

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 15, 2019

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: CHRISTOPHER ZIEMANN, DIVISION CHIEF, TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM # 5 – ALEXANDRIA TRANSIT VISION (ATV) PLAN

ISSUE: Consideration of network design policy questions for the final draft ATV network, which will be developed over the summer and presented to the public for additional feedback in fall 2019.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Transportation Commission weigh the staff recommendation and provide formal input to the ATC Board of Directors in response to each of the following policy questions:

1. What is the appropriate balance between “Ridership” -oriented service and “Coverage” -oriented service that should be targeted for the future Alexandria bus network?
2. What is the appropriate level of service growth that the ATV should target between now and 2030?
3. What is the appropriate level of service growth that should be targeted for FY 2021 and FY 2022 in the ATV’s Short-Term Implementation Plan?

City and DASH staff provide the following recommendations to the Transportation Commission for the final draft network based on feedback from stakeholders and staff evaluation:

1. The final draft ATV network should be designed with approximately 85 percent of the service hours dedicated to ridership-oriented goals, and approximately 15 percent of service hours allocated for Coverage-type services. Staff recommends that the 15 percent of service that is devoted to Coverage-oriented routes or services should focus on maintaining transit access for areas with large numbers of seniors and individuals with limited mobility. Implementation may include a future pilot program with flexible demand-response-style platforms that are operated with smaller, Americans with Disability Act (ADA) accessible service vehicles. The project team should also seek to expand all-day and off-peak service levels, while maintaining productive peak-oriented commuter routes to the greatest extent possible.
2. The long-term Alexandria Transit Vision Plan network should represent a 25 percent increase over current service hours by FY 2030, or an average increase of 2.5 percent per

year. By comparison, the two draft network concepts were developed based on a 20 percent increase over existing service levels. Staff believes that with this additional five percent increase, many of the community concerns relating to reductions to existing peak service and service in areas with high populations of senior and disabled persons can be addressed.

3. The short-term ATV implementation plan should represent an eight (8) percent increase over current service levels by FY 2022. This increase will allow the city to realize some of the immediate benefits from the new ATV network changes, while minimizing the negative impact on routes or services that may need to be reduced or reallocated.

BACKGROUND: The ATV Plan is a joint effort by the City of Alexandria and DASH to redesign the Alexandria bus network from scratch based on current and future transit demand and community transit priorities. DASH and City staff have just conducted the second round of ATV public engagement, which focused on two distinct draft bus network concepts that illustrate two different approaches for future network design. The two draft network concepts represent different points on the transit network design spectrum between “Ridership” and “Coverage” goals. The ATV project team will use the feedback received from the public, stakeholders and city officials to develop a final draft ATV bus network, which will be presented for public comment in fall 2019. The project website can be found at www.dashbus.com/transitvision/.

A second round of ATV public engagement was held during spring 2019 to receive input on the two concepts. At the April 17, 2019 Commission meeting, staff provided a summary of the public engagement that has been conducted to date for the ATV Plan and an overview on the decision-making process moving forward. Commissioners provided feedback to staff on potential areas of concern, which have been documented, by staff for consideration as part of the final network design process. Both the Transportation Commission and the ATC Board of Directors held a public hearing on the two network concepts at their respective April and May meetings.

The Transportation Commission is asked to provide recommendations to the ATC Board on the following three questions:

- 1. Ridership-Coverage Balance.** *What is the appropriate balance between Ridership-oriented service and Coverage-oriented service that should be targeted for the future Alexandria bus network?*

The Commission is asked to provide two percentage values – one representing the proportion of bus service that should pursue “Ridership” objectives, the other representing the proportion of service that is intended to provide “Coverage”. In addition to providing these percentages, the Commission is encouraged to provide staff policy guidance on specific areas of need or concern that should be addressed. Examples could include maintaining productive peak services to the greatest extent possible, or exploring flexible demand-response options for low-density residential areas that do not generate sufficient ridership to support fixed-route bus service.

2. Long-Term ATV Investment. *What is the appropriate level of service growth that should be assumed for the final Alexandria Transit Vision Plan in 2030?*

The Commission is asked to recommend a percentage by which the current amount of bus service hours provided in Alexandria should increase between now and 2030. For context, the two draft ATV network concepts both assumed that service would grow by 20 percent during that time period.

3. Short-Term ATV Implementation Plan Investment. *What is the appropriate level of service growth that should be assumed for the short-term implementation plan for the ATV in FY 2021 and FY 2022?*

The ATV scope includes a short-term implementation scenario, which is intended to represent a first step towards the final transit vision plan. The short-term scenario should be designed so that it may be realistically implemented within the next two years. The Commission is asked to recommend a percentage by which the current amount of bus service hours provided to Alexandria should increase between FY 2020, FY 2021 and FY 2022.

Based on the input from the Commission and guidance from the ATC Board at its June 12 meeting, the project team will prepare a draft transit network later this summer. The ATV Plan will involve one more round of civic engagement in the fall of 2019 to ensure that concerns and ideas from the Alexandria community are heard, recognized and incorporated into the development of a future transit network. Ultimately, the short and long-term investment amounts will need to be coordinated and balanced with other likely transit investments, including increased labor costs, and the acquisition of electric vehicles.

DISCUSSION: The staff recommendations provided above will allow for the development of a modern Alexandria bus network that aligns with travel demands and community goals while improving overall mobility and quality of life for residents, workers and visitors. The recommendations have been developed based on community feedback, stakeholder input, staff judgment, and guidance from DASH and City leadership.

