

Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association
Comments re: Designated Routes
(submitted via e-mail by ACVA executive director Stephanie Brown, October 14, 2008)

1. We would like to see an assessment of the streets in Old Town to identify which streets do not meet criteria for reasonable use by a motor coaches.
2. We support identifying routes as long as the routes provide access to relevant commercial interests.
3. We think the DASH bus routes should be evaluated since they have been vetted for use by large passenger vehicles.
4. We are concerned that the small number of streets considered so far will create unintended consequences by concentrating all motor coaches on too limited a route.

I will be out of town on business during the next meeting. Please let me know I can provide anything in advance, or if you would like me to send an alternate from our board.

Thank you,

Stephanie

Old Town Civic Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 1213
Alexandria, Virginia 22313

At the last Old Town Civic Association (OTCA) meeting, the membership was asked to give their view on motor coaches in Old Town. OTCA gathered a diverse panel that briefly laid out their perspectives, and then were questioned by the membership. OTCA wanted this panel to first lay out the diverse interests that relate to motocoaches. The interests and representatives were:

Enforcement: David Baker, Police chief, Alexandria Police Department
Tourism: Stephanie Brown, President & CEO, Alexandria Convention & Visitors Association
Citizen Issues: Bert Ely, Chair of the OTCA Traffic Committee.
Historic Aspects: J. Lance Mallamo, Director of the Office of Historic Alexandria.
Industry: Victor Parra, President & Chief Executive Officer, United Motorcoach Association

All the presentations were to the point, and the audience proceeded in a calm rational manner to clarify differences in their and the presenters viewpoints.

This was followed by an extremely productive session in which the members were asked to comment on their concerns and possible solutions. The concerns were presented in a respectful manner that underscored the understanding of other stakeholder groups concerns, yet the members conveyed in 1 hour what the task forces took years to accomplish. Many thanks are due Linda Couture, member of the OTCA Board, for the magnificent job facilitating the session.

The concerns voiced by the membership can be divided into distinct categories that lend themselves to specific solution sets offered by the membership.

The concerns

“Idling and crawling on residential streets, General idling, Number of busses is too many, Routes, Pollution, Pedestrian safety, Noise and vibration from the buses, Discharging in non designated areas, Buses Too big too tall, Rude drivers, Trash being dumped and Signage”.

Solutions proposed by membership

1. Educational efforts aimed at teaching bus drivers, businesses, and the business association about the rules and regulations in the City of Alexandria. This would help familiarize visiting motorcoaches with the laws, and give them a better understanding of the problems and constraints facing Old Town. The membership also pointed out the need to educate residents about the issues.
2. Enforcement of existing laws was thought to be lacking. Therefore, if the City put more effort to ensure that it is done in a more comprehensive manner, it would piggyback nicely on the proposed educational program above.

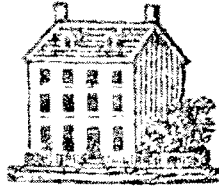
3. Designated routes and parking areas were brought up as a way to protect sensitive areas of Old Town, but the membership emphasized the need for criteria based choices and expressed concern about concentrating the problems in designated areas. A suggestion was also put forth to look into the viability of designating no drive streets instead.

The next set of solutions encompassed new and creative transportation solutions for the modal split.

1. Old Town is a very walkable city and the historic ambiance is best enjoyed as a pedestrian, not in a motorcoach! The City ought to take advantage by encouraging more "historic walking" in particular with the young through both education and promotion of Old Town as an historic walking City.
2. Limit the bus sizes to fewer than 20 feet, as the current busses are too large and cumbersome for the infrastructure of Old Town.
3. Require permits to drive in Old Town, and limit the number of busses.
4. Use trolleys in efforts to come up with creative transportation solutions modal split requiring that visitors change from bus to trolley in order to drive around Old Town. The members were enthusiastic about trolleys as the "neat" way to go--meaning people like them because they think trolley rides are "fun."

Poul Martin Hertel, President OTCA Board of Directors





ALEXANDRIA OLD & HISTORIC DISTRICT RESIDENTS GROUP

26 October 2008

Yon,

I owe you feedback on the issue of motorcoach routes in Old Town and some commentary on the Motorcoach tour of September 22nd.

Washington Street Loading & Unloading

We liked Paul's idea of using Washington Street as a loading and unloading area. It confines the buses to an arterial street as other cities have done. Washington Street near King, Prince, and Cameron Streets is within walking distance of almost all Old Town attractions, and for visitors who choose not to walk the King Street Trolley is nearby.

There would be a few issues to work out with regards to Washington Street rush-hour parking restrictions, safety, and remote parking (buses should not be allowed to park there for more than the time to load or unload). However, those do not seem to be insurmountable.

