



**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
301 King Street, Room 4100
Alexandria, Virginia 22314**

December 20, 2013

Dear King Street Residents,

I want to thank you all for your participation and patience throughout the King Street Bicycle Lanes and Pedestrian Improvement project. As you know, King Street between Janney's Lane and Callahan Drive was resurfaced in October 2013. As with all road resurfacing projects, I am required to follow the City Council adopted Complete Streets Policy which states, "*if safety and convenience of users can be improved within the scope of pavement resurfacing operations, such projects shall implement Complete Streets infrastructure to increase safety for users.*"

With projects of this type, there are always issues of balancing the needs of all street users. In order to ensure that I had a complete understanding of all the issues related to the implementation of this type of project, extensive public outreach was conducted. The time, effort and input of the residents was essential in the development and refinement of a plan. This outreach included three community meetings, four Commission meetings, over 200 testimonials, and a public hearing at the Traffic and Parking Board, which provided ample opportunities for community input on this project. As a result of this process, significant modifications and improvements to the plan were made that I believe will improve the safety for all users on King Street.

The goals of the King Street project, as supported by the Complete Streets Policy, are to:

- Provide facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers
- Improve the safety and convenience of all street users
- Implement City Council adopted plans and policies

Project Description: The King Street improvements aim to reduce vehicle speeds by narrowing the travel lanes and installing a variable speed sign, which have been shown to reduce speeds and make the roadway safer for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. The added bicycle lanes provide designated space for cyclists and encourage them to ride in the roadway instead of on the narrow sidewalk, making it safer for pedestrians by reducing conflicts. The bicycle lanes also provide a safe location for cyclists riding up the hill, who may be traveling as slowly as 5 miles per hour (mph). These lanes create a buffer for pedestrians along the south sidewalk, which currently abuts the travel lane, and provides unobstructed visibility for residents on the north side as they enter and exit their driveways.

Public Meetings: Following an introduction of the project to the Taylor Run Civic Association on June 12, 2013, a public meeting with substantial community turnout was held on September 18, 2013. At that meeting, the City proposed installing bicycle lanes on both sides of King Street between West Cedar Street and Janney's Lane by removing the on-street parking. The intent of this proposal was to leverage the road resurfacing project and redesign the roadway consistent with the City's Complete Streets Policy. I received and reviewed a number of comments during and after this meeting, including concerns about loss of parking, excessive speeds, provision for loading and drop-off and concerns about visibility backing out of driveways. In response to this input, my staff revised the plan to address as many of these concerns as practical and collected additional data, including volumes, speeds and crash data.

I reviewed all of the data collected which includes:

- Parking utilization surveys, which were conducted during AM and PM weekday peak hours and off-peak hours on both weekdays and weekends. On average, less than three vehicles were parked along this roadway. The highest occupancy observed was six vehicles. More than half of all parked vehicles were located west of Highland Place.
- Crash analyses was reviewed and categorized by mode, time of day and season. There was one crash involving a pedestrian over a five-year period and none reported involving bicyclists.
- Speed surveys showing that 85th percentile speeds were as high as 34 mph in the eastbound direction and were 33 mph in the westbound direction. The posted speed limit is 25 mph.
- Vehicle volume counts that were used to evaluate the feasibility of the proposed plan and averaged nearly 12,750 per day.
- Bicycle volume counts to determine the use of this roadway prior to the installation of safe, designated bicycle facilities and averaged 12 during the PM peak period.

The volume of vehicular traffic, large vehicles and associated travel speeds continue to support the need for infrastructure that accommodates cyclists by providing them adequate facilities.

A modified plan was then presented at a second public meeting on October 30, 2013, and to the Traffic and Parking Board on November 25, 2013. This plan focused on the safety concerns that were voiced in response to the first proposal. New elements to provide a safer street were incorporated including a wider westbound bike lane and a variable speed sign. Ten parking spaces were maintained at the top of the hill, between Highland Place and Janney's Lane, where cyclists can more safely share the road with moving vehicles and parking surveys revealed the highest parking utilization. While a continuous bike lane from West Cedar Street to Janney's Lane accomplishes this goal as the original plan depicted, the modified plan also accomplishes the project goals while better balancing the needs of the community. The core safety need as related to the cyclists as a mode of travel is accommodation along the King Street hill between West Cedar Street and Highland Place.

