The District of Columbia's Multimodal Long-Range Transportation Plan

The Long View
L'Enfant Plan for the District of Columbia
CHAPTER 1:
The Long View

I. Transportation Shapes the City

The District’s transportation system today is inherited from decisions made centuries ago. The vision for transportation in the District contained within the moveDC plan and the decisions on transportation that will be made in the years to come will influence the city for generations. Reviewing the history of the city and how it has been shaped by the transportation system is essential to understanding how transportation will continue to influence where we live, work, shop, go to school, and get around.

II. History of the City

Washington, D.C., grew up around transportation systems. In 1790, the District of Columbia became the capital of the newly-formed United States of America. Georgetown, Alexandria, and Bladensburg were already settled along the banks of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, but much of the new capital was a blank slate.

Pierre L’Enfant was commissioned to lay out the capital city in 1791. His design created the layout of the City of Washington, which provided the foundation for the connected street grid and diagonal axes with grand vistas and open spaces in the District today. The presence of the L’Enfant Plan on the National Register of Historic Places shows the impact this original structure had on the city.

For more than 100 years, people moved around the District mainly by horse or on foot, shaping the city through the construction of footpaths and carriage houses. As the capital grew, settlements extended outward along a series of country roads that led to farmland and country estates. At the turn of the 20th century, developers established numerous independent subdivisions that capitalized on the city’s growing population and increased transportation capabilities—from railroads to the first streetcar lines.

From the first electric streetcar launch in Eckington in 1888 to the completion of Union Station in 1908, rail was the cornerstone of mobility for the city in the early 20th century. Streetcar lines reached out to Brookland and Anacostia and ran up Connecticut Avenue to country estates in Chevy Chase. Many of these original streetcar routes are still in service as today’s Metrobus lines.

Although the streetcar and rail lines kept people moving, the rising negative impacts—pedestrian safety, noise, and soot (from coal-powered rail engines)—prompted the McMillan Commission to make a bold proposition. The Commission wanted to create a modern and elegant multimodal hub for the Capital, while forming or preserving major parks. The McMillan Plan relocated the tangle of existing rail lines from the Potomac River plain to clear the way for the National Mall.

The early 1900s were a time of rapid growth and change for the city. The population increased by more than 50 percent in the first 20 years of the new century—rising from 278,000 people in 1900 to more than 437,000 people in 1920. By 1940, the District’s population had reached more than 660,000.1

1 www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab23.pdf
Fueled by the easy access offered by the expanding streetcar network, urban neighborhoods sprang up on formerly rural lands. Housing development boomed in Pleasant Plains; on Barry’s Farm, the original homes of what is now Barry Farm grew; and Swampoodle’s shantytowns (now NoMa) gave way to both industries and the Uline Arena, bringing Joe Louis, Malcolm X, and The Beatles to Tiber Creek’s former floodplain.  

In 1919, the laying of the “Zero Milestone”—the point at which the road system in the United States is measured—just south of the White House marked the beginning of the era of the auto.

D.C. planners of the early 20th century saw automobiles as the solution to their urban mobility problems. They didn’t contribute to public health issues like horses and weren’t on fixed routes like the streetcars; however, cars took up more space—whether they were moving or parked. A 1946 article in The Rotarian highlighted parking and transportation challenges, similar to those experienced in the city today. Transportation officials had to balance meeting the demand for parking and driving with preserving history and maintaining parks and open space. In many cases, they decided to accommodate the growing demands of the automobile.

After World War II, cars became more affordable. They appeared to be the perfect solution to serve the mobility needs of a city that expanded far beyond the original Boundary Street (now Florida Avenue). As the use of cars grew, more and more streetcar lines changed from trolley to bus service until the last streetcar exited the city in 1962.

In 1956, 10 years after World War II ended and the population of the District peaked, two plans were released to deal with the increasing demands for auto movement and storage. A proposed freeway plan and a new zoning ordinance both shaped the future of the District and region.

