Washington, and regardless of studies or findings of the Environmental Impact Statement, we support a ban on overhead streetcar wires from all streets and avenues in the District of Columbia.

SIGNATORIES TO THIS RESOLUTION:

- *Committee of 100 on the Federal City, Laura Richards, Chair*
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TO ADD YOUR ORGANIZATION to this list before February 15, 2010, please send your organization's name, telephone number, and name of the presiding officer to megmaguireconsultant@msn.com. Thank you.

Note: Capital Hill Restoration Society has also passed a resolution opposing overhead wires.