DC's H Street-Benning Road Streetcar Alliance
Information for the DC4D Vote to Join the Streetcar Alliance

H Street-Benning Road Streetcar Project:

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) has developed a long-term plan to build a network of streetcar lines crisscrossing D.C. complementing existing Metrorail and Metrobus service. A coalition of community leaders has provided strong support for a streetcar line in the H Street-Benning Road N.E. corridor which will link up an under-served transit corridor between the Minnesota Avenue Metrorail Station (Orange Line) and the Union Station Metrorail Station (Red Line). A number of challenges remain, however. Accordingly, the H Street-Benning Road Streetcar Alliance was established to support the streetcar line to promote economic development, invest in infrastructure that supports local businesses and communities, and protect the environment by reducing air pollution from cars. The following organizations are members:

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 5B	Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6A
Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6C	The Argonaut
Coalition for Smarter Growth	Design Army
Dynamic Health & Wellness	Granville Moore's
H Street Country Club	Liberty Tax Service
North Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association	The Red & The Black
River Terrace Community Organization	Rock & Roll Hotel
Sierra Club - Washington, D.C. Chapter	Sweets & Treats
Theater Alliance	

Why the District Needs Streetcars:

DDOT studies show a strong need for transit improvements in a number of corridors across the District, most notably along the H Street-Benning Road N.E. corridor between the Minnesota Avenue Metrorail Station and the Union Station Metrorail Station where:

- The X2 Metrobus route struggles to meet demand despite frequent service and larger articulated (accordion) buses;
- The surrounding neighborhoods have low rates of car ownership; and
- Residents experience some of the longest transit travel times to jobs in the District.

Streetcars Offer Many Benefits:

Cities around the world have greatly benefited from streetcar systems, which have eased traffic congestion, reduced air pollution from automobiles and spurred economic development. D.C. could realize these benefits too. Streetcars offer the following benefits:

- Streetcar lines are much cheaper to build than subway lines and cheaper to operate and maintain than bus lines.
- Streetcars can carry more riders than buses.
- Streetcars provide a smooth, comfortable ride and are much quieter than buses.
- Because streetcars run on electricity rather than gas, they do not emit air pollution at street level as buses do. And with diesel and natural gas prices expected to increase in the future, electric streetcars will be cheaper to power than buses.
- Streetcars have fewer greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming than cars.
- Streetcar lines in other cities have demonstrated their ability to promote economic development and neighborhood revitalization along their routes.
- Streetcars can draw more people out of their cars and onto transit than buses.

Potential Role of DC4D:

- Lend the organization's name as a coalition member of the H Street-Benning Road Streetcar Alliance;
- Educate others in the community about the benefits of streetcars through tabling, flyering and door-to-door canvassing.
- Sign on to letters to our elected representatives;
- Meet with D.C. officials; and/or

- Provide a representative to attend periodic stakeholder meetings.

Benefits of DC4D's Participation in the H Street-Benning Road Streetcar Alliance Initiative:

- Work with like-minded organizations in the community;
- Build partnerships with DC Sierra Club for environmental/sustainability issues;
- Build partnerships with ANC groups and other community groups;
- Strengthen the organization's record on local issues;
- Grow the organization's membership

Streetcars vs. Buses (per Jason Broehm of the DC Sierra Club)

1. **STREETCARS PERFORM BETTER THAN BUSES**

- Speed: Streetcars have greater acceleration and braking abilities than buses, which means that streetcars can serve their routes faster and, therefore, streetcars can deliver its riders to their destinations faster, and fewer streetcars are needed to serve a given transit corridor than buses.

- Capacity: Streetcars can carry more passengers than buses -- about 30-50 percent more passengers than even longer articulated (accordion) buses.

- Reliability: Streetcars, particularly if they are given traffic signal priority, can be more reliable than buses.

- Comfort: Streetcars provide a smooth, quiet ride with visible routes, easy access and large windows, all of which make the riding experience more enjoyable.

- Safety: Streetcars have a better safety record than buses, in part due to their predictable routes and better braking abilities than buses.

2. **STREETCARS MAY COST MORE THAN BUSES UP FRONT BUT LESS IN THE LONG RUN**

- Capital Costs: Streetcars and the associated infrastructure cost more than buses up front; however they can cost less in the long run.

- Operating Costs: Streetcars can offer lower per-passenger operating costs than buses, and particularly in busy transit corridors, streetcars can be more cost effective to operate.

- Fuel costs: Although the cost of electricity -- which presumably would power streetcars -- has risen, the cost of diesel fuel and natural gas -- which powers buses -- has risen in recent years too. Energy experts predict that due to scarcity the long-term costs of diesel fuel and natural gas will increase. Because electricity can be generated from a wide variety of energy sources, including renewable sources like wind, solar, and biofuels, electricity provides greater flexibility, which is particularly important because we do not know what the energy mix of the future will be.

- Energy Efficiency: Because streetcars use steel wheels on steel rails they lose less energy due to friction than buses, which use rubber wheels on asphalt and concrete.
- Maintenance: Experience has shown that streetcars experience fewer breakdowns than buses, meaning that maintenance costs can be lower for streetcars than buses.

