

BRAC-133 Advisory Group Meeting
March 16, 2011
Summary Meeting Minutes

1. 7:00PM meeting called to order.
2. Roll was called. Members present included Jim Turkel, Jerry Dawson, Donna Fossum, Kathy Burns, Rick Tedesco, Gerry Chiaruttini, Don Buch, Paul McMahon, John Komoroske, Jerry Dawson, Geoffrey Goodale, Julie Edelson, Mark Benedict, Ron Sturman, Dick Somers, Peter Carson, David Dexter, Nancy Jennings, and Stephanie Landrum. Staff present included Rich Baier, Abi Lerner, Jeff Farner, Adam Thiel, City Manager James Hartmann, and David Grover. Tom Fahrney of VDOT, Mike Snare and Keisha Voigt of the VaMegaProjects were there to present. Councilwoman Del Pepper, Mayor Euille, Councilwoman Hughes, Councilman Smedberg, Councilman Krupicka and Vice-Mayor Kerry Donley were in attendance. Also present were Delegate Herring, Gwenn Sigda of Senator Webb's office and Sharon Annear of Councilwoman Hughes office.
3. Chairman Dexter advised the Advisory Group and those present of the meeting agenda and ground rules for the orderly conduct of the meeting. He also stated that the minutes from the February meeting would be dealt with at the April meeting.
4. Abi Lerner, Deputy Director of Alexandria TES provided a short presentation on the background of the HOV/Transit Ramp project, speaking about the previous development and assessment of alternatives for access to the BRAC facility at the Mark Center over the past 18-24 months. He gave a brief description the full operational analysis done by VDOT which resulted in seven alternatives, the two recommendations that came out of that analysis, and their subsequent rejection. Alternatives F and G were then developed, with Alternative F being the HOV-Transit Ramp now being analyzed. Mr. Lerner explained that the need is for the short, mid- and long-term improvements as a part of a system that also includes other transit improvements.
5. Tom Fahrney, VDOT's BRAC Coordinator began his presentation on the development of Alternative "F", and the development of funding for this project. Mr. Fahrney explained that all of the questions received via email by the City were forwarded to the VDOT team and many responses were incorporated into his presentation. He went on to say that Alternative "F" is the same alternative endorsed by both the BRAC-133 Advisory Group and City Council. It is an HOV/Transit Ramp that is a transit infrastructure improvement. Unlike Alternative "G", "F" does not require reconstruction of the second tier rotary at the Seminary Road interchange; "F" has a shorter completion schedule; and, can take place entirely within the existing limited access right-of-way. Mr. Fahrney said the HOV/Transit Ramp would help DoD achieve the 40% reduction in single occupancy vehicles (SOV) going to the BRAC-133 facility. He went on to explain that the \$80

million is available exclusively for the HOV/Transit Ramp project, and cannot be used for other projects or transit due to the source of the funds. He then described the study area as being to the next interchanges east and west and including two intersections on either side of the interstate.

Mr. Fahrney introduced Mike Snare and Keisha Voigt of the VaMegaProjects general engineering consultant firm. Keisha Voigt provided an informational presentation on the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) environmental documentation process, particularly the Categorical Exclusion, used for this type of project. With transportation projects involving federal monies, FHWA is the lead agency for NEPA. The hallmark of NEPA is public involvement, which can happen at one of three levels: Categorical Exclusion, Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Statement. FHWA makes the determination as to which is appropriate. Ms. Voigt described the importance of the purpose and needs statement, and the components for this project as:

- To enhance transportation access for BRAC-133 at the Mark Center;
- Reduce congestion on I-395;
- Reduce congestion at local intersections and on the Seminary Road interchange; and,
- Enhance transit and HOV

Ms. Voigt emphasized the differences in the CE and EA processes as being primarily the additional time an EA takes due to the public hearing process and agency review by FHWA, and went on to list the primary differences, first for a CE as:

