

Comments on UDC 2021-35

Nicholas Smith

Dear Members of the Urban Design Committee and City Planning Commission,

In regards to the new temporary GRTC Transfer Plaza, **I'm writing to oppose any fencing other than existing fencing** on Clay and 9th Streets, where the slope makes access moderately dangerous. In particular, **there should be no fencing in between the transfer plaza and the employee parking lot**, and none of the fencing should be chain link, as the staff report and Richmond 300 Objective 8.4.j recommends.

It is important that pedestrians, the users of this transfer plaza, have direct walking access to the local area of the central business district. Much of that area is to the southeast of the transfer plaza: the John Marshall Courts Building, City Hall, the VCU Health hospital, the Capitol and other parts of downtown. **Access to the southeast is the most important direction from the transfer plaza. And yet that direction is the hardest to access in the proposed plans due to the fence between the plaza and the employee parking lot.**

The project narrative states "Fencing is proposed along the curb between the parking portion of the lot and the transfer center at the request of DPW Parking Services to prevent bus patron access to the parking lot." Note that GRTC is not making this request, as there is no operational reason for them to do so, and it is a detriment to their customers to install this fencing, not to mention a cost for construction. **Hundreds of people will walk between the plaza and the area southeast of the plaza seven days a week, morning, evening and night; 34 people will park their cars in parking lot, likely 8-5 weekdays. The benefits of the former far outweigh any harms to the latter.**

And nothing in the project description identifies any harms to the people parking if the fence is not constructed. Nearly all parking lots and structures downtown and region-wide are open to the public to walk through. This includes the city-owned deck one block west and various other city and state decks, as well as private ones, regardless of whether the public can park in those areas. There is generally no security, fencing or other measures preventing pedestrian access to those lots and decks by the public. Pedestrians walk through these all the time to make shorter trips to their destinations, often crossing diagonally, even when the public cannot park there.

I'm not aware of any epidemic of property damage to cars or safety issues with cars owners in lots, especially in ones that will have many people nearby (at the transfer plaza) night and day to able to act as good samaritans and witnesses. **This means this should be one of the safest lots in downtown. And this fence wouldn't even block off access to the lot, as it's open from Clay St.!** Since DPW Parking Services specifically says this is to "prevent bus patron access", it is hard not to conclude that they think bus riders are more likely to engage in criminal acts than others. I'm sure that's not the case and there's some other explanation that isn't based on harmful stereotypes we've heard for years from areas outside the city in which people say pedestrian infrastructure and transit bring crime.

Since there are no harms identified to not building the fence and significant harms caused by building it, **UDC and CPC should approve the plans on condition that no fence be built separating the parking lot and the transfer plaza.** Hypothetical, unarticulated, occasional harms based on stereotypes should not trump good design that benefits hundreds if not thousands of people a day.

Thank you.