



**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

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Transportation Planning Division

**MEETING MINUTES FROM JULY 21, 2011 HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT CORRIDOR WORK
GROUP MEETING**

To: High Capacity Transit Corridor Work Group
From: Jim Maslanka, City of Alexandria, T&ES; Steve Sindiong, City of Alexandria, T&ES
Meeting Date: July 21, 2011
Time: 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.
Meeting Location: Charles Houston Recreation Center, Multi-Purpose Room
Subject: Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study High Capacity Transit Corridor Work Group Meeting 7
Attendees: **Corridor Work Group:** Councilman Paul Smedberg (Co-Chair), Bill Denton, Donna Fossum, Dak Hardwick, Poul Hertel, Nancy Jennings, John Komoroske
City of Alexandria staff: Rich Baier (Director T&ES), Abi Lerner (Deputy Director, T&ES), Jim Maslanka (T&ES), Steve Sindiong (T&ES), Karen Callahan (T&ES), Susan Gygi (T&ES), Mark Jinks (Deputy City Manager), Jeff Farner (Deputy Director, P&Z)
City Council: Del Pepper
Members of the Public: 32 citizens signed in

Agenda

Corridor B (Duke Street/Eisenhower) Discussion

1. Introduction
 - a. Opening Remarks
 - b. Meeting Objectives and Goals
2. May 19th Meeting Minutes
3. Background
4. Corridor B Discussion
 - a. Existing Conditions and Land Use
 - b. Preliminary Comments
 - c. Evaluation Criteria
 - d. Alternatives
 - e. CWG Input and Observations
 - f. Public Input and Observations

Corridor A (North-South) Discussion

5. Corridor A Discussion

- a. Existing Conditions and Land Use
 - b. Preliminary Comments
 - c. Evaluation Criteria
 - d. Transitway Concepts
 - e. CWG Input and Observations
 - f. Public Input and Observations
6. Logistics and Next Steps
- a. Next Meeting Date
 - b. Next Meeting Topics
- Upcoming Meetings Related to Corridor C Implementation

Summary of Discussion

Introduction

- May 19th Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved with two changes
 - Page 4, under John Komoroske, 2nd bullet, the word “area” is misspelled as “are”
 - Page 5, under Poul Hertel, fifth bullet, take out word “Almost”
- Goal of the meeting:
 - Narrow concepts for further evaluation through CWG and public comment

Corridor B

- Presentation by David Whyte
- CWG comments/questions during the presentation
 - Would like to have a view of area densities rather than just zoning.
 - There are two metro stations along Eisenhower that are underutilized. How are they figured into the thinking?
 - Response: The Metrorail station areas are well-served by Metrobus and DASH service. Development will occur within easy walking, biking, and local transit service distance in the two areas and increase ridership at the stations over time.
 - Any concern about the lack of a north-south connection through the core of the city?
 - North/south connectivity in center of the city is relatively limited today; however, most of the areas people seem to want to travel to outside of the corridor are along areas that have north/south connectivity.
 - Eisenhower Avenue is not conducive to people living there because of the industrial and transportation infrastructure.
 - Duke Street, in the section adjacent to Landmark Mall is the City’s worst section for roadway maintenance.
 - Response: it is VDOT-owned
 - Duke Street (section 3) has no left-turn lanes and motorists making left-turns in combination with stopped buses cause traffic congestion.
 - Duke Street has significant housing density.
 - Do you have traffic volumes on Duke Street?
 - Response: around 28,000 (near the Masonic Temple) to 40,000 vehicles per day (near Landmark)
 - What are the headways of the proposed service?
 - Response: that will be a part of the detailed evaluation.
 - Why was an Light BRT mode considered here and not on Corridor C?

