

Whitehurst Freeway Deconstruction Feasibility Study

Public Outreach Meetings – April 7, 26, and 27, 2005 Summary Report

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1.0 Introduction

This report documents and summarizes questions, comments, and concerns that were voiced at three public meetings for the Whitehurst Freeway Deconstruction Feasibility Study held in April 2005. The events were publicized in advance through half-page advertisements in *The Georgetown* and *The Current* newspapers (*The Northwest Current*, *The Georgetown Current*, and *The Dupont Current*).

The purpose of the meetings was two-fold: to provide information to the public about the scope of the study and existing conditions data collected so far, and to solicit public input.

Several visual tools were developed for the meetings, including a half-hour PowerPoint presentation, a handout containing the presentation slides, and a fact sheet. Also, materials from previous studies were displayed, and 10 new boards containing information about existing conditions were set up on easels near the meeting areas. The presentation discussed background information about the project, study goals, existing conditions in the study area (including structures and land values), the existing traffic model, case studies, recent related projects, and a summary of “next steps.”

In addition to providing information to the public through these materials, the second purpose of the meetings was to solicit the public’s views on the study. This was accomplished by providing a forum (a half-hour to more than one hour in length) where participants could make comments, ask questions, and share concerns. Also, attendees were given comment cards on which they could make their views known in writing. Returned comment cards have been transcribed in full, and a paraphrased transcription of forum questions and comments have been included in this report.

The first meeting was held, on April 7 at St. John’s Episcopal Church on O Street NW, in Georgetown. It was the best-attended of the meetings, with more than 100 members of the public, local government, and media in attendance. The second meeting, on April 26 at Sibley Hospital on Loughboro Road NW, was located in the Palisades neighborhood. More than 50 members of the public, local government, and media attended this meeting, which featured a forum session with District Department of Transportation director Dan Tangherlini. The third meeting was held on April 27 in Foggy Bottom, at the Melrose Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue NW. More than 50 members of the public, local government, and media were in attendance, including Ward 2 councilmember Jack Evans, who started off the meeting with brief comments, and answered audience questions..

In addition to three public meetings, two design workshops for the study were held on April 30 and May 7, 2005. A separate report addresses the content of and public input from those workshops.

Part 2 of this report summarizes the questions, comments, and concerns often heard during the three public meetings.

Parts 3, 4, and 5 contain the agenda and minutes of each meeting, a summary of all three question-and-answer sessions, and transcriptions of the written comments received at each of the public meetings.

2.0 Summary of Significant Findings

During the public meetings, some issues were discussed more often than others. The following table lists the issues that were raised the most during question-and-answer sessions and on comment cards.

Traffic impacts as a result of deconstructing the Whitehurst Freeway was the issue of most concern to participants, followed by questions about the need for having a study. Land value and access to the Potomac waterfront, particularly by pedestrians, also ranked high among participant concerns. (Note that the issues listed here encompass both the pro and con views of removing the freeway.)

Issue	Apr 7	Apr 26	Apr 27	Total
a. Traffic impacts	17	11	9	37
b. Concerns about purpose, timeframe, and cost of study	6	8	6	20
c. Land value and revenue impacts	7	5	2	14
d. Pedestrian/bicycle access and safety	3	3	5	11
e. Cost of project, cost/benefit, financing	1	5	4	10
f. Aesthetics	6	2	2	10
g. Development potential	5	0	3	8
h. Parkland impacts	3	1	4	8
i. Environmental impacts	1	2	3	6
j. Study area	2	2	2	6
k. Consideration of previous studies	3	1	2	6
l. Non-specific opposition to project	3	1	2	6
m. Non-specific support of project	3	1	1	5
n. Impacts to adjacent/future transit and roadways	2	2	1	5
o. Tunnel alternative	4	0	0	4
p. Security, evacuation route, risk assessment	1	2	1	4
q. Parking impacts	2	1	0	3

3.0 April 7 Public Meeting

3.1 April 7 – Meeting Agenda and Minutes

The first public meeting took place on April 7, 2005, from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM at St. John's Episcopal Church, 3240 O St NW, Washington, DC. Approximately 120 members of the community and local media attended this meeting.

Due to the rain, the meeting started at about 7:15. Opening remarks were given by the District Department of Transportation's (DDOT) Ramona Burns, who stressed that this project is only a feasibility study, and that this is only the first public meeting for that study. She also mentioned that the feasibility study would have to be followed by an environmental review process, and no decisions have been made about the Whitehurst Freeway at this time.

Her brief introduction was followed by a half-hour presentation by Abi Lerner of DMJM Harris.

The remaining hour and 15 minutes of the meeting was devoted to a question/answer session. Abi Lerner answered most of the questions with help from Mark Gander and Steve Del Giudice, also of DMJM Harris, and Ramona Burns. The meeting adjourned after 9 pm, with several community members staying a short while longer to study the visual displays and talk privately with project team leaders.