Based on the belief that accommodating cars would lead to a more successful city, Harold Lewis published the Lewis Plan of 1956, which recommended a major zoning overhaul for the District of Columbia. Among other things, the Lewis Plan proposed strict requirements for substantial parking in new developments. The Zoning Ordinance of 1958 adopted most of the Lewis Plan’s recommendations and is still largely the foundation for zoning in the District of Columbia.

While the L’Enfant Plan emphasized a grid of streets capable of sharing the traffic loads, planner Harland Bartholomew proposed a freeway plan for the Washington region that was a dramatic departure from the traditional city. Bartholomew’s plan channeled auto movement onto a limited network including three circumferential freeways. Bartholomew believed that they would help cluster new development in efficient ways as a means to both contain and strengthen the growing city.

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2 www.thewashingtonsyndicate.wordpress.com/2010/05/24/barry-farm-past-present-premiers-at-hsw-june-5th/  

3 www.voices.washingtonpost.com/rawfisher/2006/11/saved_dcs_beatles_connection.html

4 www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/zero.cfm

Many people disagreed with the freeway plan—including the residents of the 200,000 housing units standing in the path of proposed freeways. While many Washingtonians are familiar with the Building Height Act of 1910, few know about what amounted to the Roadway Width Act of 1893. That law stated that “no highway right-of-way in the city could be wider than 160 feet” (the width of Pennsylvania Avenue). The eight- and 10-lane planned freeways vastly exceeded the comparatively narrow 160-foot monumental boulevard—and in fact, several freeways were stopped by court order.

A. THE MODERN CITY

Surface and Underground Transit

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) emerged as the regional transit agency in 1967, amid the discussion of a freeway plan for the Washington region. The authority was created by an interstate compact, approved by the Maryland General Assembly in 1965, and passed through the Virginia General Assembly and Congress in 1966. WMATA laid out the first plan for a regional subway system in 1967. Ultimately, the planned freeway expansions ended in a compromise. Some sections of the planned system were built, while others were not. Meanwhile, $5 billion of planned highway funds went to create what is now a world-class subway system—Metrorail—though ultimately along alignments slightly different from the original concept.

WMATA broke ground for the first of its Metrorail lines in 1969. At its opening on March 27, 1976, the Red Line connected Dupont Circle to Rhode Island Avenue. The 103 miles (166 km) of the original 83-station system were completed on January 13, 2001, with the opening of the Green Line’s segment from Anacostia to Branch Avenue.

While WMATA’s original compact provided plans for regional rail service, as transportation demands grew, so did the need for reliable bus service to connect riders to destinations and to future rail stations. In response, WMATA acquired four area bus systems in 1973 and consolidated them into the Metrobus system with a unified red, white, and blue brand. Metrobus served as the exclusive source of public transit in the District until Metrorail service began operation in 1976.

Driving

Moving passengers and goods and accommodating service activity by private and commercial vehicles remain important within the District’s transportation system. The use of other transportation modes in the District has increased steadily; however, the District recognizes that strategic investments in the vehicular transportation network are beneficial to mobility, livability, equity, health, and safety.

The District remains committed to improving vehicle safety and operations for private and commercial vehicles in a manner that is integrated with other transportation modes. Substantive investments in facilities such as the 11th Street bridge, systems for traffic signals and the freeway network, and programs such as the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI) embody DDOT’s ongoing commitment to improving the District’s vehicular network.

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Biking, Walking, Buses, and Streetcars

The last decade has seen an increase in interest and investment in popular early forms of travel—walking, bicycling, and transit. The first bike lanes in the city were installed in 2000 and in little more than a decade the network has grown exponentially to more than 50 miles. Meanwhile, sidewalks have been improved or constructed in many parts of the District.

The District also has led the way for American bike sharing by launching its first system—SmartBike—in 2008. That system laid the foundation for the successful launch of Capital Bikeshare (CaBi) in 2010, which is the nation’s second largest system as of January 2014.

These investments have led to some of the highest rates of walking and biking for transportation of any city in the United States. As of 2012, approximately 12% of District residents (39,000 people) walked to work and 4% (13,500 people) biked to work each day.

Recognizing the need for additional transit service, the District launched its own branded bus service—the DC Circulator—in 2005. Circulator continues to expand and has grown to five routes carrying more than 16,000 riders every weekday.