- Response: We are not expecting as many changes to the edge of Duke Street as there is not approved or on-going large scale redevelopment and planning. We wanted to offer a version of the BRT mode that had additional flexibility.
- Clarify the planning-level capital cost estimate.
 - Response: it includes the running-way, stations, transit technology; it does not include vehicles, right-of-way, maintenance facilities, operations; those cost estimates will be provided in the next level of evaluation
- Clarify the property impacts screening process.
 - Response: widening is considered to have high negative impact and is given a poor rating, no widening is viewed as positive, widening in some areas is less problematic than others.
- What is the travel time difference with dedicated lanes?
 - Response: that will be part of the more detailed evaluation
- What does Duke Street connect to on the west?
 - Response: the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the regional planning body, has included a high-capacity transit corridor in their fiscally constrained long-range plan extending west from Alexandria, through Fairfax County, to the City of Fairfax. Duke Street is also a WMATA priority bus corridor. The intent of the Transportation Master Plan (TMP) was to continue the corridor to George Mason University.

- **Public Comment** on Corridor B

- Don't understand the vision for the long-range land-use along Duke Street
- Why do we need high-capacity transit along Duke Street? There needs to be a return to the City to justify the cost of building. What are the benefits of transit for us?
- Afraid the project team is steering the CWG to recommending BRT, just like Corridor C. Need to consider economic development and ridership. Choosing rail transit and doing it right leads to economic development and can change the character of the corridor.
- Rail means less cars and better quality of life as smart growth and livability improve.
- A bus system does not do anything for economic development. We already have buses.
- Please include a dedicated bikeway on Duke Street corridor.
- Study should include ridership projections as part of initial screening.
- Consider a north-south connection between Duke Street and Eisenhower – could be a bike-pedestrian-transit connection.
- Caution that preliminary screening criteria connotes that the criteria are all of equal importance. If it is cheap but doesn't work, it is not a bargain. Travel time is the most important criteria.
- Feel the project team is advocating a certain alternative and route. Choosing a route should be a public policy decision.
- Rail spurs economic development; the City needs to understand transit-oriented development.
- Three high-capacity transit corridors need to be the same mode and work with other jurisdictions on the same mode.
- Eisenhower seems logical as it connects two metro stations; Transitway can pick up people and take them to the stations.
- Cannot hear cars, but can hear buses.
- The way not to be car-friendly is to insist that existing car lanes be converted to a bus lane; need to move away from the car culture; do not widen the street.
- Not interested in gentrifying Duke Street; do not spend money on the road to do away with the shops and restaurants that are there.

- **CWG comment** on Corridor B
 - **Donna Fossum**
 - Similar to Corridor C, start with BRT on dedicated lanes where we can, plan to get streetcar in the future.
 - Need to widen the 4-lane undivided section.
 - **Dak Hardwick**
 - Would have liked for the CWG to be involved in selecting preliminary screening criteria (like was done for Corridor C); operability should be included in the screening.
 - Not prepared to throw out the Eisenhower route at this time; interested in seeing what parts of the City could become with transit, not what they are now; transit can be a development incentive.
 - Would like to see automobile travel times.
 - Need to look at concepts that begin as BRT (due to funding constraints), but move toward a streetcar.
 - BRT systems are being implemented all over the country; federal funding was granted for 2 light rail projects and a dozen BRT projects; want to get as much federal money as possible because the City has other large expenditures.
 - **Poul Hertel**
 - Studies have shown that BRT spurs economic development and does add to adjacent property value.
 - Light rail is only more efficient if it runs much faster than BRT.
 - Paying a luxury tax for streetcar on an idea that it is a panacea.
 - On Duke Street the amount of transit travel shows that we need to take away a general purpose lane; taking away a lane for transit is equivalent to congestion pricing.
 - Alexandria is a crossroads with people wanting to get through it; for mobility in the City we need to take lanes away from cars; when congestion happens, through traffic goes elsewhere.
 - We cannot have the transit stuck in traffic; system needs to operate in dedicated lanes.
 - Concerned with the idea of widening; people who live there should not be subject to major changes to their property and buffers from the roadway.
 - Need to find out transit travel times.
 - Suggest separating Corridors A and B into two meetings.
 - Want to see more analysis of alternative E.
 - **Nancy Jennings**
 - Philosophically and practically, the Duke corridor makes sense as a high-capacity Transitway because people use the buses already and have proven transit works in the corridor.
 - Widening on Duke Street has been on the books for 20 years, but there has not been money; why do we think there will be money for the Transitway?
 - Response: Council has allocated \$140 million to Citywide projects
 - **John Komoroske**
 - It is smart to start out with a lower cost system such as BRT with the ability to move to rail later if it works well.
 - Additional passengers are accommodated on a streetcar only because they are standing.