Public Hearing: At the Traffic and Parking Board's public hearing on November 25, 2013, the modified plan was presented so that the Board could provide me with a recommendation regarding the parking removal associated with this project. There were 66 speakers, 48 for the proposal and 18 against. The central theme that I heard voiced by both sides was the need for a

safer street. Those that did not support the project generally spoke about improving safety, the loss of the parking lane which currently provides space for loading, drop-off and visitor parking. Project proponents generally spoke in favor of designing the street more safely for cyclists and pedestrians and correcting a critical “missing link” in the City’s bicycle network that provides access to the King Street Metrorail station, a major transportation hub that provides regional connections throughout the Metro area as well as other destinations including T.C. Williams High School. As the design of this project pertains to the safety of roadway users, the process does not include a recommendation or approval for action by the Alexandria City Council.

Additionally, in order to gain broad input, both the original and modified plans were presented to the Transportation Commission, Environmental Policy Commission, Park and Recreation Commission and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. These bodies, that each represent Alexandria through the purview of their expertise, all submitted letters of support for this project stating that the project met the goals and objectives adopted by the City through numerous plans.

The process has affirmed that the modified plan is consistent with numerous master plans and adopted policies endorsed by City Council as listed below:

- City Council Goal #3: *A multimodal transportation network that supports sustainable land use and provides internal mobility and regional connectivity for Alexandrians*
- Transportation Master Plan: *Implement a citywide bikeway network to serve all users and trip types, provide end-of-trip facilities, improve bicycle/transit integration, implement encouragement programs and improve safety*
- Eco-City Alexandria: *We see Alexandria as a city where social well-being is supported by a strong economy and sustained by a healthy environment. Specifically, we envision Alexandria as a city where we travel less and less by car and increasingly by mass transit, walking, and bicycling*
- Complete Streets Policy: *Alexandria shall incorporate Complete Streets infrastructure into existing public streets to improve the safety and convenience of users and construct and enhance the transportation network for all users*

It should be noted that the Complete Streets Policy allows for exceptions to comprehensive design, such as excessive cost or that the use of the roadway by bicyclists or pedestrians is prohibited by law, neither of which apply in this case.

To ensure that my staff was not overlooking any safety or design factors, I directed that the plan be peer-reviewed by a professional engineering firm as well as a Complete Streets expert from the National Complete Streets Coalition. The plan as designed, even with a variation in the roadway of plus or minus a foot, meets or exceeds the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) design guidelines pertaining to travel and bicycle lane widths and provides pedestrian accommodations recommended for this street type.

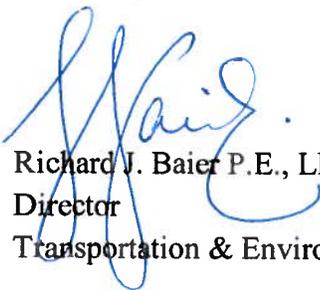
As part of the process, the Traffic and Parking Board was faced with a very difficult task and had to balance many passionate opinions and testimonials. At their November 25, 2013 meeting, the Board ultimately recommended to defer the project in order to achieve greater compromise with the various interests of the community.

This has been a challenging and complicated project, and I am empathetic to the inconvenience that the loss of parking will create for residents who currently have street parking available in front of their homes. I am also empathetic to the pedestrians and bicyclists that use this corridor on a daily basis. I have taken every comment and concern under consideration. I walked, drove and rode my own bike up and down King Street to make sure that I experienced the roadway from the perspective of all street users. It was this experience that affirmed my belief that it is imperative to implement a plan that improves the safety concerns highlighted as part of this project.

As a professional engineer tasked with ensuring the safety for all users of our street system and after reviewing the data and researching alternative proposals, I believe that the modified plan is the best plan to achieve the common goals of improving safety and balancing the needs of multiple users of King Street. I reached this conclusion after much thought and analysis, taking into account the comments and concerns raised by the community.

A delay of this decision to further study and discussion is not recommended. I do, however, believe that the City and the community can, and should, continue to evaluate additional measures to improve pedestrian safety throughout adjacent neighborhoods, and my staff will work with them to do so this spring. We will be seeking input from the Rosemont and Taylor Run Civic Associations. **At this time, I have directed my staff to move forward with this the implementation of the modified plan for the King Street Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements in the new year.**

Sincerely,



Richard J. Baier P.E., LEED AP
Director
Transportation & Environmental Services

Cc: The City Manager's Office
Mayor and Honorable City Council
Transportation Commission
Environmental Policy Commission
Park and Recreation Commission
Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
Alexandria Traffic and Parking Board