

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: DECEMBER 16, 2020

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: HILLARY ORR, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM #5 – I-395/95 COMMUTER CHOICE GRANT PROGRAM FUNDING REQUEST

ISSUE: Consideration of the recommended DASH/City of Alexandria projects for the FY 2022 – FY 2023 I-395/95 Commuter Choice Grant Program.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Transportation Commission provide an endorsement to City Council for approval of the two proposed I-395/95 Commuter Choice projects at their January 12, 2020 legislative session. The “DASH West End-Pentagon Bus Service Enhancements (Line 35)” at a two-year cost of up to \$6,810,000, and the “DASH West End-Potomac Yard” Bus Service Enhancements (Line 36)” with a two-year cost of up to \$4,180,000.

BACKGROUND: The purpose of the I-395/95 Commuter Choice program is to identify and provide funding support for transportation projects that maximize person throughput in the corridor and improve overall mobility options. The program is managed by the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) and the Potomac Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC), which oversee the distribution of \$15 million in annual toll revenues.

For the inaugural FY 2020 - FY2021 I-395/95 Commuter Choice program, DASH and the City of Alexandria were awarded funding for two service enhancement projects –the AT-1 Plus (Van Dorn Metro/Seminary Plaza) and the AT-9 (Mark Center/Potomac Yard). Both service expansions were implemented in October 2019. As a result, monthly ridership on the AT-1 Plus and AT-9 increased by 25 percent and 45 percent respectively during the first five months of service from the same period during the previous year. By comparison, total monthly boardings on all other DASH routes were down by over five percent during the same period. Although transit ridership has fallen dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, these two routes have experienced only modest declines. For example, average weekend boardings in the first quarter of FY 2021 increased for both routes compared to the same period in FY 2020.

Project applications are due January 31, 2021. After the applications are submitted, NVTC and PRTC will evaluate projects and provide recommendations to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB). A public comment period will occur in April and/or May, with the final proposed program adopted in June 2021.

DISCUSSION: City and DASH staff, as well as the Alexandria Transit Company Board of Directors recommend applying for funding for two projects to enhance DASH bus service through the I-395/95

Commuter Choice Grant Program (Round Two) during the FY 2022 – FY 2023 cycle. The two recommended projects will allow DASH to implement two initial recommendations of the 2022 Alexandria Transit Vision (ATV) Plan with the service levels the Plan calls for.

As part of the implementation of the ATV or “New DASH Network”, two new routes, Lines 35 and 36, will replace the current DASH routes that are receiving I-395/95 Commuter Choice funding (AT-1 Plus and AT-9) and operate on similar alignments. The funding request for this round would be significantly larger than the service enhancements that were requested in the previous grant cycle. The goal of the additional service is to allow the new routes to operate every 15 minutes or better, all-day, seven days per week to maximize their usefulness and build upon ongoing ridership growth in these transit-friendly corridors. Without this funding, the new routes would operate much less frequently with shorter operating spans, which would not be nearly as useful to existing and potential riders. DASH and City staff view this increased service as serving both the goals of both equity and economic recovery by strengthening connections for low-income populations on the West End and Arlandria to activity and employment centers.

Project # 1 - “DASH West End – Pentagon Bus Service Enhancements (Line 35)”

This proposed top priority project would provide major weekday, Saturday, and Sunday service enhancements for the new DASH “Line 35,” which will replace and extend the existing AT-1 Plus DASH route in West Alexandria. Like the existing AT-1 Plus, Line 35 will operate from Van Dorn Metro to Mark Center and Southern Towers via Landmark Mall and Beauregard Street, but also extend to the Pentagon via Park Center and Interstate 395 as a key regional connection for West Alexandria (Attachment 1). The proposed increases in service frequency would allow the route to operate every 10 minutes all-day on weekdays and every 15 minutes all day on weekends. This would introduce frequent, all-day service on this corridor, seven days per week, and further the development of this route as precursors to the eventual West End Transitway service.

