



Ad Hoc Motorcoach Task Force

Meeting Minutes
14 July 2008
City Hall, Room 2000

Attendees

Task Force Members: Rob Aronson, Rich Baier (chair), Stephanie Brown, Bert Ely, Mayor William D. Euille, Lt. Dianne Gittins (Alexandria Police Department for Chief David Baker), Charlotte Hall, Hubert Herre, Valerie Ianieri, Ellen Stanton, Sarita Schotta, Councilman Paul Smedberg, Denielle Vendetti, Tara Zimmnick-Calico, Yon Lambert (staff), Lorraine Lloyd (staff), United Motorcoach Association President/CEO Victor S. Parra.

Guests: Chuck Andrews (WorldStrides), Bernard Caton (City of Alexandria Legislative Director), Carolyn Cooper, Julien Locault, Van Van Fleet, Ronald Cooper, Jeff Bodnar, Elizabeth Baldwin, Louis Marcus, Betty Ward, Jeff Hernholm, Wellington Watts, Andrea Stowers, Danielle Westphal, Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet.

Below is a summary of the City of Alexandria's Ad Hoc Motorcoach Task Force meeting conducted on 14 July 2008.

Executive Summary: The primary meeting topics included a review of legislative issues, a presentation by United Motorcoach Association President/CEO Victor S. Parra and review of future meeting topics. The meeting began at 7:06 pm and concluded at 9 pm.

1. Welcome & Introductions

Mr. Baier welcomed everyone to the Motorcoach Task Force meeting and reviewed the topics of the evening.

2. Review Minutes

Mr. Baier reviewed the minutes of the 23 June meeting and asked for comments. There were no comments and the minutes were unanimously approved.

3. Legislative Issues

Mr. Baier introduced Bernard Caton to provide the Task Force with a refresher on the City's legislative process. Mr. Caton said that the last time he could meet with the Task Force would be August 11 and explained that a proposal, if one were available, would need to be solidified by late August. Mr. Caton reminded the group that if it were seeking some broad authority, it could be very difficult to get through the General Assembly.



Mr. Caton said a proposal would require consensus from the Task Force. He encouraged the Task Force to refrain from going to the General Assembly to ask for one type of authority with the intent of modifying it later. Mayor Euille reminded the group that the City's legislative process has three parts: (1) a recommendation by the Task Force, (2) public hearing with the proposal subject to adoption/approval by City Council and (3) formal inclusion in the City's legislative package with sponsorship by a Delegate or Senator.

Mr. Caton closed with a final review of the City's legislative process. He provided the following general dates:

- Task Force proposal (if available) by early September
- Informal meeting between City's legislative subcommittee and the City's legislative delegation in late September
- Formal memo and proposal for City Council in time for the Council's 2nd legislative meeting in October
- Public hearing in November
- Formal approval by City Council in November
- If approved, inclusion in the City's formal legislative package for the General Assembly by January

Ms. Hall asked what the Task Force's plan was. Mr. Baier said the Task Force had agreed to review Legislative Issues as a group at each meeting and asked if others had comments to add.

Ms. Vendetti said she felt the group was still split on this issue.

Mr. Ely said there were some on the Task Force who feel that the key problem in Old Town is the size of the buses and that the City should seek legislative authority from the General Assembly to regulate the size of the buses.

Mr. Aronson said he wanted to clarify that the Task Force could seek authority to regulate (as opposed to regulating) and asked whether anyone on the Task Force felt that the City should not have such authority.

Ms. Brown said the Task Force had not had time or addressed anything that is solutions based. Ms. Brown said the Task Force had not established parameters for what it would do with regulatory authority nor talked about what kind of authority it was seeking. Ms. Brown said Mr. Caton had now twice explained that any request would need to be specific and she believed that Council would also require any request to be specific. She said the time period between now and August 11 would be best spent defining the problem.



Mayor Eulle said the Legislative Issues review was included on the agenda to be sure the process is clear. He said there is nothing wrong with having flexibility or suggesting items for consideration because between the work of the Task Force, public hearings and adoption the items may fall off the radar screen.

Mr. Ely said Mr. Caton had outlined a clear deadline and unless a proposal is ready by August 11 the Task Force may have missed its opportunity for this year.

Mr. Smedberg said there are numerous examples of regulatory authority the Council has but does not use and there may be an opportunity to seek some authority that it reserves for use at a later date. Mr. Smedberg also said that he had personally experienced frustration with motorcoaches and that problems do exist.

Ms. Brown said that a good process would identify problems and how to solve them. She said once the Task Force identifies problems it would speed the process of proposing solutions. She said the tourism industry is anxious about bringing solutions forward first and would want to be sure that any solutions address what has been clearly identified as a problem.

Mr. Smedberg said the regulatory options had been put on the table because the Task Force may those tools to address some issues.

Mayor Eulle said he understood the Task Force had chosen not to establish a Legislative Subcommittee but that there still may be a need to seek authority from the Legislature to do what it needs to do. He suggested that the Task Force come up with a proposal which it could fine tune.

Mr. Smedberg said the Task Force needed to work collaboratively to effectively manage what could be an increase in tour bus traffic, given the historic and enforcement constraints in place.

