Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

February 2, 2011

PROJECT BACKGROUND

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of study is to identify and adopt a transit enhancement strategy for each study corridor and provide an action plan to guide future study and implementation efforts. The project will involve transit planning, a conceptual level of engineering, concept-level environmental study, and public outreach and coordination.

How were these three corridors selected?
The Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study builds on the 2008 City Council adopted Transportation Master Plan recommendation for providing enhanced transit service in the following three corridors:1) generally along Route 1 / Washington Street (North-South corridor A); 2) Duke Street / Eisenhower Avenue (Corridor B), and 3) Van Dorn/Beauregard corridors (Corridor C). The three corridors were identified as providing the best connections to existing and future growth areas in near the City. Please refer to the study area map on the project webpage.

Why is the City beginning the analysis for Corridor C first?
Corridor C is being studied first because it has the highest priority given the current local and regional development issues, and the need to identify solutions in a timely manner. The BRAC-133 facility is anticipated to open in fall 2011 with 6,400 new employees, and there are additional large development proposals being considered within the same vicinity. Finally, Arlington and Fairfax Counties and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) are currently conducting an environmental analysis for the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative, which could potentially be connected with the preferred transitway solution for Corridor C.

What is the High Capacity Transit Corridor Work Group?
The High Capacity Transitway Corridor Work Group established by the City Council in 2010 focuses on providing citizen input to the Transitway Corridor Feasibility study and issues such as route alignments, cross-sections, methods of operation, types of vehicles which should be used in these corridors at specific times, land use considerations, ridership, and financial implications.

The Work Group representation includes: two members of Council, one representative from the Planning Commission, one representative of the Transportation Commission, one representative of the Budget / Fiscal Affairs Advisory Commission, one representative of the Chamber of Commerce, two people appointed by the Alexandria Federation of Civic Associations, and a citizen with transit planning expertise.

WHO DOES IT SERVE, AND WHERE WILL IT GO?

What populations are you intending to serve with high capacity transit?
The transitway corridors will serve transit captive populations (those persons who are reliant on transit for mobility), as well choice riders – persons who may have access to a car but instead ***choose*** to use transit to meet their mobility needs. This market could be very large if services were made attractive and competitive to the automobile.

Are the transitways intended to provide local mobility or regional connectivity?
The corridors are oriented to serve local destinations as well as connect to other corridors and systems being planned in the region by Arlington County, Fairfax County, and the District of Columbia. Within the City, the corridors are organized to serve significant local and regional destinations with minimal overlap (duplication of service) between corridors. The corridors are also oriented to provide seamless service between neighboring jurisdictions and the corridors under consideration in those jurisdictions.

Will services within the designated High Capacity Transit Corridors replace existing local transit services, such as DASH?
No. Local transit services will continue to operate throughout the city to serve areas and destinations not well served or directly served by the planned high-capacity transit corridors. To coincide with the investment in infrastructure and services in each transitway corridor, it is likely that DASH service would be reconfigured to increase Alexandrians' access to, quality of, and frequency of local transit.

How will High Capacity Transit affect travel patterns?
Ultimately, the conceptually envisioned increase in attractive high capacity transit service in the corridors, in combination with the implementation of transit service improvements in neighboring jurisdictions, has the potential to affect people's travel choices and encourage more people to use transit.

Has any origin-destination analysis been conducted for the corridors?
Origin destination analysis is used to determine where people are coming and going to today. During the Transportation Master Plan's development, The Ad Hoc Transportation Task Force, in collaboration with the City, evaluated City trends in transit ridership, reviewed citywide socioeconomic conditions, evaluated travel demand forecasts for automobile and transit travel, and referenced regional plans. The result of this in-depth evaluation was the designation of three transit corridors being further reviewed in this study. Furthermore, the Transitway Corridor alignments are being developed taking into consideration the location of current and planned activity centers along the selected corridors.

WHAT DOES THE TRANSITWAY LOOK LIKE?

Have the transit modes been already selected for each High Capacity Transit Corridor?
No. Among the many purposes of the Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study is the evaluation of each corridor, to determine the most appropriate and feasible transit mode, or modes for each corridor. Alignment also will be reviewed for each corridor. In general, the transit modes under consideration include Rapid Bus, Bus Rapid Transit, and Streetcar.