In 2014, modern streetcars will reenter public service in the District for the first time since 1962. The modern streetcar is making a comeback in D.C. and several major U.S. cities. Streetcar has demonstrated an ability to provide efficient, high-quality transit and drive investments in housing, retail, and commercial properties. The first line of the D.C. streetcar is along H Street NE. The District has begun procurement of private-sector partners to design, build, operate, and maintain the 22-Mile Priority Streetcar System.

III. The Way Ahead

The 21st century yields rising automobile congestion, rapidly rising travel costs, and concerns about rising carbon emissions. The most recent stand-alone citywide transportation plan—1997 Transportation Plan for the District of Columbia—called for the expansion of multimodal options, many of which have now come to fruition. Since that time, the District has experienced rapid growth and the expansion of multimodal options. The population and employment growth during the past 17 years have strained the transportation system, and maintenance needs continue to grow.
Strengths
- The transportation system provides choice, convenience, and reliability to support a variety of households and new market activity. The network of redundant routes forming the city’s grid and angled avenues provide flexibility and resiliency as incidents occur or needs and demands change. Figure 1.2 shows recent changes in the way District residents travel to work.

A. TODAY’S GROWING CITY
After a long period of decreasing population, the District is again growing, having added nearly 30,000 people between 2000 and 2010—approximately 1,100 people each month since 2013. Figure 1.1 shows a historic summary of the population of D.C. since 1900.

B. BUILDING FROM THE PRESENT
The District has a strong foundation for future transportation investments. The street network is mostly interconnected. Transit is largely clean, comfortable, and convenient. Many parts of the city have a diverse land use mix, putting many amenities within easy reach of residents. Most residents, workers, and visitors have the option to walk, bike, ride, or drive depending on their needs, moods, and abilities. These factors combine to make the city among the top in the nation in ratings of walkability, bikeability, and transit access. The moveDC planning process began by investigating the strengths and challenges of the current transportation network.

Figure 1.1: Historic Summary of D.C. Population
![Graph showing population growth from 1900 to 2010.](image1)

Source: U.S. Census and District of Columbia, Office of Planning

Figure 1.2: Work Travel Mode Summary for D.C. Residents, 2000 and 2010
![Graph showing percentage of workers by mode of transportation in 2000 and 2010.](image2)

Source: Journey to Work data, U.S. Census 2000 and 2010

To meet these and other challenges, the District requires strategic investment and a spirit of innovation. moveDC builds on the District’s history to address existing strengths and challenges and outline a path forward for the future.
The District’s transportation system adds a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining residents. Residents are able to choose how much transportation they need and what they spend on transportation. In the most recent recession, the District grew while other city populations declined. District residents, workers, and businesses had the ability to adapt to changing economic conditions through making different transportation choices.

City streets form a linear park system and the many street trees cool the city and clean its air and water. The District’s active transportation networks—sidewalks, bike lanes, and many trails—offer people opportunities for physical exercise. The abundance of non-motorized and transit options reduce the number of auto trips that need to be taken. When auto trips are required, the city accommodates privately-owned vehicles as well as the use of shared autos.
Challenges

- Past planning has resulted in many streets being called on to simultaneously accommodate vehicular traffic, bicycles, trucks, and transit, meaning that priority for any mode is difficult. At the same time, these streets are evacuation routes and are the planned corridors for economic development. The moveDC plan helps inform choices between these demands, while retaining overall choices in mobility.

- The post-WWII era focus on orienting transportation system operations to serve auto-commuter needs is still evident in today’s network. Travel from suburb to downtown is frequently quicker and easier than getting from neighborhood to neighborhood within the city.

- Many District streets and transit services within the District experience a significant peak in use by non-District residents during morning and evening rush hours. This congests major travel corridors and contributes to crowding on key transit services.

- Despite having considerable capacity along many commuter-oriented streets and on major transit services, when these services and facilities fail, demand overflows onto neighborhood streets and to services not designed to carry peak demand. This overflow affects people’s travel quality and reliability as well as residents’ quality of life.