3.2 April 7 – Summary of Question and Answer Session

Q. The land values chart is out of date (2004); does not include new development. When would the value of newer parcels be added to the assessment?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: Info came from the DC assessor's office; info is updated annually. We can't update land values with data that hasn't been released yet or on projects that haven't been built.

Q. Where will the Whitehurst Freeway traffic go if the freeway is taken down?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: The traffic model will help answer this question. Georgetown is included in the regional model.

Q. What will the impact of the deconstruction be on the waterfront park?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: NPS says the park will be a better park without the Whitehurst Freeway but park can be built with the Whitehurst Freeway in place. It will be more complicated to deconstruct with the new park there. All construction has some kind of impact.

Q. What is the eastern boundary of the study area when assessing land values? Is Foggy Bottom included?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: 24th Street NW. Assessment does not include Foggy Bottom or the Kennedy Center. (Referred to slide to delineate boundary of study area.)

Q. What is still developable in Georgetown that is not spoken for? What is driving this study?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: Development or redevelopment could occur in Georgetown regardless of whether the freeway comes down. Alternatives have not yet been decided, so it's impossible to say at this time what kind of development could take place.

Q. How many cars are to be displaced? What is the future volume of the freeway?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: The freeway is carrying 42,000 vehicles per day. Growth will be limited in the future because of constraints at either end.

Q. A gentleman expressed at length his opposition to the freeway deconstruction, calling it unreasonable.

[Comment noted.]

Q. What will this look like in 25 years? Will there be other improvements to DC's transportation system?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: The regional model will incorporate expansion and acknowledge different rates of growth.

Q. Has DC put a cap on the number of alternatives? Is a tunnel possible?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: No, there is no cap; all options will be explored.

Q. Foxhall and Palisades may lose property value because of diminished access to the city center.

A. DMJM Harris Representative: We'll have to look into that.

Q. I've been here 50 years and this is the craziest thing I've ever heard. Removing the freeway will result in even less pedestrian access.

[Comment noted.]

Q. I'm a business owner on K Street. Why was \$30 million spent on refurbishing the freeway if previous reports were inconclusive? People in the community want specifics about plans.

[Comment noted.]

Q. Will there be parking on K Street in off-peak and weekend hours?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: The parking situation will be examined.

Q. Why is there no tunnel replacement option? You can't take down the freeway without some kind of replacement.

A. We will look into all alternatives, and based on comments tonight we will examine a tunnel alternative.

Q. Who is driving the resurrection of this project? The National Park Service? Developers? Will the park be built no matter what happens to the freeway?

A. DDOT Representative: There has always been interest in removing the freeway at DDOT. Yes, the park will be built regardless of the outcome of this study.

Q. Is there an alternative to just leave the freeway alone?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: There is a no-build alternative.

Q. Please look at the impact to land values in Palisades.

[Comment noted.]

Q. I saw Dan Tangherlini on TV talking about this. When asked 'why take the freeway down,' his response was 'why leave it up'?

[Comment noted.]

Q. Redevelopment seems to be the impetus behind this proposal. Re-routing Whitehurst traffic to K Street is bad.

[Comment noted.]

Q. It boggles my mind that we've argued about a traffic light that might cause 20-second delays, but now we're talking about something that will make traffic far worse in Georgetown and make the park less accessible.

[Comment noted.]

Q. As an architect, I appreciate the upcoming design charrette. I hear a lot about how the freeway is an eyesore, but I like the look of it; it's a lot better than it used to be.

A. DMJM Harris Representative: At this point, everything is up for grabs. We're willing to include any suggestions for evaluation.

Q. When is the next refurbishment?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: The Whitehurst has a 25-year life cycle, so probably in 15 to 17 years.

Q. Will the feasibility study be completed by the end of 2005?

A. DDOT Representative: Yes, and then comes an environmental review.

Q. A former head of a citizen's association in Georgetown, spoke at length in favor of the deconstruction, saying it doesn't matter how many lanes you have, the light can still only control 2,000 vehicles per hour. Also talked about non-peak traffic and other issues.

[Comment noted.]

Q. Is the volume or the pacing that is the traffic issue on the freeway?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: Depends on the time of day. It's a limited facility, surrounded by other limited facilities.

Q. How will this affect access to the Kennedy Center?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: We will take it into consideration. It's likely that intersections on lower K Street need to be signalized.

Q. ANC Representative: The study must have pedestrian counts, especially around the new movie theater [at Wisconsin & K] and non-peak traffic counts.

[Comment noted.]

Q. Will the design charrettes have O/D data?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: Yes.

Q. The traffic problem may not be the Whitehurst, but the fact that the west end of K Street is a dead end.

[Comment noted.]

Q. If it's mostly Maryland and Virginia drivers using the freeway, put it underground and let them pay for it.

[Comment noted.]

Q. It would help if you put the numbers in context. For example, if the Whitehurst is removed, will K Street be like 16th Street NW, or more like M Street NW? Please draw comparisons so we can better understand.

[Comment noted.]

Q. In the handouts and other materials, it sounds as if it's not a feasibility study, but a predetermined outcome. Please weigh the pros and cons, and don't take sides.

