

Comprehensive Program for Infrastructure and Transportation Revitalization in the District of Columbia

The District of Columbia stands at a historic juncture where transportation infrastructure, racial justice, and economic democracy intersect. For generations, the physical landscape of the District has been shaped by patterns of systematic disinvestment, leaving communities east of the Anacostia River to bear the compounding burdens of transit deserts, food insecurity, and health disparities. To build a city that truly belongs to its working-class residents, public transit must be treated not as a commercial commodity or an accessory for downtown real estate, but as a fundamental civil right and a collective public good.

This comprehensive policy blueprint outlines a transformative plan to revitalize the District's transportation networks. By rejecting regressive financing mechanisms and proposing a progressive revenue architecture, this program directly confronts the structural inequities that have defined municipal planning for decades.

Redressing Systemic Inequity and Municipal Disinvestment

The physical degradation of the District's transit network is a direct consequence of a multi-generational maintenance debt and an obsolete funding paradigm. Nationally, the purchasing power of the federal gas tax has eroded by approximately 81% since 1993, driven by inflation, enhanced vehicle fuel economy, and the expansion of the electric vehicle market. This fiscal deficit has shifted the financial burden onto local drivers, who pay an average of \$725 annually in vehicle repairs due to deteriorating roads. Currently, 97% of the District's roads are in poor or fair condition. Furthermore, the city's structural foundations are rapidly aging; the average age of its bridges is 62 years, and 30% of the bridge inventory will require rehabilitation over the next decade.

This infrastructure crisis is not felt equally. The consequences of deferred maintenance are

concentrated in Wards 7 and 8, where transit networks fail to provide basic access to employment, healthcare, and essential services.

The Geography of Exclusion

The divergence in transit accessibility across the District illustrates a profound racial and geographic divide. While residents of Ward 2 experience an average commute of 26 minutes, residents of Ward 7 endure a 36-minute average commute. This structural barrier directly impacts health outcomes: the average Black resident must travel 25 minutes by transit to reach the nearest hospital, compared to 20 minutes for white residents. In Ward 7, transit times for emergency care and maternal health services can stretch to a critical 60 minutes.

This connectivity gap is also the primary driver of food insecurity. Approximately 11% of the District’s land area is classified as a food desert, yet over 80% of these food deserts are concentrated in Wards 7 and 8. The termination of the DC Circulator in late 2024 and ongoing modifications to the Metrobus system have left these communities with severely restricted access to fresh, affordable nutrition.

Ward	Full-Service Grocery Stores (2024)	Food Desert Concentration (% of Ward Area)	Median Household Income
Ward 3	15	0%	\$122,680
Ward 7	3	31%	\$45,469
Ward 8	3	51%	<\$44,995

The Three As Framework: Designing for Liberation and Access

To dismantle these disparities, this program executes a comprehensive modernization strategy organized around three core pillars: Accessibility, Affordability, and Availability.

Accessibility: Uncompromising Intersectional Design

A liberated transit system must be entirely barrier-free. This plan guarantees the complete execution of the All Stations Accessibility Program (ASAP), ensuring 100% elevator reliability and total station parity across the Metrorail network. To protect pedestrian lives, the District will implement "centerline hardening" and curb bulb-outs at every intersection on the High Injury Network (HIN), which is projected to reduce vehicle-pedestrian conflicts by 70%. Furthermore, Leading Pedestrian Intervals (LPIs) will be mandated at all major intersections, immediately reducing pedestrian-vehicle collisions by 13%.

Affordability: The Dual-Track Zero-Fare Strategy

A progressive vision for transit requires the decommodification of daily mobility. Rather than forcing working-class families to choose between transit fares and basic necessities, this plan institutes a dual-track affordability model:

- **Universal Zero-Fare Metrobus:** The entire District Metrobus system will transition to a permanent zero-fare model for all riders, eliminating administrative costs and accelerating boarding times.
- **Targeted Zero-Fare Metrorail & Paratransit:** Metrorail and MetroAccess services will be completely free for low-income residents.
- **Automated Enrollment:** To remove the bureaucratic barriers and stigma associated with means-tested programs, the District will leverage SNAP and Medicaid databases to automatically enroll eligible residents. Enrollees will receive a pre-loaded "Connect DC" card granting unlimited, barrier-free access to subway and paratransit services, while high-income commuters and tourists continue to support the system through standard rail fares.