- While the District is served by two commuter railroads (MARC and Virginia Railway Express), Metrorail, and frequent passenger rail services (such as Amtrak), the ability for these services to carry commuters is limited by facility and operational constraints. These include rail line and station capacity constraints, service limitations, and access challenges.

- The L’Enfant Plan overlaid a series of diagonal avenues over a regular grid of streets. While his vision was to create vibrant civic spaces where these two layers intersected and reduce travel distances between city communities, he also succeeded in creating large, complex, and confusing intersections. These intersections challenge efficient roadway operations and create large distances for pedestrians to cross.

- Early in the city’s history, the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers linked the city to the rest of the nation. Today, these rivers, Rock Creek Park, major natural features, and institutional campuses divide the city and are challenges to connectivity between neighborhoods.

- In many locations, the continuous grid laid out by both L’Enfant and McMillan is broken. Among other impacts, missing local street connections can force people and goods to travel the long way around, and isolate neighbors and neighborhoods.

- While the city’s pedestrian and bicycle network is expanding, it is still incomplete. Gaps in the sidewalk system force pedestrians into the street at some locations. Many bicycle routes are suitable only for experienced riders.

- In the District, many lower-income communities struggle with existing transit fee structures that do not facilitate transfers between bus and rail and charge a higher fee for more efficient services. Low-income travelers often have to choose between paying a lower transit fare but taking a time penalty and saving time by paying more money for a quicker trip.

- Some people must travel out of their communities to meet daily needs such as accessing high performing schools or fresh food options, making trips not required in other communities. Shared-vehicle systems like CaBi and carsharing systems require a credit card in order to join, making them harder to access for those without a bank account or with poor credit.

- The District has an aging transportation system. Many streets have not been rebuilt in the past 50 years and many more are overdue for major maintenance. The Metrorail system and dozens of bridges require major improvements and investment. Traffic signal and lighting systems are in need of modernization. Currently, funding is stretched to ensure a state of good repair for the existing system. Meanwhile, the transportation system needs to grow and change to meet existing and anticipated demand.
The Nation’s Capital

The federal government is linked to transportation planning, policy, and investment in the District of Columbia. It is an important and influential employer in the District, one that helps support a multimodal transportation network in the city and the region. Federal transit benefits support the region’s high transit ridership. As the federal workforce continues to evolve, new transportation options will offer people more choices about how they work and how they get to work each day.

The presence and needs of the federal government also places certain restrictions on transportation planning. As the capital city, the District’s transportation infrastructure supports and accommodates special events, motorcades, and other unique roadway requests. Occasions such as the presidential inauguration showcase the city’s infrastructure and serve millions of additional visitors, yielding local benefits for the District; however, daily motorcades and associated road closures can prove challenging to the management and accessibility of the transportation network.

Many major transportation corridors are directly controlled by the federal government, not by the District. For example, the grounds around the Capitol building are controlled by the Architect of the Capitol, and the National Park Service controls roadways within Rock Creek Park and the National Mall. District agencies regularly coordinate with federal partners to plan and implement projects throughout the District that help maintain and improve infrastructure.

Homeland security measures implemented in the 1990s and 2000s also have significantly altered the District’s transportation infrastructure. Key blocks of Pennsylvania Avenue NW—a critical east-west connection through downtown—have been closed to vehicular traffic since 1995, although this closure also yielded a new pedestrian-oriented, public gathering space.

In the interest of security and hardening perimeters of federal agencies, some street connections have been restricted or closed altering travel routes for drivers, bicyclist and transit. Other street segments have been closed entirely for security purposes, such as E Street NW, near the Ellipse. Retractable barriers have been installed on Independence and Constitution Avenues to create vehicle checkpoints. Physical improvements have been made to streets over time alongside security upgrades; however, the streets often remain closed, creating circulation and planning challenges for all modes of travel.
IV. A Shared Vision for the Future

Current forecasts for the District—prepared prior to 2013 by the District of Columbia Office of Planning—suggest that the city will grow to nearly 800,000 people and have nearly 1,000,000 jobs by 2040. Meanwhile, the region surrounding the District will grow and change significantly. These forecasts are shown in Table 1.1.