DMJM Harris Representative: There is no predetermined answer.

Q. Why not just deal with the signals at each end of the freeway? That's why there are bottlenecks.

DMJM Harris Representative: The Study will look at options to improve these intersections.

Q. Is this freeway idea following through on the mayor's plan to redevelop K Street?

A. DDOT Representative: The K Street Transitway is a separate issue.

Q. It seems like the people who want objectivity have already made up their minds against removing the freeway, and that they should take their own advice.

[Comment noted.]

Q. What does the study cost and who authorized it?

A. DDOT Representative: \$400,000. DDOT authorized the study.

Q. The freeway is an eyesore that doesn't belong in the nation's capital. The Via Appia and Champs Elysees could be used as models for K Street. It should be a beautiful place to hang around.

[Comment noted.]

Q. Where in the U.S. has this been done before?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: Portland, San Francisco, and Boston, although in Boston the arterial became a tunnel.

Q. Octavia Avenue in San Francisco was a freeway, and they replaced it with a beautiful boulevard.

[Comment noted.]

Q. This issue is not just about traffic; it's also about retail, security, and revitalization.

[Comment noted.]

Q. Is an EIS required?

A. *DMJM Harris Representative: Probably; it's too soon to say.*

3.3 April 7 – Written Comments Received

Eighteen written comments were received at the meeting. Eight comments were generally for removal of the freeway, five were against, and five were neutral. Where comments are illegible, “[...]” has been inserted.

1) Comments: “The Whitehurst Freeway is grotesque! How in the world could a CFA, ANC, OPG, and CAG have ever permitted it to be built? They didn't exist at that time? Well, that explains it. This should not be a question of: can we remove it, but how to best handle things after it is gone.”

[Comment noted.]

2) Questions: “Where did volume data come from? Was the Whitehurst/Potomac Fwy connection considered? Is it significant? Can future land value studies consider different taxation scenarios? There is a growing movement to try to throttle back the tax rates, given trends in appreciation.”

Comments: We've sent similar comments by e-mail: 1) Please consider impacts (esp. land value, travel times) on neighborhoods bordering study area, especially Palisades. 2) Please consider impacts on Virginia side of bridge. Also: peak traffic (PM) study should be extended later; window is too narrow. Please communicate these facts: 1) there is an improvement scheduled for the Canal/Whitehurst intersection (and provide details). 2) The U.S. Park Service is going forward with the park.”

Response to question on volumes: DMJM Harris used new counts for most of the study intersections and average daily traffic data from the DDOT Web site.

3) Comments: “Take it down! Thanks.”

[Comment noted.]

4) Comments: “Tear it down. It is an anachronistic blight on the city.”

[Comment noted.]

5) Comments: “Here's to the 'Champs Ele-K.”

[Comment noted.]

6) Questions: “Where are the [...] interstate spec tunnel replacement designs? Exhaust filtration?”

Comments: “Study seems more interested in quick property tax increases than actual transportation improvements.”

[Comment noted.]

7) Comments: "Please update the land value chart to reflect current conditions and development in the area. On the existing traffic volume plot, attached [comment sheet has '2005 Existing Volumes' attached to it], K St only carries 32,000 vehicles. The alternative to the freeway does not have to carry 40,000 vehicles – it is only supplying and carrying 32,000 on K St. The fact that the Whitehurst now carries 40,000 does not mean that the alternative should be designed to carry 40,000 – you need to reduce the flow through the community. Please factor new transportation [...] including regional public transportation models. [On attached page] The new alternative does not have to carry 40,000 vehicles because it only feeds 32,000 on K St."

[Comment noted.]

8) Comments: "Our condo board at 3303 Water St has a sub-committee devoted to the Whitehurst Freeway and other Georgetown-related community affairs, like the bridges over the canal. We plan to stay thoroughly engaged in the Whitehurst project. Our condo building is directly under the freeway, facing the Potomac River."

[Comment noted.]

9) Comments: "The District should not be wasting taxpayer money trying to figure out how to get rid of the Whitehurst. Instead, you should be focusing on building more bridges and roads. This area has the 2nd highest traffic in the U.S. Tax dollars should be going for building more roads and expressways. The Whitehurst is also a major road to the Kennedy Ctr. If you want to have direct access from Canal to the Waterfront, then build an access ramp for that – but that was a totally separate issue from the Whitehurst, and it would be cheaper."

[Comment noted.]

10) Questions: "Will the Waterfront area between 34th St and 1,000 feet above Key Bridge, known as the non-motorized boathouse zone, be included in the feasibility study and EIS?"

Comments: "If everything is 'up for grabs' or 'on the table,' does it make sense to begin construction on the Georgetown Park [in] Fall 2005 before the feasibility study and possible EIS on the proposal has been done? See separate paper, Page 1 article re: GU Boathouse, Sierra Club, DC Chapter, spring issue newsletter. Please consider this issue and other boathouse proposals for waterfront in your feasibility study and EIS for the Whitehurst Freeway deconstruction proposal."

