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Earlier east-side gate opening hours for the National Zoo

Resolved, that ANC1D advises the National Zoo that an 8 AM opening time for the gates on the east edge of the Zoo will impose a substantial hardship on residents east of the Zoo, especially bicycle commuters, walkers, and joggers, and asks that the gates be opened at 6 AM.

Why: Public policy in the District of Columbia is to promote bicycle commuting, to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution, and to promote public health. The Zoo is a crucial link in an important bicycling route to downtown DC, the Rock Creek Park Bicycle Path. Residents of the neighborhoods east of the Zoo pass through the Zoo gates to reach the bike path. Bicyclists on the path use the path to get around the Beach Drive Tunnel, avoiding the very unsafe sidewalk in the tunnel. If the gates into the Zoo, and to the Tunnel bypass, are closed until 8 AM, then many morning commuters will be forced to take routes that risk collisions and injury.

Concerning the Harvard Street gate, when that gate is closed, bicyclists attempting to access the RCP bike path must attempt to run across Beach Drive, across rush-hour traffic. The hazardousness of that run was demonstrated some years ago when the overpass was closed for repairs, and at least one person attempting to run across Beach Drive was struck and injured by a car.

Concerning the Tunnel bypass path, the sidewalk through the tunnel is far too narrow for safety. The slightest brush against the wall of the tunnel, or an encounter with an object on that sidewalk, may cause a bicyclist to crash into Beach Drive, right into the path of the heavy morning traffic.

Zoo Director Dennis Kelly is quoted (Northwest Current, December 9, 2015) as saying “*you don’t compromise on safety*”. But opening the east-side Zoo gates only at 8 AM does exactly that, for bicyclists attempting their morning commutes.

ANC1D recognizes that the Zoo staff have difficulties with walkers and joggers passing through the Zoo during the morning working hours. But bicyclists east of the Park using the Zoo for commuting are not passing through the exhibit areas, but are merely skirting the edge of the Zoo as they make their ways towards downtown. Surely the east-side gates can be opened at 6 AM to promote bicycle commuting with safety, with minimal impact on Zoo personnel doing their morning jobs.

Many motorists also use the route through the Zoo, from Harvard Street to Beach Drive, for access to Beach Drive and Rock Creek Parkway. Again, such use affects only this easternmost fringe of the Zoo, and causes no conflicts among the animal exhibits.

Passed by 5 to 0 vote at the legally noticed, public meeting of ANC1D on December 15, 2015, with a quorum present. Voting “yes”: Commissioners Agbro, Griffiths, Rivas, McKay, Hoey. A quorum for this commission is three; five commissioners were present.