Availability: Reclaiming Time for the Working Class

High-frequency, reliable service is a matter of economic justice. The District will mandate a 10-minute maximum headway on all primary bus corridors, ensuring that working-class commuters are not left stranded during late-night shifts and weekends. For low-density zones in Wards 7 and 8, the administration will deploy an AI-driven public microtransit system. This program will provide point-to-point connections to regional transit hubs, reducing average passenger wait times from 60 minutes to just 12 minutes. Additionally, AI-enabled "Smart Junctions" will adjust traffic signal timing in real-time, yielding a 23% reduction in overall journey times.

Strategic Critique: Rejecting Incrementalism and Speculative Funding

A critical examination of alternative platforms reveals a reliance on incrementalist measures, speculative funding structures, or corporate-aligned compromises that fail to meet the needs of the District's working class.

The Limits of Speculative and Segmented Progressivism

The legislative approach championed by the progressive Ward 4 councilmember representing the democratic socialist wing of the Council has historically relied on highly volatile and speculative funding models. That platform's transit initiatives proposed utilizing "excess municipal revenues"—a mechanism that only allocates funding if the city's general revenue estimates happen to exceed projections, and only after existing debt services and housing funds are fully satisfied. This speculative funding structure left the program vulnerable to immediate budget cuts, political compromises, and implementation delays when regional revenue streams fluctuated.

Furthermore, that platform remains constrained by a reliance on "segmented free" transit frameworks. By accepting programs like the regional half-price transit discount program, which is restricted only to residents who actively enroll and prove their food assistance eligibility, that approach forces vulnerable residents to navigate complex administrative bureaucracies. Despite extensive outreach, fewer than 10% of eligible low-income residents have enrolled in these regional discount programs due to these barriers.

Finally, while that progressive platform has introduced bold legislative concepts like sustainable social housing and a lead-free water line program by 2030, it lacks a viable, dedicated capital acquisition plan to fund them, leaving these vital programs subject to annual budget battles. While opposing autonomous vehicle deployment due to safety concerns, that platform also fails to offer a structural transition model to protect transit workers from eventual automation-induced displacement.

By contrast, the proposed plan offers a universal zero-fare bus system, completely removing the administrative burden from riders and operators alike. It replaces speculative budget surpluses with a permanent, dedicated revenue stream, ensuring that transit equity is treated as a core budget priority rather than an after-thought.

The Limits of the Commuter -Centric, Corporate Platform

Conversely, the platform of the business-aligned former at-large councilmember consistently views public transportation through the lens of downtown commercial revitalization and tourism, rather than as a public service for working-class communities. That candidate's incrementalist platform prioritizes high-income commuters traveling to the central business district, while ignoring the systemic transit deficits that isolate the residents of Wards 7 and 8.

This corporate-aligned platform has consistently opposed progressive revenue models, including voting against a modest 2021 tax adjustment on high-income earners that funded housing vouchers and childcare wage increases. That candidate also opposes the Business Activity Tax (BAT), choosing to protect the profit margins of unincorporated corporate law firms and lobbying partnerships over funding the city's public infrastructure.

Furthermore, this establishment record is marred by poor oversight and ethical challenges, including supporting the controversial sole-source sports betting contract that cost the District millions and listed a close family member as a subcontractor. That candidate also voted against ethics amendments requiring council approval for large public housing contracts, shielding developers from transparency. Finally, as the oversight chair of utility regulation, that legislator failed to hold utility monopolies accountable as electric bills skyrocketed, while maintaining cozy ties with industry lobbyists.

Relying on private-sector incentives and marketing initiatives to revive the District is a proven failure. Without a dedicated public investment in transit equity, the city's economic divides will only continue to widen.

Integrating Key Civic Debates and Missing Policy Solutions

To construct a truly comprehensive municipal plan, this proposal addresses several critical issues raised in recent civic debates that have been neglected or poorly handled by alternative platforms.