- Would like to see the studies that relate to BRT and economic development; rail shows a commitment to transit.
- Planning for bicycles is important – there is a lack of east-west bicycle connectivity in Alexandria.
- An origin-destination study should be conducted.
- Concerned about use of the Transitways if they are only located in Alexandria.
- **William Denton**
 - Dedicate a lane for BRT now and if funding is available, change mode later.
 - Connectivity to other jurisdictions and Alexandria corridors is important.
- **Councilman Paul Smedburg**
 - Not ready to throw out the Eisenhower corridor; there is value in discussing.

Corridor A

- Presentation by David Whyte
- **Public Comment** on Corridor A
 - Have an opportunity to continue dedicated lanes from the Route 1 section, Crystal City-Potomac Yard to Braddock Metro using the railroad right-of-way.
 - An origin/destination study would be useful to understand who is going where, ie to Old Town, vs. Fairfax in order to narrow down concepts.
 - Would caution against a disconnected system that requires a mode transfer penalty.
 - Like the connection through Old Town and to Fairfax concept; there has been a lot of discussion about congestion in Old Town and doing nothing is not a solution. There should be a concept to protect Old Town and get traffic around it; using the right-of-way along the railroad or disembarking at Eisenhower are a reasonable solution.
 - Was hoping that the trolley on King Street would replace empty DASH buses on King street; nostalgia is something to value and would like to see a historic drawing and bring back what used to be there such as a historic streetcar.
 - Need to consider the existing walkability in Old Town today. What is the purpose of the transit system? To get people to Old Town? Or to have people pass through Old Town?
 - Want peace of mind that there won't be widening of the residential street (N. Patrick).
 - Need to understand the methodology for the analysis; some assumptions are incorrect and the process is moving too fast.
 - Why is Slaters Lane a destination, when it is not the same character as Old Town?
 - Nine years ago I asked Council to clean up Patrick Street and the letter has been ignored. Why do we need another major corridor? Trucks don't use the middle lane like they are supposed to and now tour buses are on Patrick Street. The City is destroying the residential neighborhood. Washington Street has 10' wide parking lanes, while Patrick only has 6' wide parking lanes. The street is dirty due to littering.
 - Need a 'do nothing' alternative.
 - Concerned about the implications of the concept; transit is a huge capital investment; would increased density and FAR be offered to developers for proffers? This would destroy the character and walkability of Old Town. The best option is no build.
 - Confused on why transitway is needed because residents can walk to the Metrorail station.
 - Studies for North Patrick Street have shown structural damage to homes from vibration; concerned about further damage due to transit.
 - Need to determine who the customers area going to be – are they mainly people passing through, who don't pay City taxes?
 - Be creative and send cars along the Metrorail where there are vacant lots available.

- Sidewalks on Patrick Street are narrow as is; concerned they will be impacted. Also concerned about vibration; will the project add buffers or wider sidewalks?
- What problem are we trying to solve? Are we trying to make it easier for residents to move around the City and harder for others to pass through?
- Why would people use surface transit if they can use Metrorail? The system looks redundant to Metrorail; save money with the no build option
- Preserve the streetscape and walkability
- Who is benefitting and who is paying for the system? If it helps people from outside Alexandria to get through it, they should pay for it.
- To solve congestion, take away a lane or add a congestion tax.
- The Existing and Planned concept has a small gap which is filled with Metrorail; spending a lot of money for high capacity transit when we already have that with Metrorail.
- Mt. Vernon area of Fairfax wants rail on Route 1, consider extending the yellow line to Fort Belvoir.
- 41 percent of the residents of Census Tract 16 already use transit; think about why people aren't using the existing high capacity transit and if a new one is built, would people use it?
- Think about serving Maryland via an east-west corridor that crosses the bridge.
- Long-term need an extension of Metrorail to Ft. Belvoir if indeed BRAC at Ft. Belvoir is a driver.

