

# City of Alexandria, Virginia

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## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** MAY 21, 2014

**TO:** MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

**FROM:** SANDRA MARKS, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

**SUBJECT:** AGENDA ITEM #6 – WEST END TRANSITWAY (CORRIDOR C)  
ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS/ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT UPDATE

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**ISSUE:** Update on the West End Transitway (Corridor C) Alternatives Analysis/Environmental Assessment (AA/EA)

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Transportation Commission:

1. Receive an update on the West End Transitway AA/EA
2. Appoint a member of the Transportation Commission to serve on the West End Transitway AA/EA Policy Advisory Group (PAG)

**BACKGROUND:** The City's Transportation Master Plan, adopted by Council in 2008, identified three priority corridors that would offer high-quality, high capacity, and reliable transit service within the City. These three corridors (Route 1, Duke Street, and Van Dorn/Beauregard) connect existing and future development areas that have high densities of residential land use, major activity and employment centers, and connectivity to regional transit including the City's existing and future Metrorail stations.

In 2010, the City began the Transitway Corridors Feasibility Study. As part of the study, a High Capacity Transit Corridor Work Group (CWG) was formed to provide input on issues such as route alignment, cross-sections, method of operation, vehicle type, land use, ridership, and financial implications for all three corridors.

The project team conducted an analysis of existing conditions, needs and alternatives, and presented these to the CWG. For the Van Dorn/Beauregard corridor, an initial set of seven alternatives was screened and four alternatives were carried forward for a more in-depth evaluation. Based on this analysis, the CWG made the following recommendation for the corridor on May 19, 2011:

*“Alternative D (Bus Rapid Transit in dedicated lanes between Pentagon and Van Dorn Metro) is the preferred alternative for phased implementation of transit in dedicated lanes in Corridor C (Beauregard/Van Dorn) until such time as Alternative G (Streetcar*

*in dedicated lanes between Pentagon and Van Dorn Metro, via Columbia Pike) becomes feasible and can be implemented.” (Attachment 2)*

City Council held a public hearing on September 17, 2011. Following the public hearing, the City Council adopted the recommendation of the CWG, with the addition that staff optimize the alignment to better serve the Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC).

**DISCUSSION:** In December 2013, the City kicked off an Alternatives Analysis (AA) and Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze and refine the alignment as defined by the CWG and City Council, and to identify any impacts and potential mitigation associated with the recommended alternative. The study is partially funded by a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and is the first step towards applying for a federal Small Starts grant for project design and construction.

The AA will evaluate three alternatives developed with input from FTA:

- (1) The No Build Alternative includes the existing and planned transportation network
- (2) The Transportation Systems Management (TSM) Alternative includes system improvements such as transit-signal priority, but stops short of a major capital investment such as dedicated lanes
- (3) The Build Alternative includes dedicated transit lanes along most of the corridor between the Van Dorn Metrorail Station and the Pentagon as described above

At the outset of the AA, the project team will focus on defining a Build Alternative. This requires additional analysis to resolve specific issues related to the project alignment and cross section, including:

- Optimizing service to the NVCC, particularly in light of the recent Campus Master Plan;
- Balancing stop spacing along the corridor to best serve existing and planned development while at the same time keeping the “rapid” in “bus rapid transit;”
- Refining access to Landmark Mall based on recent development plans; and
- Determining the initial curb-to-curb cross section required to achieve dedicated lanes along Van Dorn Street.

The project team is currently working to document existing conditions and draft the Purpose and Need statement for the project. This statement is the basis of the evaluation measures which will be used to compare the alternatives and is therefore a key part of the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). The assessment of existing conditions and trends has identified three broad issues within the corridor:

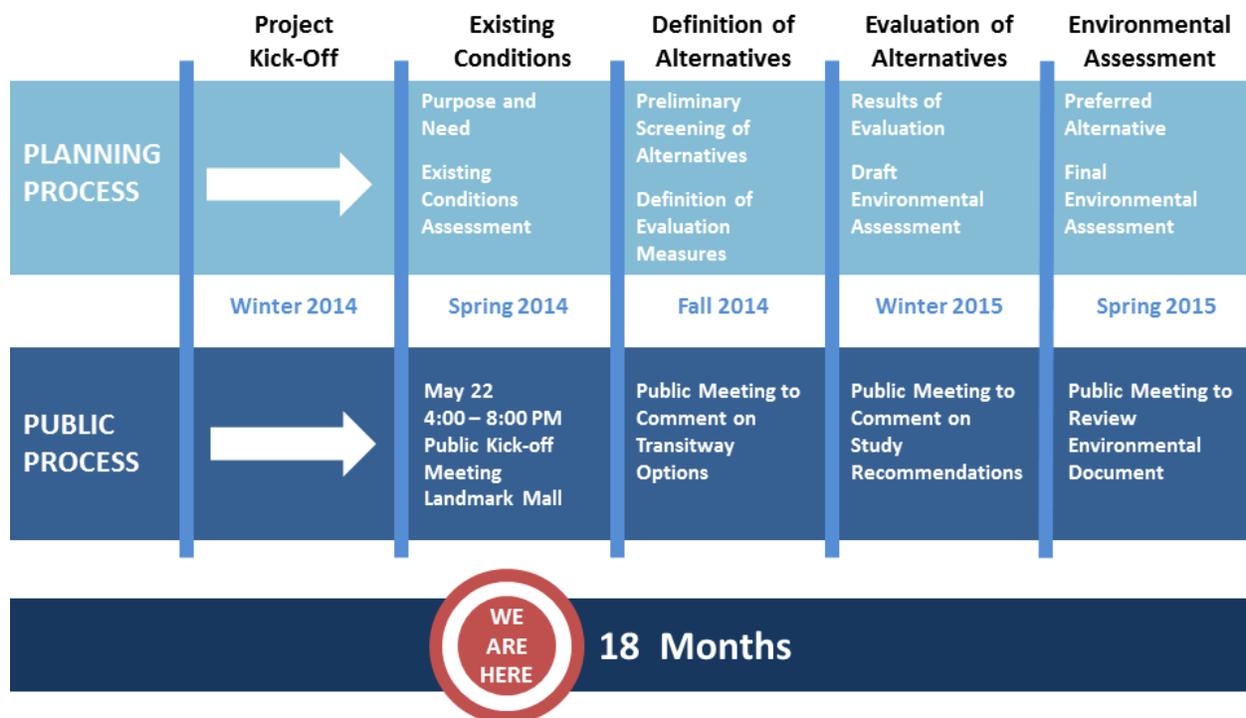
- **Land Use and Economic Development**, specifically the anticipated increases in population and employment over the next 25 years and the inadequacy of existing transportation and transit infrastructure to support anticipated travel demand.
- **Traffic Congestion**, which currently results in auto and transit service delays in the corridor and is expected to increase in the future.
- **Transit Service**, which does not adequately serve current travel demand due to its fragmented nature.

Figure 1 illustrates the 18-month timeline for the AA/EA and shows how the public process aligns with the planning process. In addition to public meetings, public input will be sought at specific points in the process through both active and passive engagement opportunities, including public workshops, community briefings, pop-up meetings, and use of social media. The first public meeting will be held on May 22, 2014 at Landmark Mall from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. and will include an open house format.

In addition to the public outreach activities described above, the PAG will be comprised of various corridor stakeholders and will provide input on key deliverables and project recommendations related to the West End Transitway AA/EA. The first PAG meeting will be held in early June. PAG members will be updated on project activities to date (including the results of the public meeting) and will be asked to provide input on the proposed Purpose and Need.

**Figure 1: AA/EA Timeline**

**West End Transitway Project:  
Timeline for Alternatives Analysis and Environmental Assessment**



The results of the AA will provide information to local officials on the benefits, costs, and impacts of each alternative so that a LPA can be identified. The AA process will also identify local funding sources for implementation and operation. The work completed during the AA will support the City’s potential application for federal Small Starts competitive grant funding and will also provide baseline information for the completion of the environmental review process and preliminary engineering.

The EA (which follows the AA if the AA does not select a No Build Alternative) will evaluate potential transportation, socio-economic and environmental effects, focused directly on issues concerning the public, the FTA, and state and local agencies. The EA will analyze construction impacts as well as longer-term effects resulting from the project, and will identify mitigation measures as appropriate. If the project receives a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) following completion of the EA, the project will be eligible for federal funding.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The AA/EA is being funded through federal grants. The support provided by staff will be conducted within the allocated operational budgets for each department, and the support provided by consultants has been assumed in their contract.