Snow Justice and Winter Mobility Equity

The District's current winter weather response exhibits a glaring geographic inequity, where streets in Wards 7 and 8 are routinely left unplowed long after wealthier wards have been cleared. This neglect directly harms the 72% of children in the District who commute outside their home neighborhoods to attend school, with travel distances and safety risks exponentially higher for families East of the River.

This administration will implement the **Winter Equity and Snow Justice Protocol** :

- **Restricting Non -Essential Traffic:** During major winter storms, non -essential vehicular traffic on primary transit corridors will be restricted to allow municipal plows to clear lanes rapidly.
- **Free Municipal Parking Alliances:** The District will establish agreements with commercial parking garages in downtown and dense residential areas like Capitol Hill to offer free parking during storms, clearing street lanes so plows can work unimpeded.
- **Prioritized Clearing of Transit and School Commutes:** Snow removal assets will be prioritized to clear bus routes, microtransit corridors, and school commuting pathways in Wards 7 and 8 first, ensuring working-class families and children are not isolated.

De-carceration and Late -Night Youth Corridors

Rather than adopting regressive curfew policies and pre -trial detention expansions supported by establishment politicians, this program establishes **Late-Night Mobility and Youth Enrichment Corridors** . By expanding after-hours Metrobus service to 24 -hour operations on key corridors and funding late -night access to community recreation centers, the city provides safe, constructive spaces for youth.

Labor Sovereignty and Autonomous Vehicle Moratorium

To support organized labor and protect transit workers, the District will enact a strict moratorium on commercial unmanned autonomous vehicle testing, requiring a licensed operator to be physically present. Additionally, the plan codifies a **Labor Autonomy and Just Transition Accord** in partnership with transit labor organizations, guaranteeing that no transit union worker faces automation -induced layoffs and protecting operators from being forced to perform fare -enforcement duties.

Comprehensive Municipal Utility Regulation

To combat soaring utility bills, the administration will establish a municipal utility rate -cap program, forcing utility monopolies to absorb cost increases rather than passing them to working -class residents, and enforcing strict oversight of utility lobb yists.

Strict Anti -Corruption and Open -Bidding Standards

In direct opposition to the nepotism and backroom deals of previous administrations, all municipal contracts —including those for green social housing construction and public infrastructure —must go through an open, competitive bidding process. Any contract exceeding \$250,000 will require rigorous council review and public disclosures.

The Financial Architecture: Progressive Redistribution

Implementing an ambitious municipal infrastructure program requires a reliable, progressive revenue strategy that rejects regressive taxes on working -class families.

The Business Activity Tax: Closing the Commuter Loophole

The cornerstone of this funding model is a 2% Business Activity Tax (BAT) on national and local businesses operating within the District. Because of a historical loophole stemming from a 1979 judicial ruling on the Home Rule Act, the District is barred from taxing the personal income of non -residents. Consequently, highly profitable professional services firms —including major corporate law offices, lobbying partnerships, and management consultancies whose wealthy partners live in Maryland and Virginia—exploit this gap and pay little to no local corporate franchise taxes.

A 2% Business Activity Tax operates as a simple value-added tax on a firm's economic footprint within the District, which is fully permissible under the Home Rule Act. To protect local merchants, small businesses with less than \$200,000 in annual revenue will be completely exempt. This progressive tax is estimated to generate \$500 million in stable, recurring annual revenue, providing a robust funding base to support the universal zero-fare bus program and structural infrastructure improvements.

Leveraging Federal Programs and Land Value Capture

To maximize local resources, the administration will deploy sophisticated municipal finance mechanisms to capture and redirect capital :

- **Flexing Federal -Aid Highway Funds:** The District will transfer up to 50% of its Federal -Aid Highway Program formula funds to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to directly support mass transit construction and bus service upgrades.
- **Carbon Reduction and Air Quality Grants:** The administration will leverage \$25.6 million over five years from the federal Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) to build municipal electric vehicle charging networks and expand public micromobility infrastructure.
- **Land Value Capture (LVC):** For all major transit station modernizations, the District will establish Special Assessment Districts (SADs) and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) zones. This mechanism ensures that a portion of the windfall profits accrued by commercial real estate developers from public transit investments is reclaimed by the city to fund public housing and neighborhood transit hubs.