

# CITY OF ALEXANDRIA - ANNUAL REPORT 1997

## MAJOR ISSUES

### Transportation

The coming year will present Alexandria with several challenging transportation issues, many of which will have long-lasting impacts on the City's transportation system – and on its quality of life. The list of issues includes the Woodrow Wilson Bridge replacement project and possible changes in Metrobus' route structure and cost sharing.

#### Woodrow Wilson Bridge

After more than three years of studying and debating various proposals to improve this aging Capital Beltway bridge over the Potomac River, the 13-member Woodrow Wilson Bridge Improvement Study Coordinating Committee voted in September 1996 to endorse a 12-lane drawbridge. The proposed bridge includes HOV lanes and separated lanes for local and express traffic. The 12-lane span would be 244 feet wide, cost \$1.6 billion to build, impose tolls on bridge users, and require an expansive interchange at U.S. Rt. 1 that could seriously impact nearby neighborhoods.

City Council supports a 10-lane bridge similar to the 10-lane American Legion Bridge on the north side of the Capital Beltway and has urged the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to begin planning for a second Potomac River crossing 10-15 miles south of the Beltway. With eight through lanes to match the eight lanes of the Beltway, plus two lanes for traffic entering the bridge from Route 1 in Virginia and Interstate 295 in Maryland, the 10-lane bridge will remove rush hour traffic backups and satisfy future traffic demands without imposing tolls on bridge users (City Council's 14-point position is posted on the City's Internet Web site: <http://alexandriava.gov>). At a hearing held by Virginia Senator John Warner's Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee in June, Mayor Donley and representatives of Alexandria civic groups urged congressional support for a 10-lane replacement bridge.

September, a House committee proposed that the federal government give the Wilson Bridge to Maryland, Virginia, and the District, and require the bridge to compete with other "high cost" highway projects for funding from a \$1.87 billion fund.

### Bus Transportation

Alexandria is participating in a study mandated by Congress and commissioned by Metro to determine the future of bus service in the region. The Metro Board, which includes Council Member Walker, established a 28-member Regional Mobility Panel to evaluate the current and future regional bus transportation needs and develop a plan for meeting those needs in the most cost-effective and efficient manner. The Mobility Panel includes Mayor Donley and other local elected officials from the region, state transportation officials, business and labor leaders and citizen representatives.

In recent years, Alexandria and other Northern Virginia jurisdictions have worked with Metro to reduce the rate of growth in transit expenditures. Alexandria's share of Metrobus costs currently totals \$20.5 million in annual operating subsidies and capital costs. While remaining committed to a cost-effective and efficient regional transit system, the City and other Northern Virginia jurisdictions have expressed dissatisfaction with the current formula for allocating the cost of Metrobus subsidies. As this 1975 formula applies today, Virginia jurisdictions receive 23% of Metrobus service, yet pay for 27.3% of service costs. A Northern Virginia Caucus, chaired by Mayor Donley and representing the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax City and Falls Church, and the counties of Arlington and Fairfax, has put forward a plan to accelerate the phase in of a new cost allocation formula, which would result in significant cost savings to the City. In addition, Metro's General Manager Richard White has proposed a plan to hold bus fares constant for five years with no increase in local subsidy payments and no layoffs of

In July, City officials raised objections to including the 12-lane bridge project in the regional Transportation Planning Board's long range plan, pointing out that air quality analyses covered only a 10-lane bridge. The TPB's plan was approved despite the City's concerns.

City officials estimate that a 10-lane replacement bridge can be built for less than \$1 billion, and have urged congressional leaders to provide such funding for a scaled-down project, not just for the sake of Alexandria's impacted neighborhoods, but for the sake of sensible, cost-effective transportation throughout our region.

City officials have raised the possibility of mounting a court challenge to the 12-lane bridge unless the project is scaled back to reduce its impacts on Alexandria. The FHWA is preparing a final environmental impact statement and a memorandum of agreement related to the project's impact on historic sites and is scheduled to issue its Record of Decision in October. In early

Metro's unionized operating employees.



*The long-awaited Eisenhower Avenue Connector Interchange opened in August, providing direct traffic access from the beltway to the Eisenhower Avenue development corridor.*



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