- No significant environmental impacts anticipated (based on preliminary review)
- Does not require consideration of alternatives
- If any relocation is involved, it is minimal
- Requires technical studies at the same level as an EA
- Can use the City's public information process
- Generally takes 6-8 months

For the EA:

- Significance of environmental impacts are unclear after preliminary review
- A reasonable number of alternatives are required to be considered
- Requires the same technical studies as a CE
- Involves a higher level of more formal public involvement
- Generally takes 12-14 months

Ms. Voigt also listed some of the resource areas the NEPA process requires be considered as: Land use, Air Quality, Noise, Farmland, Coastal Resources, Recreation, Wetlands, RPA's, Hazardous/Toxic materials, and Aesthetic/Visual Impacts.

Tom Fahrney then reviewed the probable schedule for the project with a CE as follows:

- Studies would be done by the end of 2011
- NEPA work done early in 2012
- Preliminary design completed at the end of 2012
- Design/Build construction completed at the end of 2014

6. Chairman Dexter then opened up the meeting for questions from the members of the Advisory Group.

Don Buch began his comments by stating that he would like to step back for a minute and look at the bigger picture. Everything we have heard to this point is about transit. For several years we have repeatedly heard that “transit”, meaning, to most people, high capacity commercial transit, not HOV-3 automobiles, is the only practical, viable salvation for the West End of Alexandria. There is a litany of support for this – from the City’s Master Transportation Plan to the City establishing a “High Capacity Transit Corridor Working Group” to presentations we’ve heard from the likes of urban experts telling us that transit is the solution. Vice Mayor Donley has been pushing the “Add on Tax” so we can compete with transit systems of other jurisdictions. Yet again, the issue is public transit, or lack thereof. Now we are at cardiac arrest at Seminary Road and Beauregard. The City’s High Capacity Transit Corridor Group appears to be narrowing its focus on the West End transit options to three, the respective capital costs of which are estimated to be \$55 million, \$67 million and \$185 million. If we have a “solution” that might be had for \$55-67 million, why would anyone support the ramp Band Aid for \$80 million? Not to mention that extensive new development/redevelopment is planned for this corridor and a new ramp will only draw ever more vehicles to intersections your Department has already projected will be operating at levels “E” and “F”. It has been suggested that the \$80 million can only be used for roads and if we don’t spend it quickly someone may revoke the offer. Can you accept that, to a layman – a layman who has consistently heard that transit is the answer to our challenges – that makes no sense whatsoever! If all the “brains” are saying transit is the answer, why is our City Council then voting for a CE so we don’t even look at any alternatives?

Abi Lerner stated that this ramp is a part of a system of measures that will work together to respond to the problems.

Tom Fahrney responded that the \$80 million is interstate funding and therefore only available for road improvement projects on interstate roadways.

Rich Baier stated that Alternative “F” is the only alternative endorsed by the BRAC-133 Advisory Group and City Council after consideration of numerous other alternatives, all of which had been rejected for various reasons.

Kathy Burns spoke next saying that the BRAC-133 Advisory Group had not been asked for an opinion prior to the City Council vote to endorse Alternative “F” and the CE. She suggested that the Advisory Group should vote now and go on record. Ms. Burns also said we should be looking at the viability of the BRAC project in light of the other development being planned in the area and look for regional solutions.

Tom Fahrney said they are not studying the viability of BRAC at the Mark Center. The BRAC facility is something that exists and will open come September 2011. We are looking for a solution to the conditions that exist. We have \$80 million and we believe we can build this ramp for that amount of money.

Mike Snare stated that the preliminary results of the General Engineering Contractor analysis of Alternative “F” should be available in June or July of 2011.

Dick Somers then read his statement into the record as follows:

"For the record and for documentation in the minutes, here are the questions and comments I raised/made at last evening's (3/16) Advisory Group meeting:

First question and related statements:

Does VDOT have the authority to limit all am westbound and pm eastbound (Alternative F) ramp traffic to Mark Center via the intersection of Mark Center Drive and Seminary Road? This limitation would preclude potentially compounding the already congested rush hour traffic at Seminary and Beauregard as well as Seminary Road west to Skyline.