This project is recommended as the top priority because it would continue to build on the pre-pandemic AT-1 Plus ridership increases along the planned West End Transitway corridor, serve as a potential future source of operations funding for the transitway, and allow DASH to implement the full service plan for Line 35 as identified by the ATV.

A summary of the project costs is included below. As a result of the major increases in service levels set forth for this corridor in the 2022 Alexandria Transit Vision Plan, the number of net annual revenue hours requested for this grant cycle would equal more than twice the number that were requested for the AT-1 Plus during the inaugural grant program.

Table 1 - Cost Summary for West End-Pentagon Service Enhancements (“Line 35”)

Category/Cost	FY22	FY23	Total
Operating Costs (Net)	\$3,310,000	\$3,310,000	\$6,620,000
Capital Costs			
TSP Upgrades	\$20,000	\$0	\$20,000
Bus Stop Improvements	\$80,000	\$0	\$80,000
Real-Time Info Displays	\$40,000	\$0	\$40,000
Marketing/Outreach	\$40,000	\$0	\$40,000
5% Capital Contingency	\$10,000	\$0	\$10,000
Total Capital Costs	\$190,000	\$0	\$190,000
Total Project Costs	\$3,500,000	\$3,310,000	\$6,810,000

Project # 2 - “West End-Potomac Yard Bus Service Enhancements (“Line 36”)

This second-priority project proposes weekday peak and off peak, Saturday, and Sunday service enhancements for the new Line 36 that connects Mark Center, Shirlington, Arlandria and the future Potomac Yard Metro Station. As shown in the attached map, the new Line 36 replaces the existing AT-9 DASH route along a similar route alignment with major service increases to make it a frequent, all-day route, seven days per week, as outlined by the 2022 Alexandria Transit Vision Plan. The proposed service enhancements will increase service along this corridor so that it runs every 15 minutes, all-day, seven days each week, which represents a substantial increase over the 20-30 minute headways currently provided by the AT-9.

The AT-9, which is being replaced by Line 36, is the second of two DASH routes currently receiving FY 2020 – FY 2021 I-395 Commuter Choice funding for service enhancements. In the five months following the implementation of the service enhancements, the AT-9 has seen a 45 percent increase in total monthly ridership as compared to FY 2019. This represents the greatest ridership increase of any DASH route over that period.

A summary of the project costs is included below. As a result of the major increases in service levels set forth for this corridor in the 2022 Alexandria Transit Vision Plan, the number of net annual revenue hours requested for this grant cycle is roughly three times the number of revenue hours that were requested for the AT-9 during the inaugural grant program.

Table 2 - Cost Summary for West End-Potomac Yard Enhancements (“Line 36”)

Category/Cost	FY22	FY23	Total
Operating Costs (Net)	\$2,030,000	\$2,030,000	\$4,060,000
Capital Costs			
Bus Stop Improvements	\$60,000	\$0	\$60,000
Real-Time Info Displays	\$30,000	\$0	\$30,000
Marketing/Outreach	\$20,000	\$0	\$20,000
5% Capital Contingency	\$10,000	\$0	\$10,000
Total Capital Costs	\$120,000	\$0	\$120,000
Total Project Costs	\$2,150,000	\$2,030,000	\$4,180,000

FISCAL IMPACT:

The City is applying for a total of \$11 million in grant funding, and there are no fiscal impacts associated with the application or award of I-395/99 funds. The funding awarded can be scaled down based on the routes' scoring and assessment, and City staff believe it is likely that NVTC will grant some portion, if not all, of the proposed applications. Although should the City not receive any funding through this program, the frequency of bus service on these routes and some service areas would be reduced to baseline levels of service included in the FY22 operating budget. Consistent with a revert to all-day 30-minute headways on Line 36, a reduced service on Line 35 during the day (10-15 minute headways to 15-20 minute headways), and reduced trips to the Pentagon.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1: “Line 35” Map (Van Dorn Metro to Pentagon via Mark Center)
- Attachment 2: “Line 36” Map (Mark Center to Potomac Yard via Shirlington)
- Attachment 3: DRAFT Endorsement Letter to Council