Mr. Ely asked whether it would be appropriate for members of the Task Force to work together on a proposal. Mr. Baier reminded the group that no more than two members of the Task Force could work together on a proposal because of FOIA and Sunshine Laws.

Mr. Herre said the Task Force had agreed at previous meetings that these issues should not be addressed in subcommittee and that everyone should be involved in the discussion.

Mayor Eulle said that the July 28th meeting should be used to bring items to the table to work on this issue.



Ms. Hall said that many members of the Task Force represent other organizations and that these organizations' input would be needed. She asked whether the City Council planned to go forward with a proposal regardless of whether it had Task Force support. Mayor Euille said to his knowledge there was no plan by Council to ask for any authority and that was the reason the City Manager had established a Task Force.

Ms. Hall said the Task Force needed more time to clarify problems and solutions.

Mr. Aronson said the City could acquire authority to regulate but not use it.

Ms. Hall asked what the City would regulate.

Ms. Stanton said there are concerns about asking for regulatory authority because at the previous meeting not everyone knew where the parking locations were. It is possible the City is not adequately enforcing or communicating existing rules and regulations.

Mayor Euille said that it was part of the Task Force charge to find out where buses go after they drop off and that the group needed to focus on solutions. He suggested that the next meeting be used to articulate problems and potential solutions.

Ms. Vendetti said the Task Force needed to focus on solutions and not Legislative issues.

Mr. Baier said that the July 28th meeting would be used to define the problem and outline tools that may provide solutions. He encouraged members to provide staff with problems and tools to arrive at solutions.

Ms. Zimnick-Calico said that this approach would allow Task Force members to communicate these issues with their constituencies.

Mr. Ely asked whether the Task Force should provide staff with problems and solutions.

Ms. Brown said that some of the groups represented on the Task Force do not meet until August and that for solutions to have broad-based support, they would need time to clarify and discuss these concepts.



Mr. Baier said that staff would create a matrix for use on July 28th that would be used to identify problems and solutions. He said the next meeting would be devoted to that issue.

Ms. Zimmick-Calico asked whether data would be available to help clarify problems.

Mr. Baier said that data may not be available for each issue but that this would not necessarily preclude the issue from being included for consideration. He reiterated that the meeting on the 28th would be dedicated to formulation of a matrix to articulate problems, tools and short-term or long-term solutions.

4 and 5. Presentation: Perspectives on Tourism, United Motorcoach Association (Victor S. Parra)

Mr. Parra began by thanking the Task Force for the invitation to speak and told the group that the UMA is located in Alexandria on South West Street. He told the Task Force that the UMA has no tolerance for illegal activity and encouraged the City to ticket motorcoaches that are breaking the law.

Mr. Parra said that the limit on motorcoach size is 45 feet long and 102 inches in width. He said the limit had been in place for at least 20 years and that motorcoaches are not getting bigger.

Mr. Parra addressed the UMA/ABA challenge to the District of Columbia regarding Charter Bus Permit Fees and said the UMA would likely appeal the case. However, he said the case may or may not be relevant to Alexandria because DC carries statehood status. The UMA is considering a challenge on the basis that the fees violate the commerce clause.

The issue of emissions is a global issue and Mr. Parra provided a handout with a proposed rule by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection that he felt addressed the issue. The purpose and effect of the new rule is to reduce emissions from unnecessary, long-duration diesel engine idling.

A task force member asked whether there had been localities that restrict the size of buses. Mr. Parra said there are certain areas that had limited the size of buses but he was not aware of any challenges to individual regulations.

Mr. Parra said the height of tour buses is limited to 13' 2" and that double-decker buses have low ceilings.



A task force member asked whether the Florida EPA rule would be adopted at the federal level. Mr. Parra said that he understood the federal government was reviewing similar rules but that there were no proposals.

Ms. Schotta asked to what extent routes are chosen by drivers or whether operators plan routes. Mr. Parra said typically tour operators plan routes. Ms. Hall said that sometime drivers alter routes. Ms. Brown said that many operators are at corporate locations and may not actually be on the trip.

Mr. Baier asked whether drivers are required to pay traffic tickets. Mr. Parra said that it depends on the company policy.

Mr. Ely asked about maximum weight per axle. Mr. Parra said that weight is federally regulated and he did not know an answer off the top of his head. Mr. Parra said buses are typically friendlier to road surfaces than trucks because the frame is monochoque constructed and discussed four major bus manufacturers.

Mr. Smedberg said many buses are too large to make turns at intersections. Mr. Baier asked whether it was possible to provide the minimum turning radius for the most conservative bus. An answer was not available.

Mr. Ely asked about damage to utilities and underground infrastructure by trucks and buses. Mr. Baier said that buses generally have less impact than trucks. A study for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge based on stress gauges and photographic evidence found that the primary issue was the "terminal serviceability" life of the pavement and not impacts on underground utilities or on neighboring structures.

Ms. Schotta said many intersections are problematic because cars park too close to the intersection and that this may be addressed by enforcement.

