Focus Groups
Round 1 Summary
January 2020
Overview of Content

- Overview and Context of Focus Groups
- Factors Influencing Travel Choices by Groups
- Takeaways from Group Discussions by Topic Area
  - Mobility Options
  - Streets
- Round 1 Lessons Learned

What mobility strategies will most impact your life for the better?
Focus Group Purpose

• Community-generated ideas from a diverse audience
• Ideas will be considered in context of other inputs and against the AMP Vision and Guiding Principles
• Recognition that these are a way to have an in-depth discussion, but may not be fully representative of the community
• A subset will be shared in upcoming citywide community engagement events to get broader feedback

Discussion Topics
• Round 1: Streets and Mobility Options (Completed February/March 2020)
• Round 2: Transit and Parking and Curbside Management (Spring 2020)
AMP Focus Groups – Round 1

January 2020
• AMPAC Meeting

February/March 2020
• In-Person meetings grouped by stage of life
  ▪ 6 Meetings
    ✓ 9 group discussions
    ✓ 72 in-person total participants

• Online Discussion
  ▪ 3 Online Groups
  ▪ 43 Online Participants
AMP Advisory Committee (AMPAC)

• Reviewed preliminary material and participated in focus group discussion
• Provided feedback in preparation for outreach to community
• Key Takeaways
  ▪ Importance of regional coordination
  ▪ Ensure that equity is considered in decision making (i.e. paving schedule)
  ▪ Improving the appeal of transit for professionals
  ▪ Consider more than just the peak hour congestion
  ▪ Weave best practices into the plan document chapters
  ▪ Metro access is major concern for West End communities
  ▪ How do we address trip chaining and different needs for each trip?
  ▪ Need to incorporate concerns from the driver perspective that may not be vocal on the AMPAC
Each age group had slightly different mobility considerations, but many broader themes were largely consistent:

- Widespread concerns about safety and congestion
- Diverging approaches to addressing cut-through traffic
- Importance of regional coordination
- Consideration of equity and disparate needs in different parts of the City
- Need for better transit
- Importance of networks: bike, bus, auto
- Lack of awareness of existing tools and processes
Participants were asked what factors influenced their travel choices to jumpstart the conversation, help us understand varying mobility needs and priorities, and get a basic understanding of personal mobility in each group.
Factors Influencing Travel Choices

Ages 56-74

- Unsafe brick pavement or lack of sidewalks prevents walking
- Drive due to time that transit takes, need to make multiple stops, or carrying a load or shopping bags
- Safety concerns getting home late on transit
- Avoids peak periods and school bus pick-up/drop off times
Factors Influencing Travel Choices

Ages 41-55

• Destinations vary throughout region, need car
• Buses take too long and not a convenient option

Ages 18-40

• Chose to live near Metro
• Drive due to lengthy transit travel time and reliability of car
• Availability of car sharing/ridesharing and micro-transit options
Factors Influencing Travel Choices

T.C. Williams High School, Leadership Class - Ages 16-18

• Strong desire for license for independence
• Drive and carpool to school with classmates
• DASH bus primarily when free
• Scooters when available, but can get costly
Factors Influencing Travel Choices (online)

Persons with Disabilities or Limited Mobility

- Choices based on weather, distance
- Safety concerns when walking - Related to infrastructure (i.e. brick sidewalks)

Working Parents

- Safe bike routes and bike amenities at destination
- Carrying packages or kids – More likely to drive
- Walking/Metro - Avoid driving during peak hours
- Safety while traveling with younger kids

Community Champions / Business Community - Factors For Individuals They Serve

- Proximity to metro and availability of bus service
- Ownership or access to personal vehicle
- Rideshare used late at night when transit is less frequent
Factors Influencing Travel Choices

T.C. Williams High School, Liberty Promise (In Spanish) - Ages 18-25

• Overcrowding on school bus makes DASH an appealing choice
• Traffic congestion impacts transit reliability
• Limited access to personal vehicle
• Credit card payment option limits bikeshare usage - Desire alternative payment options
Takeaways From Group Discussions
Mobility Options: Summary of Themes Discussed by Group

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<tr>
<th>Overview of Discussion</th>
<th>Generally Support</th>
<th>Opinions on Both Sides</th>
<th>Generally Did Not Support</th>
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<td>Major Topic of Discussion</td>
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<th>Reoccurring Themes</th>
<th>Support for More/Better Travel Choices</th>
<th>Importance of Public Transit</th>
<th>Dockless Mobility</th>
<th>Awareness of Travel Tools and Options</th>
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*Participants were divided into two smaller groups.
Mobility Options – Major Takeaways

