Just Do It!

......or......

Think Global, Act Local!

......or......

Eat What You Kill

(bugs and all)

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Streetcars were our past.......and our future

Once had over 200 mile system
Last streetcar ran in January 1962
Multiple streetcar “suburbs”
Nodal corridors - Connecticut Ave
Why new transit? Why now?

- City of 600,000+ residents swells to a daytime population of over 1.3M
- Annually ranked one of the most congested regions in the country - this year #1
- Continued regional growth - even in the recession
- 32% more transportation trips forecast by 2030
- Rail hub and spoke system doesn’t meet growing inter-neighborhood/intra-city trip demands
- Bus not meeting demands of many potential travelers
- At or over capacity on some rail and bus lines
Goals of the DC Streetcar

• Link neighborhoods with a modern, convenient and attractive transportation alternative.
• Provide quality service to attract and reach new transit ridership.
• Offer a broader range of transit options for District residents.
• Reduce short inner-city auto trips, parking demand, traffic congestion and air pollution.
• Encourage economic development and affordable housing options along streetcar corridors.
First there was a plan

- 1997 Transportation Vision, Strategy and Action Plan for the Nation’s Capital
- Three light rail corridors
  - Georgetown to Navy Yard (5.8 miles)
  - Adams Morgan to Minnesota Avenue (6.1 miles)
  - Georgia Avenue to Barney Circle (8.7 miles)
- Cost estimate $425M
- Initiate construction - 2010
Then there was another plan

- 2005 DC Transit Alternatives Analysis
- Nearly identical corridors as 1997 plan plus east of the river line
- “Premium transit” network combining streetcar with rapid bus
- Multiple modes evaluated, streetcar deemed local choice
Then there was ANOTHER plan

- 2010 DC Transit Future System Plan
- Familiar corridors
- Clear determination of mode (streetcar)
- Phasing strategy
- Specific alignments

Enough for action
All told, over 15 years of planning (actually more!)

QuickTime™ and a TIFF (LZW) decompressor are needed to see this picture.
Meanwhile, a demonstration line was advancing

- Utilized dormant CSX right of way (Shepherd spur)
- Intent was to reintroduce DC public to modern streetcars
- Minimal affect on travelways meant could move more quickly
- Addressing blighted rail corridor pleased residents
......and vehicles purchased

- Very long lead items
- 3 vehicles - $10M
- Bought 2005
- Delivery 2008
Then there was a complication

- CSX Shepherd Spur became infeasible (cost and ownership issues)
- Alternative was floated to run streetcar in parallel main street
- Significant community concern ensued (and still some support!)
- Demonstration line was ultimately shortened to less than 1 mile
...meanwhile, in another part of town...

- Community clamored for streetcar concurrent with scheduled streetscape
- Heavily used bus line could use relief
- H Street NE line had been on all early plans - no question about alignment
....and the reality of timing was pressing other areas

- Projects critical to roadway network needs, safety/ADA improvements or scheduled for asset preservation had to proceed
  - 11th Street Bridges
  - K Street NW
  - Benning Road NE
  - Firth Sterling Avenue SE
The decision to act locally

- Bold Director(s)
- Available local resources
- Mayoral (political) support
- Willing Federal partners (sort of)
- Community desire and advocacy
- Substantial construction efficiencies
- .....and a fair amount of naiveté
What it got us

• Tracks in the ground - momentum
• Generally excited public and developers
• Rich information on how (and how not) to do modern streetcar in DC
• Economic revitalization and TOD
• Cost efficiency and single period of construction impact
What it didn’t get us (or also got us)

- No operable line segment (yet) and “mothballed” streetcars
- Two disconnected lines that must be individually operated for the time being
- A contentious struggle with the Federal planning agency over over-head lines
- The deletion of tracks from the current 11th Street Bridge project
- Some rough relations with federal partners
Where DC is now

- Still must complete environmental documents
- Must demonstrate no prejudice in mode choice or alignments
- Challenged to finish the network and get operable lines quickly
- Many public and developer questions (but also much support)
Would I recommend it again?

A highly qualified YES

- Planning is never done, but at some point you must act
- Development continues to happen, and is planned years ahead
- The public (and financing) cannot wait 10, 12, or 20 years
- You need to know, and accept, the consequences

But the next generation of projects must address:
- Are quicker outcomes possible without sacrificing good planning and analysis?
- Where should federal partners exercise more flexibility?
- Should localities be encouraged/rewarded for taking the leap?
THANK YOU!