Ms. Stanton asked if the Association provided guidance on designated routes, particularly in mid-sized cities with historic significance. Mr. Parra said that the UMA had not done anything with broad-based applicability because every area is unique. Ms. Lloyd said that the American Bus Association has made some literature available and Mr. Parra confirmed the UMA willingness to provide communications assistance in "Bus and Motorcoach News."

Mr. Smedberg asked about the UMA membership. Mr. Parra said that its membership now exceeded 900 companies and that many of its members are small businesses, not large companies.

Mayor Euille asked whether there were logistical rules of thumb or industry standards relative to drop-off areas. Mr. Parra said that there is no standard but that time was a larger issue than distance.



Ms. Schotta asked what portion of the industry the UMA represents. Mr. Parra said there are roughly 3,000 registered motorcoach operators and those who do not belong are often one- and two-bus operators. He said the UMA represents approximately 75 percent of the industry. Mr. Parra is not aware of any bus operator associations.

Mr. Ely asked if there were different sizes of buses based on seating maximums. Mr. Parra said that there are many different manufacturers and perhaps a dozen more companies that make smaller buses.

Mr. Smedberg asked if there were examples of other communities that had done a good job in dealing with motorcoach issues and whether the UMA had played a role in those processes. Mr. Parra said that Florida had addressed the issue of idling in a productive manner. New York raised idling concerns and the UMA was not satisfied with its solution. Mr. Parra said that in most communities the two major concerns are parking and boarding (drop-off areas).

Ms. Stanton asked to what degree a voluntary plan would work. Mr. Parra said that any plan developed by this group would be supported by the UMA.

A task force member asked about directional signage. Mr. Parra said directional signage is vital. Mr. Parra said designated routes may make sense depending on conditions and that many buses use GPS for navigational purposes.

Mr. Ely asked whether the notion of limits on tourism capacity comes up in historic areas. Mr. Parra said Charleston has constraints but that they have never said "we don't want anymore" and he had not heard that before.

Mr. Baier asked whether Mr. Parra's personal and professional background provided any insight as to certain streets to avoid in Alexandria. Mr. Parra said cobblestone streets were an obvious choice.

Mr. Parra introduced Mr. Chuck Andrews, the operations coordinator for WorldStrides which he said is the largest student travel company in the world. The company provides trips for between 500,000 and 600,000 students per year. He provided the following figures for WorldStrides in Alexandria: Between April 1 and July 1, 2008, the company booked over 7,000 hotel rooms in the City, brought 1,124 buses into the City and fed 53,396 people.

Mr. Andrews said the company supported the Task Force efforts and designated routes in particular. The company produces map books for its drivers which it includes on its 4,753 buses annually. The company is headquartered in Charlottesville, Virginia.



Mayor Euille asked whether cities use on-the-street monitors to provide additional guidance for buses. Mr. Andrews said that generally cities use local police for enforcement.

Mr. Andrews addressed the issue of jitneys generally and specifically the use of jitneys at Capitol Hill. He said Capitol Hill is beginning to adjust its policies because of logistical problems and that jitneys may not provide the service planners expected. There may also be problems with respect to ADA issues.

Mr. Bodnar (guest) encouraged the City to strike a balance that addressed designated routes and parking. He said a jitney service would be logistically difficult and that any parking area would need facilities for drivers. If the Task Force recommended designated routes, the routes would get communicated to drivers.

Mr. Parra said that Atlantic City may provide a good study area for Alexandria because the bus issue is a major one.

Ms. Brown provided a handout "Motor Coach Volume at Mount Vernon" showing that in peak season (May) the destination averages 83 buses per day and that in July it averages 13. Ms. Brown also said that from a business perspective the parking at the Masonic Memorial does not work. She said Alexandria's tourism dynamic is based on proximity to DC and it is unlike Charleston. Ms. Brown said there needs to be some structured approach to fact finding so that the solution the Task Force finds addresses the problem.

6. Meeting Topic Schedule

The Task Force agreed to focus on a discussion of problems and potential solutions at its July 28 meeting. The August 11 meeting is currently reserved for a guest from Charleston, SC.

7. Public Comment

The Task Force heard questions and concerns regarding the following issues:

- a) Mr. Van Van Fleet said that the issue of Ghost Tours did not come up during his tenure as President of the Old Town Civic Association. Mr. Van Fleet reviewed a list of OTCA Guidance to its Task Force representatives which has been provided to the Task Force previously.
- b) Ms. Julie Crenshaw Van Fleet said attention needs to be given to buses coming in trains, like 5 or 6 buses together. While the drivers of trains of buses she has seen try to make decisions for unloading/loading that are the least disruptive, the City could consider this a problem that they should help in solving.
- c) Mr. Wellington Watts said that certain spots in the City are adequate and can accommodate 20-30 buses.
- d) Mr. Poul Hertel said that the Task Force needed to spend time defining the problem.

APPROVED as amended on August 11, 2008



Mr. Aronson asked about permitting on the George Washington Memorial Parkway and whether they were free. Ms. Brown said the National Park Service instituted \$50 fees and raised the issue initially to address parking at the Potowmack Landing site and in other locations where the park service had specific infrastructure issues.

There being no further comment, the Task Force adjourned.