As the Seminary Park Community Association representative on the Advisory Group, I hereby go on record that Seminary Park, joined by the Seminary Heights Condominium Association; firmly oppose any VDOT alternative F design that will permit traffic to/from the new ramp to flow past Mark Center to and beyond the Seminary Beauregard intersection. I also asked that any and all Advisory Group members that support the Seminary Park/ Seminary Heights position to go on record with their agreement. (NOTE for the record - there was insufficient time at the end of the meeting to pursue the above request for support of other Advisory Group members.)

Additionally, Seminary Park, joined by Seminary Heights go on record supporting the Moran, Webb, Warner call to the Army to delay full occupancy of the BRAC-133 facility until this long-term transportation solution is completed and, again, asked, for support of other Advisory Group members.

- The additional question:

What are the forecast AM and PM rush hour levels of service for the following intersections at each of the milestones cited below: (I stated that no immediate answer from T&ES was expected but that as traffic analyses related to milestones cited below become available responses should be provided.)

What are the forecasted AM and PM rush hour levels of service for the following intersections at each of the milestones cited below?

The intersections:

- Beauregard and Mark Center Drive
- Beauregard and Seminary
- Seminary and Mark Center Drive
- Seminary and NB entrance to 395
- Seminary and NB exit from 395
- Seminary and SB exit from 395

These happen to be the same intersections cited in Section 2704 of the Defense Authorization Act.

The milestones:

- Completion this year of the "triple turn" modifications now under construction.
- Completion of currently planned and Council-endorsed "near-term" improvements.
- Completion of currently planned and Council-endorsed "mid-term" improvements
- Completion of VDOT-proposed and Council-supported "long-term" "alternative F"

Tom Fahrney responded by saying that Seminary Road is a City street and VDOT maintenance responsibilities end at Mark Center Drive. VDOT cannot restrict traffic from entering the Seminary/Beauregard intersection, and cannot generally restrict the movements of traffic on City Streets.

Mr. Somers reiterated his position of opposition to any ramp that allows increased traffic to flow into or past the Seminary/Beauregard intersection.

Mr. Fahrney said that the level of service for those intersections is shown in the short and mid-term analyses. Abi Lerner noted that the information for all of these intersections is currently available in the analysis conducted by VDOT.

Don Buch said that again, from a layman's perspective, it appears that the entire thing hinges on Beauregard and Seminary where it does not function now. It is hard for a layman to understand how dumping additional traffic from the ramp will make that better. Also, has

anyone taken into account the IDA second building, 1.8 million square foot redevelopment of the Plaza at Landmark, the Landmark Mall redevelopment and JBG development get taken into account?

Tom Fahrney stated that the anticipated effect of the ramp is to reduce traffic at those local intersections, and that the purpose of the analysis currently underway is to determine if that will be the result. We are required to use the most current COG land use data, not speculation of development.

Dick Somers said I know that you don't agree the ramp connecting to Seminary Road will increase traffic onto Seminary Road, but we are on the record as being opposed to this ramp.

Ron Sturman asked if these improvements are designed to reduce vehicles, would the Army be willing to reduce the number of parking spaces accordingly.

Paul McMahon said the answer is no, they wouldn't be willing to do that. The Army has already made accommodations beyond what other businesses do in terms of SOV reduction efforts.

Donna Fossum said this ramp will be available not only to BRAC personnel, but also to everyone else on the HOV lanes. Has anyone considered closing the ramp during no-HOV hours?

Tom Fahrney replied that operations are something they will look at as a part of the analysis.

Geoff Goodale asked for three points for clarification:

- Has VDOT submitted the CE request to FHWA, and if so when do they expect a reply?
- What alternatives would be considered if the EA process were to be invoked? Could transit alternatives be examined?
- I understand that City council recommended that VDOT consider no right turn option. Is that VDOT's understanding?

