

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 6, 2011

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: JIM MASLANKA, CHIEF OF TRANSIT SERVICES

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM #3 - CONSIDERATION OF BUILDING A BUSWAY IN ALEXANDRIA'S PORTION OF THE CRYSTAL CITY-POTOMAC YARD TRANSITWAY AND IMPLEMENTING A BUS RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM IN COORDINATION WITH ARLINGTON COUNTY AS THE FIRST HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT SERVICE

ISSUE: Consideration of building and operating a busway along Alexandria's portion of the Crystal City-Potomac Yard transitway.

RECOMMENDATION: That the City's Transportation Commission endorse the City's effort to construct and operate a busway along Route 1 in the Crystal City-Potomac Yard Corridor.

DISCUSSION: The City of Alexandria has been doing detailed analyses, together with Arlington County and the State's Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) of the need for High Capacity transit along Route 1 and in Potomac Yard, north of the Braddock Road Metro Station for nine years. The first major effort was to do an alternatives analysis of transit options in the corridor. This effort concluded in March 2003 and indicated that all three of the major high-capacity transit modes were feasible in Potomac Yard. These included a Bus Rapid Transit service, a Light Rail line, and a Potomac Yard Metrorail station. Conscious of the real needs of rapidly growing development in the Yard, in 2005, another effort was conducted by Alexandria, Arlington County, and DRPT to determine implementation issues for high capacity transit in Potomac Yard. In 2007, the City, Arlington County, and DRPT developed an environmental document for the entire corridor called a documented categorical exclusion. Arlington County submitted this document for approval by the Federal Transit Administration, for two segments in the County, and was approved. Alexandria held back since it had not made the decision whether the transitway should operate in the median or in curb lanes of Route 1. The decision was made later that year on June 16, 2007 to operate the transitway in the median of Route 1. Development plans were developed both in Alexandria and in Arlington County in the Crystal City-Potomac Yard Corridor to allow considerably more mixed use development in both communities. As a consequence, all three modes of high-capacity transit were reanalyzed. Since high-capacity transit was needed as soon as possible, efforts continued to build and operate a busway as the first phase of the high capacity transit service in the corridor. Further,

because this corridor may need higher capacity surface public transportation, the Alexandria City Council and Arlington County Board established a project to do an environmental analysis of a possible conversion from busway to streetcar in the corridor. This joint project should start shortly. Thirdly, the Alexandria City Council approved an effort to do an environmental impact statement of a new Metrorail station in Potomac Yard.

In August 2009, the City worked with staff from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) to develop a regional TIGER grant application which included funding for the construction of a 0.8 mile portion of the Crystal City-Potomac Yard Busway from E. Glebe Road to Monroe Avenue at a cost of \$8.5 million. In February 2010, the City received notification from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and MWCOG which stated the City's 0.8 mile portion of the Potomac Yard Busway was one of several regional projects that will be funded through TIGER. In May 2010, FTA gave final approval to MWCOG to move forward with all regional TIGER funded projects. A final agreement regarding the TIGER grants was signed on December 14, 2010, between MWCOG and the U.S. DOT and between MWCOG and such project owners as Alexandria. A key point to remember is that these are 100% federal funds, not requiring any local match. This allocation of funds, plus other federal and Commonwealth funds will permit the City to begin the process of building the busway this year.

Federal construction funds can only be used after an appropriate level environmental analysis is completed and accepted by the applicable federal agency. In the case of the Crystal City-Potomac Yard Transitway, the FTA determined that Alexandria and Arlington County could develop the least rigorous environmental document, a categorical exclusion, for the provision of an interim busway. Since the time that the categorical exclusion document was developed, in 2007, several demographic factors have changed in both Alexandria and Arlington County. Both jurisdictions had to update the environmental documents to permit the use of federal funds. Arlington County recently received approval for their categorical exclusion document and Alexandria is awaiting a final response from the Federal Transit Administration for its categorical exclusion document for the construction of a busway in both jurisdictions.

Upon receipt of the \$8.5 million in Federal TIGER funds, the City will construct a bus facility along the 0.8 mile section of the Potomac Yard Transitway, as is specified in the categorical exclusion document. Since these are economic stimulus funds, they are expected to be obligated and used quickly.

A bus facility will allow Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) vehicles, as well as, possibly, other transit services to operate on the transitway in conjunction with Arlington County busway operations. Currently, staff is reviewing various operating scenarios for the busway, and developing a coordinated busway operations plan with Arlington County. One possible scenario is for WMATA to operate a new limited-stop BRT service on the busway. This service might initially operate on 10 minute peak and 20 minute off-peak headways, which could possibly improve to 6 minute peak and 12 minute off-peak headways as demand increases. This operations plan is also determining the role of other transit services on the busway, service frequencies, vehicle type, cost estimates, and an

implementation plan. The amenities provided at the stations in the transitway will have the highest quality set of transit features possible.

In addition to such basic requirements as providing shelter and seating, the stations will also have such features as level boarding, fare machines, real-time bus information, transit information, and many sustainable features. The stations and the transitway will be designed in such a manner that if a decision is made in the future to convert the busway to a streetcar facility, any disruption to customers and adjoining land owners will be minimized.

The busway, between East Glebe Road and Monroe Avenue is fully funded by federal, state, local, and private funds. A design-build contractor will be on board by September 30, 2011. Depending upon the schedule this firm develops, construction work should begin in late 2011 or early 2012. Operation of the busway will occur in late 2013 or early 2014.