This growth will create more activity in congested areas and bring energy into neighborhoods that could benefit from investment. Meanwhile, the many programs, policies, and services already planned will begin to transform the city’s transportation system, but will not be enough to help the city reach its full potential and preserve and enhance people’s mobility. Without sustained investment in all facets of transportation, the District’s competitiveness could be affected by the inconvenience and economic loss of congestion, lack of sufficient transportation choice, and system reliability. Not investing in the District’s future is not an option. Without sustained investment, the District’s future (2040) transportation system will face:

- **More congestion on District streets.** Vehicular delay would increase by nearly 50% from existing (2014) levels. This would translate to longer peak travel periods, more severe congestion on major roadways, more non-local traffic pressure on neighborhood streets, reduced mobility in growing parts of the city, and more difficult access to the city from the region.

- **Transit crowding and congestion.** Transit systems within the District would need to accommodate more than 70,000 additional daily riders. Systems crossing the border with surrounding jurisdictions would need to carry nearly 130,000 additional daily riders. Metrorail and other critical transit services would struggle to provide a comfortable and reliable travel experience for all users.

- **Unaccommodated bicycle demand.** Forecasts for walking and bicycling indicate that nearly 250,000 more walking and bicycling trips will be made within the District on a daily basis in 2040. An additional 29,000 bike and walk trips will be made between the District and neighboring areas. The District has already invested in and continues to invest in a robust pedestrian and bicycle network. Without further investment, opportunity may be lost and many would-be walkers and bicyclists could choose to travel by another, more costly (to the District) travel mode.

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Source: MWCOG Approved Round 8.2 Forecasts
A. THE MOVEDC PLANNING PROCESS
From the beginning of the moveDC planning process, the development of the District’s transportation plan was about more than transportation. moveDC reflects the broader understanding of transportation’s effect on the city and the life of its residents, workers, and visitors. The following briefly summarize the sources of information and process used in the development of moveDC’s vision, goals, and performance measures.

Exchanging Ideas and Inspiration
To expand the conversation about the moveDC plan and immediately involve the community in its development, moveDC hosted a community event to kick off the planning process on February 9, 2013, at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library. This “Idea Exchange” was attended by more than 300 people who shared ideas, perspectives, wants, needs, hopes, and visions for the future. The outcome of the event provided much of the basis for the initial development of moveDC’s goals and vision, in addition to offering insight into existing issues and future solutions.

Perspectives from city leaders, in combination with participant input at the activities and the panel discussion, were significant and informative. Key themes arising out of the Idea Exchange included:

- Transportation’s broad effect on many facets of life in the District
- The need to make efficient use of existing transportation resources
- Bicycling’s critical role in a complete transportation system
- The critical nature of prioritizing pedestrian accommodation and safety
- The need to balance accommodation of residents and commuters
- moveDC’s critical role in meeting the Sustainable D.C. goal of 75% of work trips by non-auto means
- Challenge for 2013’s transportation system to meet the growing city’s needs
- Difficulty in maintaining affordability as the transportation system matures

Building the Vision
moveDC’s draft vision became an activity for public input during the first round of workshops—Ideas that Build—in March and April 2013. Figure 1.3 is an image of the many comments people provided on moveDC’s draft vision statement.
B. MEASURING PERFORMANCE

Performance measurement, how to do it, and what to measure were topics of discussion from the earliest stages of moveDC through its completion. Understanding the complexities of the District’s transportation needs in combination with agency, regulatory, political, and public climates, the moveDC plan was developed to be implementable.

Performance criteria developed from a variety of sources were used throughout the moveDC planning process, from the development of alternatives and the recommended plan through the implementation strategy.

