

OFFICE OF WARD 1 COUNCILMEMBER BRIANNE K. NADEAU
COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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Statement of Introduction
Prioritizing People in Planning Amendment Act of 2022
February 18, 2022

Today, along with Councilmembers Janeese Lewis George, Robert C. White, Jr., and Charles Allen, I am introducing the Prioritizing People in Planning Amendment Act of 2022. This bill eliminates the outdated “level of service” metric developed to assess roadways and intersections, and requires the District Department of Transportation to develop alternative metrics that better reflect DC’s climate goals and the way our residents already use our streets and sidewalks.

Vehicle level of service, or LOS, is a standard maintained by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), and grades streets and intersections from A to F depending on their traffic flow. LOS was designed in the 1950s and 1960s, an era of significant highway expansion – expansion that was often at the expense of communities that were seen as in the way of those highways.

Because the current conception of LOS is such a one-dimensional metric – only looking at queueing and speed of vehicles – it has a strong tendency to favor projects that widen roads. Pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders are quite literally invisible in a traditional level of service model.

Eliminating this metric is an identified but unfulfilled goal of the District, as discussed in the approved Comprehensive Plan, section 403.6:

“In the past, the traditional way of measuring traffic impacts was to use a series of lettered grades (A through F) based on factors such as vehicle speed, the volume of cars that pass along a street compared to the street’s capacity, or the length of time for a car to pass through an intersection. These Level of Service (LOS) standards continue to be widely used in the suburbs, where most trips are made by car. But traditional LOS measures are not appropriate in a built out city, where widening streets to increase capacity is rarely an option (or a desired outcome). In the District, level of service measures must integrate vehicular, bicycle, pedestrian and transit travel. The benchmark should be the number of people that can pass along a corridor or through an intersection rather than just the number of cars.”

In lieu of level of service, this legislation directs DDOT to develop a series of alternative measures that are more context-appropriate: measuring the total number of people a street can move, or the potential of a project to increase vehicle miles traveled and contribute to overall congestion and carbon emissions.

While it may appear to be a minor change to an engineering concept, phasing out LOS will have significant positive ripple effects on the types of projects that get designed and approved in DC. Just as LOS has quietly put a thumb on the scale in favor of more roads and highways for almost

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a century, we can do the same for streets that are safer, greener, and better at moving (and gathering) people.

1 Janeese Lewis George
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3 Councilmember Janeese Lewis George
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1 Brianne K. Nadeau
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3 Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau
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9 Charles Allen
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15 R.C. White Jr.
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19 A BILL
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23 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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29 To amend the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Amendment Act of 2016 to prohibit the use of level
30 of service as a metric for transportation projects, and to direct the Mayor to establish
31 alternative metrics that account for transit users, pedestrians, cyclists, generation of new
32 automobile trips, and change in vehicle miles travelled.

33 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this

34 act may be cited as the “Prioritizing People in Planning Amendment Act of 2022”.

35 Sec. 2. Title I of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Amendment Act of 2016, effective

36 October 8, 2016 (D.C. Law 21-155; D.C. Official Code § 50-1951.01 *et seq.*), is amended by

37 adding a new section 108 to read as follows:

38 “Sec. 108. Level of service and preferred metrics.

39 “(a) The District Department of Transportation shall not use automobile delay, as

40 described solely by level of service or similar measures of vehicular capacity or traffic

41 congestion use as a decision-making metric for:

42 “(1) Use of funds or inclusion of projects in the capital improvements plan;

38 “(2) The development of alternatives for a street improvement project;

39 “(3) The selection of an approved alternative for a street improvement project;

40 “(4) Decisions on intersection design and traffic signal timing; or

41 “(5) The assessment of traffic plans resulting from new development.”

42 “(b) The Mayor shall establish standard metrics for assessing actions in subsection (a) of

43 this section, to include the following considerations:

44 “(1) peak throughput of persons on a street, including transit users, pedestrians,

45 and cyclists;

46 “(2) new automobile trips generated, and;

47 “(3) change in vehicle miles travelled (“VMT”).

48 Sec. 3. Fiscal impact statement.

49 The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal

50 impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975,

51 approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

52 Sec. 4. Effective date.

53 This act shall take effect after approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the

54 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of congressional review as

55 provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December

56 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code § 1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of

57 Columbia Register.