Tom Fahrney replied that the CE request was submitted on Monday (3/14/2011). It takes approximately one to two weeks for FHWA to make a determination. The funds are exclusively for this ramp. VDOT has agreed to study a "no right turn" option.

Julie Edelson asked if the intent is to have the studies going on in June and July, would they please be sure to collect data while schools are in session.

Nancy Jennings said Seminary Hill sees this as a funnel also, and has opposed a ramp at this interchange for many years and have previously had City support for that position in 2002 and 2009. She asked what could determine that this ramp is not worth building.

Tom Fahrney replied that the current study is being done to make that determination. But based on what we know now, this ramp is one of the solutions to address the traffic issues generated by BRAC.

Kathy Burns asked why the Army could not simply mandate carpools and charge fees for parking.

Jim Turkel said they are limiting the parking to 60% of the building occupancy. The Army is doing a lot to help solve the problems by producing an aggressive TMP and participating in mitigation measures at all levels. We are concerned about our employees as well as the community being able to access this area.

Kathy Burns said in comparing BRAC with other businesses, they aren't the ones causing the problems. The Army is causing the problems. Also, you say the Army is spending a lot of their money to solve the problems. Well that isn't the Army's money, it is our money first.

Gerry Chiaruttini said the technical studies are required for the CE and EA, correct? And a CE would escalate to an EA if the findings justify it?

Keisha Voigt replied that the major difference is in the type of documentation and is dependent on findings of significant impacts.

Don Buch asked if the CEQ ultimately responsible for implementing NEPA?

Keisha Voigt replied that is correct.

Don Buch gave examples of CE type projects as offered in the CEQ guide: minor facility renovation such as installing energy efficient lighting, issuing administrative personnel policies, or constructing a hiking trail. So the citizens are having trouble comparing a major interstate ramp as being in the same category as these.

Tom Fahrney said it is up to FHWA to make the determination and we expect that to happen in the next seven to ten days.

Dave Dexter said we received many questions not related to the topics being covered tonight. We will not be able to address these tonight. Let me just go through a few of the emails and cards.

- Will construction of the ramp affect pedestrian safety?
Tom Fahrney replied that safety will be one of the considerations in the study.
- Will the HOV ramp be open during Non-HOV hours?
Tom Fahrney replied that operational issues will be part of the study and determined in consultation with FHWA.
- Is there a plan for improving the Duke Street interchange?
Tom Fahrney replied that there are no current plans for that project.
- What would the construction hours be?
Tom Fahrney replied that the hours of construction would be determined in consultation with the contractor and the City of Alexandria.

Dave Dexter then opened the floor up for audience comments.

Annabelle Fischer stated that the BRAC site will open in September 2011. Anyone who believes otherwise, or thinks they can shut it down is wrong. The ramp will increase traffic, but it will also help move traffic. It is a done deal and we need to move forward.

Carol James said she questions the rationale and assumptions that led to the determination that this is interstate funding and not available for local transit. Why is transit excluded?

Joanne Lepanto stated that she heard many good questions, but not many good answers. She asked what is the purpose of the eastbound movement from the HOV ramp to Seminary Road. Why is the eastbound ramp being included?

Tom Fahrney replied that no-build is part of the study.

Joanne Lepanto replied she would rather see no ramp at all to one that allows the eastbound movement.

Barry Wilson said he had heard that the Army will only be doing partial occupancy. He inquired if this were true that they would only be moving in 2,200 people in September? Paul McMahon replied that sounded correct, and that they would be moving people in groups with the expectation of having everyone in by the end of 2011.

Barry Wilson then asked if the ramp is also taking into consideration the potential traffic circle at Seminary Road and Beauregard Street.

Tom Fahrney replied that the traffic circle would not be considered because it is not part of an approved plan, but that the ramp would not preclude the circle.

Harriet McCune said that the 2008 letter by the City said “no further studies would be necessary.” She felt that there were a number of Council members who were in office in 2008 that should be embarrassed, and perhaps since they were present they might like to speak?