United States Department of Transportation

The United States Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) oversees the implementation of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), enacted in 2012. MAP-21 is the federal government’s transportation authorization bill and funds surface transportation programs. MAP-21 guides local transportation policy by setting the following performance-based planning factors:

- Support economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency
- Increase the safety of the transportation system for all users
- Increase the ability of the transportation system to support homeland security and to safeguard the personal security of all users
- Increase accessibility and mobility of people and freight
- Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight
- Promote efficient system management and operation
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Government’s Transportation Planning Board (MWCOG TPB) is the federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the region. TPB prepares plans and programs required by the federal government to receive federal-aid transportation funds. TPB’s vision lays out eight broad goals to guide the region’s transportation investments into the 21st century:

- Provide reasonable access at reasonable cost to everyone in the region
- Develop, implement, and maintain an interconnected transportation system that enhances quality of life and promotes a strong and growing economy throughout the entire region including a healthy regional core and dynamic regional activity centers with a mix of jobs, housing, and services in a walkable environment
- Give priority to management, performance, maintenance, and safety of all modes and facilities
- Use the best available technology to maximize system effectiveness
- Plan and develop a transportation system that enhances and protects the region’s natural environmental quality, cultural and historic resources, and communities
- Achieve better interjurisdictional coordination of transportation and land use planning
- Achieve an enhanced funding mechanism(s) for regional and local transportation system priorities that cannot be implemented with existing and forecasted federal, state, and local funding
- Support options for international and interregional travel and commerce
District Plans
The moveDC vision, goals, and performance measures build from District of Columbia agency plans and various D.C. stakeholder plans. They include, but are not limited to:

- 1997 Transportation Plan for the District of Columbia
- District of Columbia Bicycle Master Plan (2005)
- District of Columbia Pedestrian Master Plan (2009)
- D.C.'s Transit Future System Plan (2010)
- NCPC's Capital Space (2010)
- DDOT's Action Agenda (2010)
- Office of the Mayor's One City Action Plan (2012)
- Architect of the Capitol's Strategic Vision & Five Year Focus (2012)
V. moveDC Vision and Goals

The moveDC vision and goals set a high bar for the District’s transportation future. The following presents moveDC’s vision and goals. The plan’s performance metrics are summarized in Appendix 1.1.

A. VISION

The District of Columbia will have a world-class transportation system serving the people who live, work, and visit the city. The transportation system will make the city more livable, sustainable, prosperous, and attractive. It will offer everyone in the District exceptional travel choices. As the transportation system evolves over time, the District will:

- Be more competitive and attractive locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally
- Have safer and more vibrant streets and neighborhoods
- Have cleaner air, streams, and rivers, and be more responsive to climate change
- Accommodate the travel needs of all residents, workers, and visitors regardless of age or ability
- Integrate the District’s transportation system with the region’s transportation network

B. MOVEDC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Sustainability and Health: Achieve 75% of all commute trips in the District by non-auto modes

- Increase non-auto mode split
- Increase access to parks and green space
- Encourage active transportation for health benefits
- Reduce air and water quality impacts of transportation
- Prepare the transportation system for changing environmental and climatological conditions

Citywide Accessibility and Mobility: Maximize system reliability and capacity for moving people and goods

- Increase the person-carrying capacity of the transportation system
- Improve system reliability
- Reduce financial barriers to the lowest-income transportation system users

- Accommodate the movement and management of freight and goods
- Integrate the District’s transportation system with the region’s transportation network

Neighborhood Accessibility and Connectivity: Support neighborhood vitality and economic development

- Increase the coverage of all modal networks throughout the District
- Increase the number of transportation choices for travel between city neighborhoods
- Increase transportation availability to population centers and jobs, schools, amenities, and services
- Increase transportation availability to economically challenged or targeted redevelopment areas

Safety and Security: Achieve zero fatalities and serious injuries on the District transportation network

- Improve safety for all users
- Improve redundancy of transportation networks to handle emergencies
- Expand sidewalk network
- Maintain ability to evacuate the District in case of emergency
- Preserve security of key functions without impacting the transportation system

Public Space: Reinforce Washington, D.C.’s historic landscapes and quality of neighborhood public space

- Protect and enhance important corridors and urban landscapes
- Make streets functional, beautiful, and walkable
- Increase tree coverage

Preservation: Maximize reliability for all District transportation infrastructure by investing in maintenance and asset management

Funding and Financing: Invest in transportation to achieve outcomes within the plan horizon