[Comment noted.]

11) Comments: "If the deconstruction is designed to bring people into Georgetown on weekends and evenings, where are those people supposed to park their cars, especially if the parking now available in that area is to be converted to a park?"

Response to Written Comment #11: The parking conditions are being evaluated as part of the study.

12) Comments: "Unless you undergo an extensive underground tunnel there will be no solution to existing problems; wasted money."

[Comment noted.]

13) Comments: "Please do not tear down the Whitehurst Freeway."

[Comment noted.]

14) Comments: "Remove Whitehurst: put traffic on K St (Water St)"

[Comment noted.]

15) Comments: “Deconstructing the Whitehurst is a fantastic idea! K Street in the winter is dark, dangerous, and has for years had retail struggling and failing. Removing the Whitehurst I believe will help revitalize the city. It’s a great move – I will support it!”

[Comment noted.]

16) Comments: “Bravo!”

[Comment noted.]

17) Comments: “To balance traffic 24 hours a day 7 days a week, the Whitehurst needs to come down. This will allow K St to serve as part of the city grid and distribute cars more evenly. A new boulevard can be a great asset!”

[Comment noted.]

18) Comments: “For whom is the Whitehurst Freeway an eyesore? We never heard that before. (Only the Ritz Hotel patrons who don’t spend any time in those rooms anyway.) What are you going to do with all the MD, DC, and VA traffic that depends on that freeway? The area for parking on K Street under the bridge is absolutely essential. And what are you going to say when wiser heads than the city has now insist that you need a freeway in the very same spot where you want to turn it down? They will wonder what you were thinking. Use that money for more walking police. What about that horrendous beating in Adams Morgan last weekend? The man has had to have his arms cut off.”

[Comment noted.]

4.0 April 26 Public Meeting

4.1 April 26 – Meeting Agenda and Minutes

The second public meeting took place on April 26, 2005, from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM at Sibley Hospital Auditorium, 5255 Loughboro Road NW, Washington, DC. Approximately 55 members of the community and local media attended this meeting.

DDOT’s Ramona Burns began the meeting at 7:15 pm, at which time citizens began to ask questions in spite of her request to hold questions until after the presentation. Two members of the public shouted at each other for about a half a minute.

After order was restored, DMJM Harris’ Abi Lerner gave a half-hour presentation about the scope and purpose of the study.

Following the presentation was a question and answer session from 7:45 to 9:15, featuring Abi Lerner and DDOT director Dan Tangherlini. Mr. Tangherlini prefaced the session with a caveat about this effort being only a study and that no plans have been decided yet. To ask questions and make comments, meeting participants formed a line at the front of the auditorium to speak into the microphone. Several participants entered the line twice. The meeting adjourned at 9:15 with several community members staying after to talk privately with the project team.

4.2 April 26 – Summary of Question and Answer Session

Q. E Street at Independence Ave is the only way to get off the freeway; have you considered this and why is the graphic not represented in the materials?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: We will update the graphic to include it next time. DDOT: You're not looking at a final report, but only the preliminary data. This is only the beginning of data collection.

Q. What will the impact on land values be in the Palisades area? In the preliminary evaluation criteria, are you willing to accept increases in travel times? What is the most acceptable increase in travel times?

A. DDOT Director: I can't answer those questions because I don't know the answers yet. The effect on land values outside the immediate study area will be studied.

Q. This project should be called the Whitehurst "demolition," not deconstruction, project. Will there be a special tax district to recapture land value?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: Yes.

Q. I do cost-benefit analysis. Where are the costs? The benefits are here, but the analysis is not credible because there are no costs.

A. DDOT Director: We haven't completed the analysis; the scope calls for cost estimates analysis.

Q. Will the report be made available to the public so it can be analyzed? How can you say that case studies in Boston, San Francisco, and Portland will produce the same results here?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: Yes, the existing conditions report will be available. The case studies do not draw conclusions about their application to Georgetown. DDOT: We're trying to communicate with stakeholders before we draw any conclusions.

Q. Who are the property owners and what is the distinction between stakeholders and citizens? What is the rationale for the study? DC is a company town, the federal government is downtown, and the freeway allows access to jobs downtown. What is the real reason for this study? What is wrong with leaving the freeway there?

A. DDOT Director: The main reason for the study is that Georgetown has changed. DC is a company town, and the value of homes is largely based on commute times to work. The city is asking broader questions about the way the city evolves, what we inherited from previous generations, recapturing the waterfront, and revitalizing the city. There has been interest [in this project] for some time, and it is progress to be asking these questions.

Q. I like the idea of removing the freeway if it's done properly; I see it as beautification of the city. What is the budget to do it properly and will VA and MD help pay?

A. DDOT Director: It's not likely that VA and MD will help pay. There is no budget now; costs are part of the analysis.

Q. I'm interested in the process of deconstruction; is there a risk assessment involved? Since the freeway can be used to help evacuate the city in the event of terrorism, should Homeland Security (DHS) be involved?