Ann Henshaw stated that she is opposed to the CE, but was very disturbed to learn it has already been submitted. She asked where are all of the BRAC people coming from. Have we done an actual detailed study to determine that?

Paul McMahon replied that they had done that study and the information is included in the TMP.

Dianne Costello said she found it demoralizing to come to a meeting to provide public comment on the CE only to learn that the CE request has already been submitted, and that the money is only available for the ramp. Citizens have no confidence in the City because this has been mishandled from the beginning. Once cars get off the ramp onto Seminary, and they have to go through already failing intersections, would VDOT explain just how getting to gridlock faster would improve things?

Tom Fahrney replied that the CE has not been sent to FHWA. Only a form requesting consideration of the CE has been sent. VDOT only makes a recommendation while FHWA makes the determination.

Dianne Costello asked if DoD supported the ramp.

Jim Turkel replied that yes, they do. DoD sent in a letter of support for the ramp project to VDOT.

Dianne Costello asked if DoD needed the ramp to meet the reductions indicated in their TMP?

Jim Turkel responded that they do not believe they need the ramp to meet the SOV reductions, but that it certainly would be helpful.

Tom Fahrney added that VDOT has never said that the TMP is dependent on the ramp, but that it helps achieve the 40% reduction in SOV use by encouraging more carpools, vanpools and transit usage.

Shirley Downs commented that citizens prefer the EA. She asked where citizens can go to express that preference.

Tom Fahrney responded that they can contact VDOT, District Administrator Moore, Commissioner Worley or Secretary Connaughton.

Shirley Downs asked what is the cost per vehicle to use this proposed ramp. She followed by also asking, with the density planned along the Beauregard Corridor being all transit dependent, who will come up with the money for all of that transit?

Dave Cavanaugh commented that since the technical studies for a CE and an EA are so similar, and the major difference being the time involved in the process, why not just do the EA? He then called for the Advisory Group to vote on a motion indicating a preference for either a CE or EA.

Carlisle Bean, a local architect, suggested that a direct access ramp to the roof of the parking garage would be a relatively simple and inexpensive solution without the impacts on the local traffic of the proposed ramp.

Rich Baier commented that these types of solutions were considered and it was determined that DoD would not allow ramps in the air space above the garages or the remote inspection facility.

An unidentified member of the audience commented that, with respect to emergency vehicle access, what is being done to ensure it continues. Also, why not use the Braddock Metro Station instead of the King Street Metro Station?

Andrea Dyes expressed her concerns about the enhanced transit service DASH will be providing along the AT2 route (King Street/Janney's Lane/Seminary Road), and how it will impact residents ability to gain ingress and egress from the several cul-de-sac streets along that route, and how the additional four DASH buses will affect buses serving schools along the route.

Dave Dexter asked her to stay after the meeting and speak to TES staff.

Jennifer Porter expressed concerns about the use of the City's public information system to disseminate information about VDOT's public meetings when the impacts go beyond the City limits into Fairfax County. She expressed support for the EA.

Owen Curtis endorsed the comments of Ms. Porter and Dave Cavanaugh, and endorsed pursuit of an EA. He said it will enhance opportunities for more thorough scoping, development of alternatives, evaluation of alternatives, and a more thorough public interface. Mr. Curtis went on to say that he strongly favors the ramp as an important piece of the overall solution, the ramp will not increase traffic, traffic is being increased by the BRAC-133 facility, and HOV lanes are the equivalent of having a Metro line into the city. The problem is there is not access to the HOV lanes in this area. The ramp will solve this situation by removing SOVs from the general purpose lanes and put them onto HOV lanes at reduced volumes.

Russell Axelson commented he has lived in the area for over 46 years. This ramp is going to create a mess by jamming up the cars. He thought the ramp would be a direct access ramp to the parking garage. That would be a better solution, but not adding to the traffic on Seminary Road.

