



Council of the District of Columbia

John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

May 15, 2020

Muriel Bowser
Mayor of the District of Columbia
Executive Office of the Mayor
1350 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

We are writing to reiterate our request that you take immediate action to close or narrow a number of public roads for use by pedestrians and cyclists during the public health emergency. As you know, traffic in the District is at an unprecedented low, creating an environment that encourages speeding; on the other hand, there has been an increase in the number of residents using our sidewalks and public spaces during this period for exercise and essential errands. To safely use those spaces, however, residents must be able to maintain social distancing, which can be difficult given density of sidewalk design. Where doing so would not affect safety, closing or narrowing roads to through traffic is one way that the District can help facilitate proper social distancing when residents leave their homes. This could be accomplished through the closure of entire blocks to vehicular traffic, or simply the closure of certain lanes.

Ideally, what we would like is for DDOT to identify public space—streets or whole corridors—that could be appropriately closed or narrowed to provide the requisite space for social distancing. Doing so will not only help residents more safely access outdoor spaces, but also could be a key tool in reducing the spread of the virus. And, yet, the agency has not yet acted. In the absence of that action, we are prepared to craft a legislative program that would enable residents to self-identify their blocks for closure or narrowing. Attached to this letter is an amendment to the Coronavirus Support Congressional Review Emergency Amendment Act, which the Council will be considering at its meeting this Tuesday. The amendment would require the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to establish a program for residents to apply for closure of a road or lane to traffic during the public health emergency. Under the amendment, DDOT would need the approval of the Advisory Neighborhood Commission for the affected block to approve a proposed street or lane closure. The amendment also authorizes DDOT to propose public street closures where the agency has received reports of residents failing to maintain appropriate social distance while using public space. Absent a DDOT-led program, we are asking for your commitment to a reprogramming to fund the cost of this amendment.

Looking beyond the immediate term, though, we also want to highlight that we can and should fundamentally shift how people move around the District. As you noted

in establishing the ReOpen DC Committee, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity before us. When the bulk of workers return to offices, rather than allowing those people to, yet again, clog and congest our streets, we should do all that we can do now to lay the ground work to encourage people to walk, ride bikes, and move around the city without using their cars.

Thank you for your administration's continued dedication to keeping District residents safe during the public health emergency. We look forward to working with you and your staff on this proposal in the coming days.

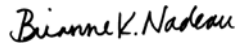
Regards,



Mary M. Cheh



Charles Allen



Brianne Nadeau

cc: Phil Mendelson, Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia
Lucinda Babers, Deputy Mayor for Operations & Infrastructure
Jeff Marootian, Director of the District Department of Transportation