A. DDOT Director: DHS should definitely not be involved.

Q. The study area is flawed; it must include Palisades and Foggy Bottom. When will the NEPA process start and how much will it cost?

A. DDOT Director: There's been no decision yet. I've never been involved in a study where there has not been a request to extend study area.

Q. Will the city have to pay back the money it used to rehabilitate the freeway?

A. DDOT Director: We're looking into that.

Q. 40,000 cars a day use the freeway; removing it will benefit the few and not the many. Transit is not viable. Washingtonians are not transit people; they won't use your buses on K Street.

A. DDOT Director: Not true. DC is second behind NYC in transit commuting. Don't believe me; check the census numbers.

Q. If this project is undertaken, it will cost millions. What are the competing needs? Will this take precedence over other priorities? My friends from Virginia come to the District and are appalled by the poor state of the roads.

A. DDOT Director: The deconstruction would have to pay for itself, and we're doing a financial analysis. We must maintain and increase pavement and bridge quality. Virginia has bad roads too, by the way.

Q. What are you going to do with pedestrians who cross K Street if 40,000 cars are going through where the freeway was? I object to the name "deconstruction."

A. DDOT Director: Lot's of roads have 40,000 vehicles per day and no pedestrian problems. DMJM Harris Representative: We're looking at different alternatives; the freeway has high numbers only in peak hours. DDOT: Should we change the name of the study?

Q. The project seems to have come on only recently. Why are we doing something that benefits only a few people? Who authorized the study and when? Who makes the final decision?

A. DDOT Director: I authorized it, based on questions from the mayor, Jack Evans, the National Park Service (NPS), and others. We thought about kicking a study off about a year ago. City Council makes the decision, but the federal government has a say too.

Q. I'm an architect and I like the freeway, but I recognize there are serious issues. What are the alternate connections?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: Please come to the design charrettes; we'd like to have your input.

Q. You gentlemen have put the cart before the horse. When you start making engineering efforts, you'll see you don't have another solution. The study is a waste of time and money.

A. DDOT Director: We're examining a variety of issues and options.

Q. This whole situation is a no-brainer. You're wasting a lot of money and time. Will there be a Metrorail station in Georgetown?

A. DDOT Director: A Georgetown Metro station can't happen; it would be too expensive. We're looking at streetcars or BRT, however.

Q. I'm growing increasingly uneasy. You're farther along this process than you're admitting. There's an old story about letting a camel's nose into the tent, because soon you'll have the entire camel in there. Well, I smell a lot of camel.

A. *DDOT Director: That's why we're having an open, honest discussion process.*

Q. If this were a trial, [project opponents] would have already hung the suspect. The facts are not yet in evidence; don't make assumptions. DDOT is doing its best to provide you with information.

[Comment noted.]

Q. We need an adequate study area. In 1982, we studied taking the freeway down, but didn't. People have studied this before, but they didn't "cook the books" then and I don't believe they're doing it now. There's been a lot of good analysis so far, but the study area needs to be larger – east to Washington Circle and north to Reservoir Road.

[Comment noted.]

Q. What will the bicycle traffic impacts be?

A. *DMJM Harris Representative: Bicycle facilities are taken into account.*

Q. I've been using the freeway for 30 years. When it was being repaired, backups were awful. This will be just as bad.

[Comment noted.]

Q. Where will the previous study reports be available?

A. *DMJM Harris Representative: The previous study reports will be in local libraries.*

Q. Will you be examining parking impacts?

A. *DMJM Harris Representative: Yes.*

Q. Will this make it more or less difficult to access the waterfront? To say it will make it easier sounds like a conclusion to me.

A. *DMJM Harris Representative: We are looking at the issue of access to Georgetown.*

Q. Have you consulted (Ward 3 Councilmember) Kathy Patterson about this?

A. *DDOT Director: No, but we probably should.*

Q. Can you put the previous studies on the website?

A. *DDOT Director: I'm reluctant to do that because of the time and expense involved. The previous study reports will be placed in local libraries.*

Q. M Street is bumper to bumper all the time. Will Lower K become the same way?

A. *DMJM Harris Representative: We are using our traffic model to assess future conditions. The model takes into consideration traffic flow, future conditions and pedestrian movements, etc.*

Q. Who put the \$400,000 for the study in the budget and why haven't we read about this in the *Washington Post*?

A. *DDOT Director: I imagine you will soon, because there's a Post reporter in the back of the room. Appropriations are not done on a line item by line item basis.*

Q. Couldn't you have spent this money on filling potholes?

A. *DDOT Director: No, federal money is not available for maintenance. We have to have the guts as a transportation department to ask unpopular questions in order to answer them.*

Q. In the past few years, Lower K Street has flooded several times; how do you plan to prevent this in future?

A. *DDOT Director: In my five years in this post, I don't believe K Street has flooded; but we'll look into floodplain issues.*

4.3 April 26 – Written Comments Received

Eight written comments were received at the meeting. No comments were for removal of the freeway, six were against, and two were neutral. Where comments are illegible, "[...]" has been inserted.