September 22nd Bus Trip Observations

Even though the traffic on that Monday night was light, it was evident that the coach still had some difficulty navigating the streets in Old Town. Off-tracking continues to be a serious issue with these vehicles. Most intersections in Old Town are such that a motorcoach must use both lanes of the street during a turn. If the other lane is occupied by a car, the bus driver must wait until the other lane is clear or risk getting stuck in the turn. We have all seen this.

During our bus trip, the driver was observed rushing a turn while sounding the horn to claim the oncoming traffic lane before a car could block it. This is an all too common occurrence on many corners. I have seen and heard this a number of times where I live and elsewhere.

In two cases, our motorcoach had to back up—once to complete a turn and once while parking. It should be noted that these motorcoaches are not usually equipped with an audible back up signals. Viewed primarily as over-the-road-buses (OTRBs) by the federal government, federal law does not require them. However, in high-density pedestrian areas, it is a crucial safety device. Even garbage trucks have them.

Our bus trip was at night. Nighttime motorcoach travel in residential areas is also something that we remain vehemently against. There should be no heavy traffic of any kind on residential streets after dark. This trip did not put my mind at ease with regards to motorcoaches in residential areas, it only reminded me of the negative impacts.

Motorcoach Routes in Old Town

As to motorcoach routes, we have decided to oppose any effort to establish dedicated motorcoach routes in the confines of Old Town east of Washington Street. We view these efforts as both improper and impractical. We realize that the ACVA wants this and that the City is trying to accommodate them. However, we note that there is no model to follow this action. Of all the cities that we have examined, none have chosen to do dedicated routing through residential areas. We do not see why anyone should see this as a proper thing to do.

Since July 27th, when the task force voted to prioritize route-finding as an objective, we have tried to keep an open mind. However, we now see that there is nothing new in these proposals. These proposals had been discussed at length before in the management committee of the old ACVA motorcoach task force, and to no agreement.

One resident likened the concept of a motorcoach route to the establishment a motorcoach “rail-road” in Old Town—with this frequent heavy coach traffic being concentrated only on certain streets. The concentrating of motorcoaches only concentrates the nuisances and dangers.

It sounds malicious to me to argue that these routes can be located where there are fewer residences, wider residential streets, or where there is already an established public bus route. This amounts to an intention to harm some while not harming others, essentially selling one street out for another. ALL residents should be treated the same. The protections that are supposed to exist for residential areas should be respected.

It needs to be understood that the establishment of motorcoach routes in Old Town would involve an EXTREME intensification in the use of some streets. Washington DC can receive between 1,000 and 1,200 motorcoaches per day during the spring busy season. We calculate that residential Alexandria is currently experiencing about 5% of that number, amounting to between 50 and 60 motorcoaches per day (perhaps a few more).

It should be clear to anyone that the natural year-over-year growth of motorcoach traffic in the District is going to increase these numbers further. This, combined with aggressive marketing by the ACVA, could easily double the number of motorcoaches in Old Town over the next few years. Beyond that, it is not inconceivable that that number could double yet again.

It doesn't take much to see that the motorcoach problem facing Alexandria is one of current and future numbers. However, this task force is apparently choosing to ignore this. Rather, routes and parking (systems that facilitate more and more motorcoaches coming to Old Town) have been voted as priorities. Residents, even though they are the majority in Old Town, are quick to point out that they did not get to vote on these points. Routes and parking are NOT their priorities. And as to enforcement? We need a task force to enforce existing law?

There is growing concern that the City is not going to address this issue either carefully or fairly. I am beginning to share that view.

R. Aronson

Mount Vernon APRIL Attendance Numbers

Date: 27 October 2008

From: Stephanie Brown, ACVA (via e-mail on 30 Sept. 2008)

Here are Mount Vernon's attendance numbers for the month you requested. To get a VERY rough estimate of busses per day, I added group adults and students, divided by 30 for the number of days, and divided by 40 for people per bus and get 68 per day.

Keep in mind that some high percentage of the students come on SCHOOL BUSES (maybe 30%), not motor coaches, and wouldn't be touring anywhere in the area. The adult group number includes some corporate... and maybe also the people who come by boat.

Here were April 2008 attendance numbers:

Adults	46,000
Group Adults	23,000
Youth	9,000
Students	59,000
<u>Free (under 6 kids)</u>	<u>9,000</u>
TOTAL	146,000

DEL RAY

BRADDOCK RD

OLD TOWN
ALEXANDRIA

Alexandria
National
Cemetery

Nannie J Lee
Community
Center

Potomac F

Woodrow Wilson
Memorial Brg