What are the key characteristics of streetcars?
Modern streetcars are relatively lightweight electrically powered rail vehicles that operate along high-demand transit routes or within areas with multiple closely-spaced destinations. Streetcars can run in

exclusive running ways or in mixed travel lanes. They have low floors and are designed to load and unload passengers quickly and efficiently and improve accessibility to people with mobility impairments.

The right-of-way required for a modern streetcar is typically less than that of light rail transit (LRT) due to the narrow width of cars and more modest station requirements. Streetcar stops are often integrated with streetscape or median treatments and frequently offer shelters, lighting, benches, landscaping, off-board fare collection, a service-specific identity, and level boarding.

What are the characteristics of Bus Rapid Transit?
The term Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) refers to the integrated system of facilities, equipment, services, and amenities that improve the speed, reliability, and identity of rubber tire transit. Unlike standard bus services, BRT generally operates in dedicated or preferentially treated running ways with priority treatments that reduce bus travel times. In many respects, BRT incorporates many of the operational efficiencies and facilities used by more expensive rail transit technologies such as light rail transit (LRT) and streetcar and benefits from greater operating flexibility and lower capital cost.

WHAT WILL BE THE POTENTIAL IMPACTS?

Will the study look at the environmental impacts for each of the corridors?
Yes. The study will evaluate, consistent with a concept plan level of study, potential environmental impacts associated with the implementation of high-capacity transit services in each corridor. Subsequent studies (outside the scope of the current effort) will fully define and evaluate environmental impacts associated with the implementation of high-capacity transit services in each corridor.

How is the project being coordinated with the planned improvements associated with the BRAC-133 facility?
The traffic analysis that has been conducted for future years (2035) assumes the development of the BRAC facility as well as the current and planned transportation improvements associated with the BRAC facility. All of the transitway alignment alternatives are being developed with the assumption that these projects will be built.

Can the steep grades, such as those on Beauregard Street north of Sanger Avenue accommodate a modern streetcar?
Yes. Modern streetcar manufacturer's specifications state that their vehicles have the ability to run on grades of up to 9 percent. The current grades along Beauregard Street do not exceed that threshold. While modern streetcars are able to negotiate grades of up to 9 percent, grades in-excess of 7 percent for long sections of the alignment are not desirable. From an evaluation of existing topography, the steepest sections of Beauregard Street under consideration are of a relatively short length and do not exceed 9 percent.

How will pedestrians and bicyclists be impacted by the transitways?
Conditions for pedestrians and bicycles have the potential to be significantly improved through the implementation of the high capacity transit service in each corridor. Where the preferred corridor strategy identifies a modification to existing roadway cross sections, appropriate enhancements to the bicycle and pedestrian network will be included. Where the implementation of the preferred corridor strategy does not require a modification to the existing roadway cross section, station/stop areas and pedestrian improvements would be identified to enhance pedestrian safety and accessibility.

How will a transitway affect the current or projected traffic along the corridors?
Alternatives that propose high capacity transit service operating in mixed flow (with vehicular traffic) and would include special intersection treatments, as well as features such as bus pull outs and bus bays at stops/stations to minimize the impact of stopped transit vehicles on vehicular traffic flow. A minimal impact to vehicular traffic flow would be anticipated in these alternatives.

For alternatives where a dedicated (separate from vehicular traffic) runningway (or lane) is proposed, little to no vehicular traffic flow impact would be anticipated. At signalized intersections where exclusive runningways are provided and exclusive transit turning phases need to be provided, minimal impact to vehicular transit flow would be anticipated.

What will the impacts be to the existing streetscape of the High Capacity Transit Corridors?
The streetscape in each corridor has the potential to be unaffected or improved as a result of the implementation of high capacity transit improvements. To the extent possible, impacts to existing high-quality streetscapes will be minimized. Where these streetscapes are anticipated to be impacted by high capacity transit implementation, plans will identify their replacement with high-quality streetscape treatments that respect the context of the area and promote a "complete streets" approach to the treatment of the public right-of-way.

WHAT ARE THE FUNDING IMPLICATIONS?