Staff has received a great deal of specific route- and stop-level feedback from concerned residents and has been carefully reviewing the feedback so that these community needs will be incorporated into the final draft ATV network to the greatest extent possible.

Considering Ridership vs. Coverage.

“Ridership”-oriented service seeks to maximize ridership, increase farebox revenues and reduce subsidies, reduce congestion and promote sustainability by allocating more service to high-density, transit-friendly corridors with high demand for bus service. “Coverage” -oriented service provides geographic coverage to wider areas so that people in more areas have access to at least some bus service, but the service is often infrequent and less productive.

Staff is recommending that the future Alexandria bus network should be designed with 85 percent of its service hours dedicated to ridership goals, and the remaining 15 percent allocated for Coverage-style services. The two draft network concepts that were presented to the public – “Ridership” and “Coverage” – represent two different points on the Ridership-Coverage spectrum. The “Ridership” concept was designed such that 90 percent of service was oriented towards ridership goals, while the “Coverage” concept commits 70 percent of service towards increasing ridership. By comparison, the current Alexandria bus network is estimated to have only 50 percent of service dedicated to “Ridership”-oriented goals. A full discussion of these two draft networks and the expected outcomes of each is provided in the [“Concepts Report”](#), which can be found in the “Reports and Plans” section of the project website (www.dashbus.com/transitvision).

The two draft network concepts that were presented to the public elicited a wide range of reactions. The ATV stakeholder group – a group of community leaders intended to represent their respective organizations – supported the “Ridership” concept approach by a margin of 73 percent to 14 percent with 50 percent “strongly preferring” the “Ridership” concept. In terms of the general public, the 1,200 individuals who completed the most recent survey were asked to rate the two networks were somewhat split between the two concepts. The “Ridership” and “Coverage” concepts received average ratings of 3.7 and 3.5 (out of 5), respectively. A significant number of residents expressed concerns about the impact that the “Ridership” concept would have on seniors and individuals with limited mobility. Others were concerned by service reductions or eliminations that would result from the “Ridership” concept for residents of Central Alexandria, most notably Parkfairfax and North Ridge. The project team will be using these comments to inform some of the more granular design decisions for the final draft ATV network.

The staff recommendation of dedicating 85 percent of service hours to the “Ridership” goal is intended to provide a compromise between the two draft network concepts, while also recognizing that bus service must be productive in order to meet the city’s current and future needs. By increasing ridership to the extent possible, the City can efficiently accommodate the significant growth in population and jobs that is expected to occur over the next decade while mitigating traffic congestion, encouraging economic growth, promoting environmental sustainability and improving overall mobility and quality of life. These benefits are most fully realized with a bus network that seeks to maximize ridership, and are closely aligned with the goals of the FY2017-22 Alexandria Strategic Plan, the City’s 2008 Transportation Master Plan, the 2008 Eco-City Alexandria Charter, and the actions within the draft version of the Environmental Action Plan 2040.

The benefits of a “Ridership” concept also underscore the transformative impact that such a high-frequency network could have on the mobility of Alexandria’s minority and low-income populations, which have been under-represented during the outreach process to date. For example, the “Ridership” concept increases the percentage of the city’s low-income residents that have access to frequent, all-day transit service from its current level of just over 60 percent to nearly 90 percent. Likewise, access to frequent all-day transit service could increase from 60 percent of existing minority residents for the existing network, to 85 percent of minority residents under the “Ridership” concept. Staff expects that a future bus network developed

based on the 85 percent “Ridership” recommendation would be able to achieve similar results for these protected communities.

Lastly, the ATV project team does not take the concerns about the impact of the “Ridership” concept lightly and intends to incorporate changes into the final draft network that will address many of the issues that have been raised. Staff will continue to meet with community representatives over the next few months to understand their needs and how they might be impacted by the forthcoming final draft network plan.

Level of ATV Investment. Staff is recommending that the future ATV bus network should be designed with an eight percent increase in service hours over the next two years, and an optimal long-term increase of 25 percent by 2030 in order to serve demand and successfully balance the “Coverage” and “Ridership” goals. This recommendation equates to an average increase in service hours of four percent per year over the next two years, and 2.5 percent per year over the next decade. For reference, the city-adopted DASH service levels have increased by an average of 1.3 percent per year over the last three years.

The eight percent service growth that would be assumed for short-term ATV implementation in FY 2021-FY2022 would allow DASH and the City of Alexandria to implement near-term service change recommendations to maximize short-term benefits for the City and minimize the need for corresponding service reductions or reallocations. These short-term changes could help stem the ridership losses of the last five years and allow buses to gain a foothold in key development areas like Potomac Yard, the Van Dorn/Landmark Mall Corridor and the Eisenhower Corridor before the development and travel behaviors in those areas have fully matured.

For the long-term ATV investment, increasing service levels by 25 percent by 2030 will allow Alexandria to develop an extensive high-frequency bus network with buses running every 15 minutes or better, all-day, seven days per week. With a 25 percent increase in service hours (or five percent more than was assumed in each of the two draft network concepts), the project team can better address specific needs that are identified by the Transportation Commission or ATC Board of Directors such as peak service improvements and additional mobility options for seniors and individuals with limited mobility.

It is important to note that while the ATC Board will make a recommendation to the Alexandria City Council on the level of ATV investment, the Council will ultimately be responsible for approving the city budget as part of the annual budget process. Furthermore, the cost impact of the ongoing labor negotiations with DASH operators will also impact the ultimate service costs that will be included in future annual operating budgets.