

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 19, 2020

TO: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: HILLARY ORR, DEPUTY DIRECTOR T&ES

SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM 6 - PROPOSED APPLICATION TO THE
TRANSPORATION-LAND USE CONNECTIONS PROGRAM

ISSUE: Transportation Commission consideration of an application for the Transportation-Land Use Connections (TLC) program of the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) to analyze the feasibility and impact of a low-income fare pass program or to identify transit bottlenecks throughout the City in coordination with the Alexandria Transit Company (DASH) and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA).

RECOMMENDATION: That the Transportation Commission endorse the City's application to the TLC Program.

BACKGROUND: The TLC Program provides short-term consultant services to local jurisdictions for small planning projects that promote mixed-use, walkable communities and support a variety of transportation alternatives. The program provides consultant assistance of \$30,000 to \$60,000 for planning projects. If funded, project award would occur in Fall 2020, and project duration typically takes six months. Applications to the FY 2021 TLC program are due March 9, 2020.

DISCUSSION: The City proposes to apply for one of the two potential projects below:

- 1) **Option 1: Low-Income Fare Pass Assessment:** This option would analyze the feasibility and impact of a low-income fare pass program in coordination with the Alexandria Transit Company (DASH) and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). The analysis would consider what a program in Alexandria could look like (i.e. who would receive a discounted fare, the actual discount, any restrictions on hours of service, applicable on DASH and WMATA or just DASH, etc.), the impact on ridership, how the program could be implemented, the costs to the City and how that impacts the City's subsidy to WMATA, and consistency with the Alexandria Transit Vision Plan and the Bus Transformation Project. This analysis will enable the City to make a more informed decision when considering any changes to the DASH fare structure.

Currently, the District of Columbia and WMATA are conducting a similar study which includes randomized evaluation of free and discounted transit fares. The D.C. study will consider the impact of cost on low-income residents' public transit use and overall well-being. The findings may inform initiatives that make public transit more accessible to low-income residents.

The Virginia General Assembly is currently debating a potential state program to provide free or reduced transit for low-income riders as part of HB1414. If this program passes, then this application will no longer be needed, and staff would apply for the project described in Option 2.

- 2) Option 2: Transit Bottleneck Identification: This option would analyze and identify transit bottlenecks in the City in coordination with DASH and WMATA. This analysis would use DASH and WMATA bus speed data and other available sources to identify intersections, corridors, street segments, etc. that slow bus service and/or reduce bus service reliability. This effort would also use ridership data and recommendations from the Alexandria Transit Vision Plan (ATV) to prioritize projects or identify future analysis needed to implement the ATV. This effort is consistent with the goals of the ATV and the Bus Transformation Project to prioritize bus service and improve speed and reliability.

Bus service is an essential transportation option for Alexandrians, especially for low-income residents, and to access jobs and services. Reliability is especially important for low-paying jobs and service jobs, for which employees do not have the option of arriving late. With faster and more reliable service, the bus would be a more attractive option for all travelers, potentially leading to ridership increases. In addition, by reducing bottlenecks in the bus system, this could lead to reduced transit costs. These all have the potential to reduce City transit subsidies. The outcome of this study could be used when considered funding decisions in relation to other future transit initiatives.