1) Comments: "Whatever solutions are considered, improvements must be made to eastbound M St at Key Bridge as that bottleneck significantly contributes to the backups on Canal Road. This has been much worse since the dedicated ramp from Whitehurst to Key Bridge was removed during the last rehab. The behavior of Ward 3 residents at this evening's meeting is the primary reason that, as a 55-year resident of this area – I don't usually attend public meetings. They are an embarrassment!"

[Comment noted.]

2) Comments: "I used to ride on the Whitehurst when I was very young; it's part of my past. Since it was rebuilt it is so much nicer. Why would you deconstruct it? It carries a lot of traffic."

[Comment noted.]

3) Questions: "As part of the cost-benefit analysis, where are the costs? What is the impact on citizens in the surrounding neighborhoods, e.g., Palisades, using the same criteria or different ones? Who paid for this study? Who determined the study parameters?"

Comments: "I will fight this project. I see no benefits and a lot of costs (traffic, decreased property value, etc.) for the Palisades neighborhood. This project benefits outsider developers and real estate owners, not DC residents. There will be a political price to pay. Do the re-count of traffic during a realistic time period, not the summer months, and certainly not August."

[Comment noted.]

4) Questions: "Why is the study being done? Who asked that the study be undertaken? What methods will you choose to determine the impacts on peak and non-peak traffic patterns if the Whitehurst is removed? Will you be considering estimating displaced vehicle traffic on neighborhood streets in Georgetown, for example, Q St, P St, R St, etc.? Will you be utilizing data from past Whitehurst or other relevant traffic pattern studies to determine past and projected vehicle numbers at various times within the study area?"

Comments: "Please explain the genesis of this study – who, what, when, and why is the study being prepared? In other words, who said what to whom to get this study underway and why?"

[Comment noted.]

5) Questions: "Why is removing the freeway being considered when the freeway was recently rebuilt and in excellent condition? How would the replacement thoroughfare be financed? Why is this issue even being considered?"

Comments: "Freeway should be retained. Retains fast route to GWU Hospital once Georgetown Hospital is closed. Retains important commuter route. Retains important route to Kennedy Center amenities on weekends when M St is jammed. Avoids clogging neighborhood streets. That real estate values have gone up by 100% with Whitehurst disproves thesis that tearing down roadway will increase tax revenues; they are increasing regardless of freeway. Retaining freeway maintains quality of life for neighborhoods in the District that feed into the Whitehurst Freeway."

[Comment noted.]

6) Questions: "How could you expect to gauge public opinion on this issue when the meetings were so poorly publicized?"

Comments: "The Whitehurst is a gem. It allows 40,000 vehicles to avoid (or add to) traffic congestion in Georgetown. These vehicles will not necessarily use K St. The residential areas of Georgetown will be severely impacted by this traffic. You need to consider what this will do to the character of Georgetown as well as to the land values."

[Comment noted.]

7) Questions: "Georgetown is not the destination of most of the Whitehurst users. Maryland, Virginia, and NW Washington commuters use this to reach the downtown and beyond destinations. Not Georgetown!"

Comments: "Do you understand this? Are you conducting traffic studies on MacArthur Blvd, Foxhall Rd, and Canal Rd at 8:30 am weekdays and 6 pm weekends? How do these people get past Georgetown? We all like the Whitehurst. Don't tear it down, please. Stop listening to Jack Evans and the developers only – hear our voices. Changing it for the few at the expense of so many is unfair."

8) Questions: "1. Does the National Park Service have the money for the waterfront park? 2. Is there a definite schedule for this construction?"

Response to Written Comment #8: NPS will start construction of the park in August 2005; the schedule will be on the DDOT Web site.

5.0 April 27 Public Meeting

5.1 April 27 – Meeting Agenda and Minutes

The third public meeting took place on April 27, 2005, from 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM at Melrose Hotel, 2430 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC. Approximately 60 members of the community and local media attended this meeting.

DDOT's Ramona Burns began the meeting by introducing Ward 2 Councilmember Jack Evans. Mr. Evans spoke for 15 minutes about the genesis of the project and his involvement in it before opening the meeting to questions and comments.

DMJM Harris' Abi Lerner then gave his half-hour presentation. Following the presentation, Abi Lerner and Ramona Burns answered more questions from 8:45 PM to 9:15 PM, after which the meeting adjourned.