- Paving Costs: Due to the heavy weight of buses, they inflict significant damage on our roads, particularly on asphalt, so with buses, particularly larger -- and heavier -- articulated buses, the city would be forced to resurface roads more frequently, resulting in higher costs for buses. By contrast, the weight of streetcars is borne by the rails, which last for decades without requiring replacement.

- Vehicle Replacement Costs: Buses typically must be replaced every 10-17 years whereas streetcars can last for decades. In fact, some cities are still using streetcars that were built in the 1940's and 1950's.

- Streetcars are an investment in improved transit service, which offers riders a better, more attractive product. Surveys of riders show a strong preference for streetcars over buses, and these results are confirmed by streetcars' demonstrated ability to draw more riders than buses in a given transit corridor, which also increases the revenue generated by passenger fares.

3. **STREETCARS HAVE A DEMONSTRATED ABILITY TO BRING FINANCIAL BENEFITS**

- Economic Development: Streetcars have a demonstrated ability to spur economic development in a transit corridor and have sometimes been referred to as "fertilizers" for local businesses. A 2006 study in Portland, Oregon, found that development within one block of a streetcar line there was denser than elsewhere in downtown Portland (since 1997 when streetcars were proposed, $2.3 billion had been invested within two blocks of the streetcar right-of-way.) Buses -- even fancier rapid bus lines -- have not demonstrated the ability to trigger economic development. The investment in streetcar infrastructure demonstrates a city's investment in that transit line in the long-term, which provides developers with the assurance they need to invest in that corridor. By contrast, bus lines can be re-routed or eliminated at any time (as we've seen, when Metro faces budget constraints, as it does currently, one of the cost cutting measures frequently proposed is the elimination of bus lines).

- Increased Tax Revenue: Because of the higher level of economic development that has been observed in transit corridors after streetcar lines are constructed (or even proposed), cities benefit from higher real estate values and thus higher tax revenue, which benefits the whole city, not only the residents, business owners and passengers in the transit corridor.

4. **STREETCARS ARE BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**

- Congestion Benefits: Because streetcars have been shown to draw more riders than buses -- including so-called "choice riders," who may choose to ride transit if it is attractive but could otherwise drive automobiles -- streetcars can help take automobiles off the road while actually moving more people through the corridor.

- Air Pollution and Climate Change: Streetcars powered by electricity have zero emissions at street level whereas buses -- whether powered by diesel or cleaner natural gas -- emit pollutants, which are inhaled by passing pedestrians. When buses idle at a stop light or accelerate after a bus stop they emit even more exhaust fumes than average. Of course, generating electricity to power streetcars currently emits air pollutants at more distant power plants, but some electricity is generated using non-polluting and renewable wind and solar energy. In order to address climate change, the United States is already investing more resources in wind, solar and other renewable energy sources so we have to assume that these sources will comprise a larger share of our electricity generation in the future.

- Noise Pollution: Streetcars are quiet whereas buses are rather loud so streetcars reduce noise pollution and make the street environment much more enjoyable for pedestrians.

Additional Answers from Jason Broehm:

1. What evidence do we have that streetcars will cause enough people to switch from cars to have a significant impact on liveability?

Streetcars should be seen as an investment in better transit. Due in large part to the more attractive features of streetcars -- they're faster, more reliable, smoother, quieter and cleaner --surveys of riders in other cities show a strong preference for streetcars over buses, and these results are confirmed by streetcars' demonstrated ability to draw more riders than buses in a given transit corridor. Historically, when buses have replaced streetcar lines, ridership has declined, and when streetcars have replaced buses, ridership has increased.

2. Given the problem statement, that the H-street corridor is currently significantly underserved by metro/public transportation, what is the timeframe the community can expect improvement in service with the trolly? In the meantime, what is the community to do? How long have they been waiting?

The H Street-Benning Road corridor is currently undergoing a complete streetscape makeover as part of the Great Streets initiative. This project is expected to take several years. Based on community demand, streetcar tracks will be incorporated into the streets as part of the project. While this is a major step in the right direction, there are a number of other challenges that remain, most notably, how the streetcars will be powered. It's difficult to stay how long the community has been waiting. Some in the community have been pushing for this streetcar line for five or more years. The key question is how much longer will the community have to wait. The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) has stated that streetcars will not be running on H Street and Benning Road NE for about 5-6 years into the future. The H Street-Benning Road Streetcar Alliance was formed because we believe this timeframe is unacceptably long, and we want to press the city to accelerate the timeline.

3. Given the dire straights of public transportation in the H-street corridor, what interim solution(s) are being pursued?

While the community is waiting for the H Street-Benning Road streetcar line, they will continue to be served by the X2 Metrobus line, which is overtaxed. Business owners on H Street NE have formed a non-profit organization to better address the corridor's transportation needs, and they recently began offering free shuttle service while the communities awaits streetcar service. Schedule and other information about the new shuttle service is available at: http://www.atlasarts.org/plan_shuttle.php