What costs are being considered as part of the evaluation?
During preliminary screening, planning-level capital costs of constructing the system in each corridor are being considered. The costs developed for this phase of the project are intended to be comparative (between alternatives) and do not include right of way, vehicles, or maintenance facilities. As alternatives are advanced for more detailed evaluation, capital and operating costs will be more fully developed to understand better the full monetary cost of implementing high capacity transit corridor improvements.

How will the transit improvements be funded?
At this time, a funding plan has not been developed for the high capacity transit corridor improvements currently under study. Traditionally, transit projects similar to those being studied have been funded in other cities/regions/states through a combination of local, regional, state, and federal partnerships and some contribution from private entities. As an additional avenue for funding future transportation and other needs, the City is considering using a Commercial Real Estate Tax—similar to what is already in use in Arlington County and Fairfax County. This tax would be used to supplement local, state, federal and private funds to pay for design and construction of transitway improvements and operational costs.

HOW WILL TRANSITWAYS BE IMPLEMENTED?

Who will select the mode and route?
Ultimately, the Alexandria City Council will make a recommendation on the preferred alignment and mode for each of the three corridors. The Council's decision will be based on guidance from the High Capacity Transit Corridor Work Group, staff recommendations, and input from the public, the Transportation Commission and Planning Commission.

What additional steps and studies will be required following the completion of the study currently being undertaken by the City?
Following the completion of the current study, it is likely that the city will pursue an approach that leads to a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) compliant Alternatives Analysis (AA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) study being performed along with Preliminary Engineering and follow-up engineering and procurement activities. In simple terms, following a neutral detailed analysis of the alternatives and corresponding detailed environmental study, a series of decisions by the City and state and federal officials, a locally preferred alternative would be defined and ideally given permission for entry into Preliminary Engineering. Following the successful completion of Preliminary Engineering, the project could enter Final Engineering or could enter a procurement process—Design-Build or Design-Build-Operate-Maintain—that would lead to completion of the project.

Is the Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study being coordinated with redevelopment and planning efforts along the Beauregard / Van Dorn corridor?
Yes. The City has been actively coordinating the Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study with the planning process currently underway along the Beauregard Corridor, including regular coordination with developers and stakeholders. The proposals by the developers have assumed a transitway facility along the Beauregard corridor.

Is the Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study being coordinated with the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative, and the Crystal City Potomac Yard Transitway?
Yes. The Columbia Pike Transit Initiative is currently going through the environmental review process which will identify the preferred alternative for that corridor. The Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study is considering alternatives that would extend the Columbia Pike transit facility beyond the Northern Virginia Community College. The Crystal City Potomac Yard Transitway is also underway with environmental review to determine whether the planned busway north of the Braddock Road station will ultimately be converted to a streetcar.

Are Arlington and Fairfax Counties involved in the planning process?
Yes. The City has invited representatives from both jurisdictions to be a part of the City's project team for the Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study. The project is also being coordinated with the current Columbia Pike Transit Initiative, which is being led by both Arlington and Fairfax Counties. As alternatives move forward that affect either jurisdiction, they will be coordinated with each county.

When will the recommended transit improvements be built?
The time horizon for implementation of transit improvements will depend upon the selected strategy for each corridor. Strategies that are less capital intensive (less monetary cost) have the potential be implemented in a few years. Strategies that are more expensive and complex would have a longer implementation horizon. Understanding that the selected strategy for any corridor has the potential to require considerable time to implement, the current study will identify phases of implementation. These phases will enable the city to make incremental improvements over time along each corridor and provide improved services and facilities, while working within a longer term plan.

Will the recommended improvements for each of the corridors be phased?
For each of the corridors, a phased approach to achieving the preferred corridor concept and implementation plan will be prepared. The phasing will identify likely next steps for environmental review, technical analysis, funding, permitting, design and construction. As an example of the type of phasing considerations being entertained, in one scenario, a preferred corridor concept for streetcar may be phased through the early implementation of Rapid Bus, followed by Bus Rapid Transit, and ultimately the

desired streetcar service. Phases have the potential to be guided by factors such as the availability of funding, degree of current and future need, complexity of engineering and construction, and approvals necessary to proceed through local, state, and federal processes.

Disclaimer: The information provided in these Frequently Asked Questions document may change in the future and is not meant to be all-inclusive. The information can evolve or change as other projects, priorities or issues may arise that impact the planning or implementation process for the Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study.