5.2 April 27 – Summary of Question and Answer Session

Ward 2 Councilmember Jack Evans began by discussing letters he'd received on both sides of the issue – for and against removing the freeway. He said the idea to remove the freeway was his idea because it's an ugly structure he does not like. He's wanted to "get rid of it" since he started representing the ward in 1992. He asserted that because the freeway is 60 years old, continually rehabilitating it will become problematic. Parkland will not be developed as a result of taking the freeway down. He said that DC can now afford to remove the freeway and explained that funds would come from tax increment financing (TIF) and other sources. He went on to say that the Whitehurst is technically not a freeway, but a 3/4-mile elevated road with a stoplight at each end; it's more of a bypass of Georgetown. The idea is to remove the freeway and replace it with a boulevard on K St. It will not double traffic, and if anything it may decrease traffic as the ramp from Key Bridge (and Virginia) would be removed. Evans cited the new Washington Convention Center at Mt. Vernon Square as a success story that was initially opposed by people, and claimed that "people like to 'catastro-phise' things in this city; people will oppose [the Whitehurst plan] because that's what they do – they oppose things." He concluded by saying that the freeway should come down because cities everywhere are removing barriers to their waterfronts that were built in the 1950s and '60s. Questions and comments for Councilmember Evans:

Q. Wouldn't a boulevard impede access to the river?

A. We're the last city in the country to do this – Boston, San Francisco, and others have had success. Timing of lights, over and underpasses, lots of things can be done. Access is the least of my worries; it can be done.

Q. Where does traffic go coming across Key Bridge?

A. People in Virginia aren't stupid. Traffic finds its own course – Memorial Bridge, 14th St. This freeway won't be here in 50 years. We can leave it for future generations, but freeways aren't supposed to be on the waterfront. One woman told me that taking down the freeway would cause her to take more time getting to her doctor's office. Well, how often does she go to her doctor? This is the sort of stuff that's starting to drive me crazy. We're trying not to change people's driving habits, but people can adjust their own schedules and routes.

Q. How is the contractor interacting with people who do evacuation planning for the city?

A. They're probably not, but they probably should.

Q. Existing K Street is not a big road; is there a plan to widen it?

A. It will be the same width as the freeway. Traffic management can be done – no peak-period parking, timing the lights. We can do this so traffic won't be slowed down any further.

Q. Is it true that if the freeway is taken down, some money will have to be given back to the Federal Highway Administration?

A. No.

Q. Where is the money coming from?

A. Explained again TIF and cited Gallery Place and Mandarin Hotel as good examples.

Q. How long will the process take?

A. K St would be done first, then deconstruction could take a year or more.

Q. What will happen to access to apartments on the service roads between Washington Circle and 27th St?

A. This is why we need community input; in case we forget something.

Q. What arrangements have been made to work with communities in MD and VA?

A. VA will have to be on board with this. If not, they can pass a law and stop it. I have started with DC-affected neighborhoods; after that we'll look at VA and MD people. This will be the same cars going on the same roads to the same place with the same lights. It's not going to back up traffic any worse.

Q. When will they start examining the proper area? The study area is completely wrong.

A. It's a step-by-step process. It took 11 years for the convention center study. It will take time to collect all the data for this. I'm going to listen to what the public has to say, but it seems that some people just oppose everything.

Q. Will people be allowed to build on green space?

A. No. We can't widen onto federal parks.

Q. How can you prevent land from being developed in 50 years?

A. Nothing is failsafe, but the vision is to preserve land on the waterfront.

Q. The underside of the freeway is like the Eiffel Tower on its side. It's beautiful.

[Comment noted]

Q. I-95 in Philadelphia isn't coming down; not all cities are doing this. We need hard, believable data. You're not being up front about development potential.

A. The north side of K St is built out, the south side is owned by National Park Service. There won't be any new development on the waterfront.

Q. There isn't enough sidewalk space for cafes. Is the money there for a new park?

A. Yes, the park will be built regardless of the freeway's fate; the money's been committed.

Q. I can't see justifying the expense of taking it down. If it's not broke, don't fix it.

[Comment noted.]

Q. Not everyone wants K St to become like M St; it's too chaotic.

[Comment noted.]

Q. Won't there have to be some taking of parkland?

A. *Possibly a few feet if that's what it takes to make it work. Mainly I'd just like to see people get over their fear of change.*

Q. Have you considered another use for the structure rather than tearing it down? I can't see the point of spending so much to tear it down. The structure could be made into a park. What about a monorail?

A. *[Comment noted.]*

Q. Have you talked to artists and architects about how to make it look better?

A. *Yes, things could be done, but at the end of the day it's a freeway on the waterfront. You could put a necklace on a pig, but...*

Q. What about added noise from young people if K St is more pedestrianized?

A. *Good point, glad you raised it.*

Q. One of the biggest issues is adding to traffic. How can you be sure it won't?

A. *I don't agree with your premise. Volume will be the same. That's why we're doing this study. Even if we proved unequivocally that traffic wouldn't be worse, 1/3 of the community would still oppose it.*

Q. Seems like DDOT has already made up its mind. Is this study chasing a foregone conclusion?

A. *There's a wealth of information from previous studies. It's not capricious.*

Q. You are insulting; some people have legitimate reasons for opposing this. From the DDOT document it is clear they have already decided this is a good idea. Will this be an honest study?

A. *[Evans bid the audience good night and good luck]*

Second Q & A after Lerner's presentation:

DMJM Harris' Abi Lerner prefaced session by stating that his job is to conduct an objective technical analysis starting from scratch with no preconceived notions.

