

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 15, 2019
TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
FROM: HILLARY ORR, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION
SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM # 5 – BUS TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

ISSUE: Consideration of the Bus Transformation Strategy and recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Transportation Commission provide an endorsement of the Bus Transformation Strategy as released on September 5, 2019.

BACKGROUND: The Bus Transformation Project team is seeking support and buy-in from Commissions, Boards, and/or Councils from all WMATA jurisdictions. As the City's Transportation Commission has received updates throughout the process, support for the strategy is non-binding to the City, and as many of our peers are seeking endorsement from their comparable Commissions, staff invited the Bus Transformation Project Team to present to the Transportation Commission without the need for City Council action.

The Bus Transformation Project Team has provided the following docket information:

Buses are an integral part of the National Capital Region's transportation system and carry over 620,000 trips per day over a network that reaches 81 percent of the region's residents. The region's nine local bus providers (ART, CUE, DASH, DC Circulator, Fairfax Connector, Metrobus, Loudoun County Transit, Ride On, and TheBus) affordably connect residents to jobs, schools, and other aspects of daily life. However, traffic is increasing, and bus speeds are decreasing, leading to longer travel times and unreliability in getting to a destination. Customer expectations have changed and there is increased competition for fewer passengers. Government budgets are under pressure to do more with less. Bus's market share is eroding as competition becomes more plentiful and, in some cases, more affordable. The allure of new technology, such as autonomous cars, distracts from the fact that driverless cars and transportation network companies (TNCs), such as Uber and Lyft, will not solve the region's mobility problem without defying the laws of physics and geometry. Empirical research points to the likelihood that the new options will make current problems worse.

The [Bus Transformation Strategy](#) was released on September 5, 2019, after incorporating comments gathered in the spring and summer of 2019 from the general public, project

stakeholders, local jurisdictions, regional transportation boards, and the WMATA Board. The Strategy has four key recommendations:

- Frequent and convenient bus service;
- Bus priority on roadways;
- Customer experience; and a
- Task Force to implement the Strategy.

Within the key recommendations, a set of 26 more specific recommendations were established. A [Bus Transformation Strategy Executive Summary](#) is also available.

A multi-year [Action Plan](#) was developed to prioritize and arrange the Strategy's recommendations to ensure maximum impact. The milestones and duration to implement each recommendation is based on each recommendation's transformational potential and the challenges involved in implementation. The Action Plan incorporated feedback from the project's Technical Team and Strategy Advisory Panel, as well as from a survey of bus providers and departments of transportation to gather progress to date. An [Action Plan Executive Summary](#) is also available.

DISCUSSION: On behalf of the region, WMATA, along with jurisdictional partners and the region's local bus providers, launched the Bus Transformation Project in September 2018. Bus providers and the cities, counties, and states that own and operate the region's roadways must coordinate and collaborate to transform the bus system into a system that meets changing customer needs, keeps up with changing technology, and maintains a sustainable cost structure. The Bus Transformation Project has taken a broad view of 'bus' to include any vehicle that transports many riders, makes efficient use of roadways, and is considered a local service, as distinct from commuter buses.

The outcome of the [Bus Transformation Project](#) is both the Strategy, which provides the direction for the regional bus system, and a multi-year Action Plan, which outlines the specific implementation steps to advance the recommendations. The vision is that "Bus will be the mode of choice on the region's roads by 2030, serving as the backbone of a strong and inclusive regional mobility system." Goals include regional connectivity, rider experience, financial stewardship, sustainable economic health and access to opportunity, and equity.

Public and stakeholder engagement has been integral since the project's launch. The project was led by the Executive Steering Committee (ESC), with additional stakeholder groups including a Strategic Advisory Panel, Technical Team, and the WMATA Leadership Team. The Strategy Advisory Panel was comprised of transit agencies, advocates, community organizations, and riders. The Technical Team was comprised of subject matter experts from Metro, local and state departments of transportation, and local bus providers.

A summary of stakeholder engagement since the project began in 2018 includes:

- 8,800+ public survey responses
- 23 Executive Steering Committee meetings
- 16 Technical Team meetings

- 8 Strategy Advisory Panel meetings
- 14 WMATA Leadership Team briefings
- 13 Metrobus operator listening sessions
- 45 External project briefings
- 33 Pop-up events
- 3 Public Open House events
- 4 Focus Groups
- 140 participants in September 2018 Kickoff Summit
- 285 Social media posts
- 312,000 people reached via social media

The Strategy sets an ambitious path forward and includes:

1. Provide frequent and convenient bus service that connects communities and promotes housing affordability, regional equity, and economic growth.
2. Give buses priority on roadways to efficiently move people quickly and reliably.
3. Create an excellent customer experience to retain and increase ridership.
4. Empower a publicly appointed task force to transform bus and lead the implementation of a truly integrated regional system.

Implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan could include the following outcomes:

- Stabilizing or growing ridership by 1%-3% through a bus network redesign, as realized in Houston, Austin, and Columbus;
- Reducing operating costs (including recouping much of the \$30M that Metrobus loses annually to congestion) and increasing ridership by up to 7% by giving buses priority and enforcing it on the region's roads;
- Reducing bus lane violation by 85% through automated enforcement, as seen in London;
- Increasing ridership by 2% by providing accurate real-time information, as observed in San Francisco, New York, and Chicago data; and
- Reducing security incidents logged by the control center by 30% and reducing customer complaints by 50% with the addition of on-board CCTV footage visible to customers.

Some specific examples of actions for the jurisdictions and local transit agencies—including Alexandria and the Alexandria Transit Company—include: general coordination, sharing data, adjusting fare policies (providing reduced fare options for low-income riders, eliminating the transfer discount between bus and rail, incorporating DASH into regional passes), and prioritizing transit on congested streets. Some actions can be led by the City, while others will require partnering with other local and regional entities, including WMATA, MWCOG, VDOT, and NVTC.