• Awareness of GO Alex was generally low; participants more aware of WMATA Smart Benefits. (All groups)

• Integrated apps or signs with real-time information gives users confidence in using alternative modes. (All Ages); Apps with incentives generated tremendous interest among high school students. (Ages 16-18)

• Varying opinions on dockless scooters and how the City should manage through policy such as incentives, more designated corrals, geofencing. (All groups)

• Reliable buses that are coordinated would generate more interest in alternatives to driving alone (All groups)

• Some interest in encouraging greater utilization of carpooling, but not often used (18+).
Mobility Options - Strategies Discussed

- Installation of "transit screens" or other real-time information
- On-demand transit for persons with disabilities / seniors
- Zero-fare transit pilot
- Ferry service expansion
- Dockless program improvements
- Local app showing mobility options with local incentives
- Regional partnerships to manage transportation demand
- Encouraging or creating telework opportunities
- Mobility hubs to enable seamless use of multiple modes
- Pilot A/V demonstration for designated route
# Streets: Summary of Themes Discussed by Group

## Overview of Discussion

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## Reoccurring Themes

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*Participants were divided into two smaller groups.*
Robust discussion around the aggressive driving culture (speeding, running red lights, not yielding to pedestrians) leading to pedestrian safety concerns. Need for enhanced enforcement and greater use of physical safety improvements to address safety concerns and motorists not obeying law (All groups).

Traffic calming and local cut-through traffic were a major topics of discussion. Suggested strategies varied from passive measures to reduce speeds to more direct measures to prevent cut-through. Some concerns about inconvenience to locals (Ages 41+).

Support for prioritizing routes/streets by mode to help set expectations and ensure there are complete networks (Ages 41+).
Streets - Strategies Discussed

- "Low Cost, Tactical Urbanism Solutions / Flexibility (Signs, Pavement Markings, etc.)"
- Local Resident Permit Program
- Turn Restrictions
- Education / Culture of Safety / Signage
- Enhanced Enforcement
- Evaluate Speed Limit with Street Design
- Leading Pedestrian Intervals and RRFBs
- Stop Signs / Stop Bars Placed Further Back from Crosswalks
- Pedestrian-Scale Street Lighting

- Prioritize Different Modes on Different Streets
- Smart or Coordinated Traffic Signals
- Dedicated Bus Lanes / Transit Priority to Ease Congestion
- Green Streets / Green Infrastructure / Low-Impact Design
- Coordinated Roadway Maintenance Schedules
Lessons Learned & Next Steps
Lessons Learned from Round 1 Focus Groups

In-Person Discussions:

- Participants appreciated background presentation and majority of time focused on smaller group discussions
- Positive feedback on facilitation and opportunity for everyone to participate
- All participants were respectful and felt as if their opinions were heard
- Positive feedback on the approach; Helpful having city staff speak to city-initiatives and highlight programs in response to specific questions
Lessons Learned from Round 1 Focus Groups

Online Focus Groups:

• Participants generally liked the flexibility to participate as their schedule allowed; Facilitator-prompted questions/responses were appreciated
• Challenging to get some users to re-engage after initial visit to platform
• Designated times for more “chat-like” discussions was suggested; Consider a window of time or “office-hours” to encourage more participation at set time

Overall

• Challenging balancing demographics across the focus groups
Focus Groups
Round 2 Summary
March 2020
Focus Groups: Round 2

March 2020
• AMP Advisory Committee
• Online Discussions

April-May 2020
• Online Discussions
  • 3 groups based on geography (East/Central/West)
  • 14 active participants (45 participants invited)
AMP Advisory Committee (AMPAC)

- Reviewed preliminary material and participated in focus group discussion platform
- Provided feedback in preparation for outreach to community
- Key Takeaways
  - Ensure that equity is considered in decision making
  - Improve parking garage signage via technology
  - A mobile application for parking may not be a “game changer”
  - Prioritize strategies based on sustainability
  - Need for more short-term parking spaces in commercial districts
  - Fewer – but better – bus stops may attract transit riders
  - Consider occasional transit users (i.e. pedestrians and cyclists that shift to transit during severe weather)
  - Consider Toronto’s King Street Transit Pilot as an example of how to implement bus priority
Focus Group Discussions: Preview of Major Themes

Each geographic group had slightly different mobility considerations, but many broader themes were largely consistent:

- Widespread concerns about safety, transit reliability, and parking availability
- Diverging suggestions to address transit improvements
- Importance of transit frequency and reliability
- Need for safe walking routes to transit, first- and last-mile solutions, and real-time information
- No clear preference of parking payment methods (app vs. meter)
- Lack of interest in parking value pricing or reservation systems
Difference in Opinion by Geographic Group
Public Transit – West Alexandria

- Lack of sidewalks and crosswalks at bus stops create **safety hazards**
- **Infrequency of service** does not make opting for transit easy, timely, or convenient
- Most **opt to drive** due to time that transit takes, multiple stops, destinations being outside of Alexandria, or carrying a load (i.e. shopping bags)
- **Lack of support for bus priority** on streets – concern that such treatments would negatively impact vehicle operations
Public Transit – Central Alexandria

- Mixed opinions on **Vision Zero / Complete Streets improvements** (i.e. Seminary Road) that make bus stops more safe, accessible, and easier to get to and from
- **Infrequency of service** during off-peak hours and weekends presents a challenge
- Concern for recent **reductions in bus service** (North Ridge)
- Support for the **Transit Vision Plan** recommendations
Public Transit – East Alexandria

• General support for bus priority on streets
• Support for Vision Zero / Complete Streets improvements (i.e. Leading Pedestrian Intervals) that make bus stops more safe, accessible, and easier to get to and from
• Support for micromobility devices (shared bikes and scooters) for first-/last-mile trips
• Support for Water Taxi service
• Desire for the transit system to be less commuter-focused
Parking & Curbside Management – West Alexandria

- Parking availability is **not perceived as an issue** in this area
- **Garage parking** is generally preferred to street parking
- General support for **curbside management**
- General opposition to the idea of **shared parking** on a citywide scale
Parking & Curbside Management – Central Alexandria

• Some participants opt for transit, bike, or rideshare when parking is expected to be limited/difficult at their destination

• Bike parking: difficult to find in many areas

• Garage parking is generally preferred to on-street parking
Parking & Curbside Management – East Alexandria

• Parking availability is a prominent issue
• Concern that employees and visitors/tourists put a strain on on-street parking for residents
  • Support for incentivizing garage use for non-residents
• On-street parking is generally preferred to garage parking by residents
  • Support for more residential-only on-street parking
• Support for allocating curbspace based on land use
Themes, Major Takeaways, and Ideas
Public Transit – Themes & Major Takeaways

• Bus stop improvements (i.e. shelters, seating, lighting) would improve the transit experience and attract new riders

• Integrated apps and/or signs with real-time information are in high demand and would give users confidence in opting for transit

• The perceived lack of on-time performance of transit deters choice riders

• Less service and shorter spans of service during off-peak hours and weekends limits use of transit

• Support for mobile/app-based ticketing platform

• Transit trips that require transfers are a deterrent for choice riders

• Varying opinions on first- and last-mile solutions like dockless scooters and how the City should manage them

• Concern for effects of bus stop balancing on disabled and elderly passengers

Ideas Discussed

Better/wider sidewalks and crosswalks at or near bus stops

Enhanced bus farebox abilities
• Ability to activate SmartTrip card reloads
• Acceptance of contactless credit/debit cards

Peak-hour bus lanes and electric bus rapid transit

More off-sidewalk parking for bikes/scooters near transit stops
Parking & Curbside Management – Themes and Major Takeaways

- Preferences for payment methods vary (mobile/app-based payments vs. traditional parking meters)
- Little-to-no interest in shared parking, parking reservation systems, or parking value pricing
- Support for real-time information
- New approaches such as curbside management are perceived as less necessary/applicable in western areas – greater interest shown in eastern areas
- Availability of parking is more strained in eastern areas of city
- General interest in alternatives to driving and parking, but opting for transit can be a challenge
- Concern for freight/delivery issues and enforcement

Ideas Discussed

Priority curbspace for wheelchair parking/loading

More bicycle, moped, and motorcycle parking

Old Town as an appropriate geography for curbspace prioritization

- Pick-up/drop-off and delivery/loading zones
- Expanded pedestrian space and street trees/landscaping

Real-time garage parking availability information
Lessons Learned
Lessons Learned

- Participants generally liked the organization of information and flexibility to participate as their schedule allowed.
- Facilitator-prompted questions/responses were appreciated.
- Challenging to get some users to re-engage after initial visit to platform.
- Greater activity during designated “open forum” times where facilitators were on-hand to provide real-time responses and follow-up questions.