Q. The study area is too small. Are pedestrian counts missing?

A. *DMJM Harris Representative: Pedestrian data is not missing.*

Q. When will a recommendation be made?

A. *[Referred to project timeline board]*

Q. Who is the contractor? When and to whom will an existing conditions report be submitted?

A. *[Gave web address of DMJM Harris.] The existing conditions report will be sent to libraries.*

Q. Why have a design workshop if people haven't had a chance to review the technical data.

A. *DMJM Harris Representative: The Study Team is to gain info from public about alternatives. DDOT Representative: Like a brainstorming session, coming up with ideas to analyze. The idea is not to have preconceived notions but to solicit input from the community. One thing we've heard: everyone in the audience is an expert, so if you have issues come to the design meetings.*

Q. A meeting participant spoke for a while in favor of approaching issues with an open mind.]

[Comment noted.]

Q. When was data collected, 2002 or 2005? Why does the peak period end at 6 pm?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: Daily data is from 2002 DDOT daily volume info. Peak hour data is from 2005. DDOT is in the process of gathering new data we will use for peak traffic in the model.

Q. Pedestrian counts are wrong; there is no pedestrian crossing on the east side of K & 27th.

A. DMJM Harris Representative: We will check the pedestrian data.

Q. DDOT has said that all [Whitehurst Freeway] intersections operate at Level of Service F, and that's why they say there's no adverse impact – because you can't get worse than worst.

[Comment noted.]

Q. Why are the workshops so soon after public meetings? There's not enough time to generate proper dialogue; the process is moving too quickly.

[Comment noted.]

Q. There is a second rush hour you're apparently not aware of. There was an EIS done in 1999 that used very faulty models. You're just paying lip service to environmental quality. How can we make sure you're using better models?

A. DMJM Harris Representative: We collect as much data as possible to make sure our models reflect existing conditions.

Q. You haven't made a case for anything; this needs an environmental and social analysis, how it affects quality of life. This freeway liberates us. It's not a barrier, it saves us.

A. DDOT Representative: This is only the first phase of the process.

Q. Make sure the consultants are aware of the last EIS (Canal Road). It was found that existing models didn't work and had to use a new model.

[Comment noted.]

5.3 April 27 – Written Comments Received

Six written comments were received at the meeting. No comments were for removal of the freeway, five were against, and one was neutral. Where comments are illegible, “[...]” has been inserted.

1) Comments: “Jack Evans is great – I've voted for him every time – but I disagree with all his positions on the Whitehurst.”

[Comment noted.]

2) Comments: “The area under the Whitehurst Freeway is relatively quiet and peaceful compared to the chaos of M St. Making K St. a boulevard will actually impede pedestrian flow to the

waterfront. Increased street level noise, especially in the early evening will negatively affect the proposed waterfront park – significant adverse impacts (noise, visual) to the park area.”

[Comment noted.]

3) Questions: “The traffic on Lower K St at rush hours is horrendous. To think about removing the freeway and adding 40,000 cars to Lower K St seems totally mad. Are there any solutions other than dropping the freeway traffic onto Lower K St?”

Comments: “The few owners on the north side of Lower K are a relative few. The TIF scheme may be a huge burden for these landowners; is there an alternate financing?”

[Comment noted.]

4) Comments: “I will not be able to attend design meetings; please consider this written input. I live nearby and do not have a car. My primary personal interest is pedestrian safety. Currently I find routes in/out of Lower K to be difficult and dangerous. Future plans should emphasize safe crossings and well lit areas. If one point of the project is to increase outdoor use of the waterfront, this is more pedestrians, regardless of whether they walk there or drive down and park. To me, this is as important as rush hour traffic flows. Another side note: pedestrian crossings in Foggy Bottom around Washington Circle and New Hampshire Ave in particular are dangerous and not well planned.”

[Comment noted.]

5) Questions: “Why remove a useful traffic link which cost \$30 million to refurbish in 1985? (Rhetorical question).”

Comments: “The Whitehurst Freeway is a vital traffic carrier, facilitating quick movement to and from Rosslyn and Maryland without interference from ground level cross streets or local traffic flow.”

[Comment noted.]

6) Questions: “Why do none of the materials show what would replace the freeway and what the specific impact would be to M and N Streets throughout Georgetown? Jack [Evans] says we cannot know until it is removed. This is a ridiculous statement.”

Comments: “This is a terrible idea! This is a key artery to Northern VA from Foggy Bottom. Georgetown already is an unpassable parking lot; this would exacerbate an already terrible traffic situation. Very few individuals would benefit at the expense of many, many more of us. Jack [Evans] demonizes the people in Northern VA as ‘really the only people’ who use this road. I use this road to get to work. I will be one of the people who will end up sitting in traffic. DC residents (his constituents) will be negatively impacted! The attitude of the DDT [sic] staff and consultants needs to be adjusted; she was rude, cutting off taxpayer questions in a snotty tone. Our taxes pay her salary and she shouldn’t forget it!”

[Comment noted.]