- ***Comments from City staff***

- There are areas in Old Town outside the walkshed of Metrorail that could be served by DASH and new transit.
- There are a lot of issues related to traffic.
- There is 55 million square feet of development pressure in the Alexandria/Arlington area.
- See need for increased transit service because of increasing traffic volumes along Route 1 and Washington Street.
- Taking right-of-way and widening will not be considered for Corridor A unless there is redevelopment.
- Corridor A Transitway is a sub-regional system, not a duplication of Metrorail; it is equivalent to an arterial versus a freeway in a road system.
- City needs to be able to offer a lot of travel options that are equivalent to automobiles.
- The high-capacity corridor plan evolved from about 30 public meeting as part of the Transportation Master Plan.
- There is very little Alexandria can do to cordon off traffic on Route 1.

- CWG comments regarding Corridor A

- ***Poul Hertel***
 - DASH unreliability is a problem
 - The schedule is provided only at certain points
 - People have to stand and wait up to 20 minutes for a trip that could be a 15 minute walk
 - Infrequency leads to low ridership
 - To make bus transit work, it needs to be reliable, fast, and convenient.
 - 33.5 million square feet of development is coming in the Route 1 corridor and Route 1 is already at saturation.
 - Real solution to traffic problem is to provide a reliable circulator system.
 - Consider an east-west circulator.

- Talk to Crystal City, Fairfax, and Maryland to convey that Alexandria is at its saturation point.
- Fairfax is developing Route 1 and Crystal City is developing; Alexandria cannot accept that traffic; think about undergrounding Patrick and Henry Streets.
- **Donna Fossum**
 - Figure out what we are doing and who doing it for.
 - Consider no build and a circulator for local people.
 - Figure out a way to protect neighborhood from through traffic.
 - Get people to transit we've already got via a circulator.
 - Try mixed flow transit system, but don't know if that will work.
- **Dak Hardwick**
 - What are the legal restrictions to do anything on a US Highway? Can we take a lane?
 - Response: has to be approved by VDOT along with concurrency by FHWA
 - This corridor is hard, almost impossible.
 - Feel sympathy for the people in these neighborhoods, but not ready to take anything off the table without more information.
 - Like the idea of a circulator that tourists pay for and residents ride for free.
- **Nancy Jennings**
 - Concerned about faulty methodology process.
 - Need an origin/destination study so as not to put buses where they're not needed.
 - Resent not having alignment options on Corridor C.
- **John Komoroske**
 - Like the process that is being used; the issues/needs are different for each corridor.
 - Corridor A is really hard, but we have the transportation infrastructure and just need to connect it up.
 - A circulator is a great idea to get people to Metrorail.
- **William Denton**
 - No Build option is the best with incorporation of a circulator.
 - Like the idea of splitting meetings between Corridors A and B.
- **Councilman Paul Smedburg**
 - If we proceed with a No Build alternative, need to look at other alternatives.
 - Factor King Street and Braddock Metrorail Stations into the options.
 - Each corridor has its own characteristics and challenges.

Conclusions

- Corridors A and B will have separate meetings
- The next meeting for Corridor B is August 18, 2011
- The next meeting for Corridor A is September 15, 2011
- There is a City Council public hearing for Corridor C on September 17, 2011
- Transportation and Planning Commissions will be providing input on the Corridor C recommendation at their September meetings.

Logistics and Next Steps

- The next meeting for Corridor B will be on Thursday, August 18, 2011. The next meeting for Corridor A will be on Thursday, September 15, 2011. The standing meeting is the third Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m.
- General comments are accepted on the project website.