Council Member Alicia Hughes spoke saying she does not support BRAC at the Mark Center. At the time of the vote, she felt that the support for the CE was the right thing to do. She is not so sure now after hearing the public comments. Many alternatives have been considered and Alternative "F" is unlikely to change. It is the best of several bad choices.

Vice-Mayor Kerry Donley commented that there is no single solution. The solution is an array of approaches that, together, will serve to improve traffic operations. The ramp is a transit improvement at this intersection where none now exists. It will allow buses; carpool and van pool vehicles access to the Mark Center and reduce SOV use.

Council Member Paul Smedberg noted that no one who was on City Council in 2004 anticipated this type of development to occur at this site all at once. In 2008 when BRAC was considering this site, we made the mistake of not stating this site is not the preferred site. We now need to move forward with solutions, we need to make decisions, and the ramp is a part of the larger solution and we need to do this.

Council Member Del Pepper said that, at the time of the zoning for this land in 2004, no one dreamed the Winkler's would sell to Duke, who would in turn sell to DoD. And who would have thought DoD would choose a site without a Metro station in violation of their own rules?

Mayor Euille stated that in his initial conversations with Secretary of Transportation Sean Connaughton about HOV/Transit Ramp project funding, he had spoken about the possible risk to the funding if process was delayed. It was his understanding at the time that an EA would present significant risk to the funding. He asked if Tom Fahrney could address this.

Tom Fahrney declined. Mayor Euille stated that he would follow up directly with Secretary Connaughton to clarify this issue.

Jennifer Porter commented that we elect people to lead and have the courage of their convictions. Access through the Winkler Preserve was the best solution and asked why that could not be reconsidered?

Vice-Mayor Kerry Donley responded that the City considered five options, including the Winkler access, and they were rejected. Now that a decision has been made we need to move forward, not rehash decisions already made. The VDOT funding may well go to another interstate project in Danville if we delay. We would then get nothing with which to alleviate this situation.

Kathy Burns again asked for a vote by the Advisory Group on their preference for a CE or an EA with the results of the vote submitted to FHWA. She put that in the form of a motion.

John Komoroske commented that an EA is fine, so long as it would not put the ramp project funding at risk.

Kathy Burns said the Advisory Group vote should also be sent to Secretary Connaughton.

The motion was seconded by an unidentified member of the Advisory Group.

Donna Fossum said she has heard numerous versions of what an EA and CE involve.

Keisha Voigt commented that with an EA, impacts are not clearly defined by preliminary studies and take approximately 12 months; and, with the CE, impacts are relatively clear and the process takes approximately 6-8 months.

Mike Snare commented that the work is the same for either process with the primary differences being that the EA adds 3 months for the public hearing process and another month for the FHWA review.

Geoff Goodale stated that he has a different understanding, that being that the EA involves a more thorough scoping process, consideration of alternatives and a more formal public comment process.

Owen Curtis commented that Mr. Goodale nailed the most important distinctions between the CE and EA.

Mike Snare commented that VaMegaProjects has already looked at numerous alternatives.

Owen Curtis commented that these are not the types of alternatives that could result from a more thorough scoping. The alternatives that have been considered were narrowly defined to address access to the BRAC facility. A more thorough scoping may well result in a broader consideration of community impacts.

The motion was repeated for clarity: The BRAC-133 Advisory Group supports an Environmental Assessment unless that process would threaten funding for the ramp project.

A call for a vote on the motion was made. The vote was recorded as follows: Jerry Dawson, Paul McMahon, and Stephanie Landrum abstained. Nancy Jennings voted against. All other members present voted in support of the motion.

Don Buch stated that residents need a level of comfort that someone is out there fighting for what is best for the City of Alexandria, and will not just roll over when Richmond says tomorrow morning that the funding is at risk... we are done. We cannot just cave in.

Kathy Burns commented that the public hearings issue is monumental and essential to the process.

The next meeting of the BRAC-133 Advisory Group was set for April 27, 2011, to be held at Beatley Library beginning at 7:00 PM

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 PM