City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 3, 2019
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: YON LAMBERT, AICP, DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
SUBJECT: SEMINARY ROAD QUESTIONS

This memo is in response to a request from Councilmember Mo Seifeldein’s email in which he requests responses to the following questions:

➢ Could you provide a rank of Alexandria roads from least safest to safest with details of number of incidents and expected dates/years of tackling those issues. More so, highlight safety assessments of roads in the West End compared with the specified Seminary Rd. Project.

➢ What other means have you examined before you settled on the proposed alternatives currently presented, if any?
  o If you have looked at other means of achieving the current goals of vision zero And other city plans, could you provide the analysis?

➢ If none, have you looked at a dedicated bus lane on Seminary road as to achieve the same objective of the current proposed plans?
  o Is this feasible? If it is feasible, would it achieve the safety goals and connectivity. (West End to King St. Metro)
  o Do you need time to assess? If so, how long?
  o Do you need a mandate from Council? If so, would it be better to pause the current plans to fully evaluate this means.
  o (long shot) Would a street car/tram be possible in the same area to achieve the same objective?

Staff Responses are as follows:

Safety of Alexandria Streets
Our Vision Zero Action Plan has maps of crashes and our top high crash corridors featured in the plan as well as our action items related to tackling safety issues. We have not ranked them according to safety and doing additional, further assessments would take additional staff time or cost for a consultant to review the data. As stated in our Complete Streets Policy, to the extent possible, we seek to explore multimodal changes to the roadway when roads are up for repaving. Since Seminary Road was up for repaving, we have been focusing on this roadway. Beauregard is also on the High Crash Corridor list
and has improvements that are being planned and will be implemented with the West End Transitway and other safety improvement projects as possible and necessary. Vision Zero’s engineering component has staff constantly tackling safety issues at intersections across the City. Development projects also present an opportunity to make safety improvements. These issues are being taken on in a rolling format as the opportunities present themselves or as staff capacity and funding allows.

Seminary Road, as a whole, is a high crash corridor. When the project began early last year, the team was considering the portion up for repaving, Seminary between Kenmore and Quaker, for roadway reconfiguration options and safety improvements. The western end of this portion of the roadway near Kenmore and Library, has more of a history of crashes with serious injuries and fatalities. When the Transurban/VDOT/I-395 project came into question in the fall of last year and through the beginning of this year, we decided to truncate the study area to the area that had more predictable traffic patterns. This leaves the team with the project area between Howard and Quaker lane, which has less of a crash and injury history than the rest of the corridor.

Design Alternatives
In the development of these alternatives, our professionally-trained staff and licensed engineering consultants worked together to take in public comment, industry standards and guidance, and best practices to formulate alternatives. They began with a universe of alternatives, then whittled down the options and key components of each to arrive at these three alternatives to model with traffic modeling software. As this process is a brainstorming process that includes sketches, ideas, development of those ideas, and consideration of different items in a verbal and pen to paper format, there is typically no formal documentation of this process or analysis to be produced.

The alternatives, traffic analysis, and options for the three alternatives were presented at the March 25th meeting. The team presented three options— one that, on the whole, maintains existing conditions with minimal changes, one that implemented a full road diet according to the standards given by FHWA and other industry sources, and one that provided a compromise of accommodating traffic while improving safety in a general sense. Each of the designs that included considerations to changes of the roadway included, as the Complete Streets Policy guides, consideration of a design that allows safe and convenient travel along and across streets for all roadway users.

There are many means of achieving our transportation safety and multimodal goals, and these are outlined in the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, the Vision Zero Action Plan, and the Complete Streets Guidelines as well as the federal or local guidance referenced therein. All of these means involve a multidisciplinary approach that includes engineering, enforcement, education, encouragement (legislation), and evaluation (data).

Dedicated Bus Lane or other High Capacity Transit Infrastructure
Some of the objectives of this project are to fill the sidewalk gap on the north side of Seminary Road, provide safer crossings, minimize vehicle delay, and potentially include a bicycle facility where design options include excess roadway width. A bus lane or
tram/streetcar would not achieve these objectives and are not advisable for this corridor. Bus lanes and transit improvements have been identified in our Transportation Master Plan and are currently going through the project development process.

Dedicated bus lanes are typically warranted when there is high frequency, high ridership bus activity on a corridor and where congestion on a corridor causes significant delay in travel time. For example, 16th Street NW in DC is being studied for a bus lane and they see about 20,000 riders per day on the corridor. Seminary Road sees two (2) bus routes (AT2 and AT2X) and low ridership (on average 92 people board in this segment each weekday) and frequency throughout the day. Additionally, traffic data shows limited congestion on Seminary Road. Level of Service, the measurement typically used, is an engineering calculation scores facilities on levels A-F that determines whether a facility design can meet acceptable traffic operations in the peak 15 minutes of rush hour. Existing conditions on Seminary Road generally show a Level of Service of A-St. Stephens Road, C at Howard Street, and D at Ft. Williams Parkway and Quaker Lane. So level of service here is above what is typically considered acceptable (LOS E) for an urban arterial. Given the limited delay from congestion and low ridership, a bus lane is not advisable on this portion of Seminary Road, so we would not include this as a project. Trams or streetcars are also inadvisable for the same reasons as well as cost, longer time frames, additional analyses and federal requirements, and other factors to be considered.

Conclusion
Staff and the consultant team have done a significant amount of work to follow the established City plans, policies, and program goals and objectives under the purview of this repaving project and present options that aid in the implementation of these plans and accomplishment of those policies, goals, and objectives. Considerations of other multimodal facilities, more involved design options, and long-term projects like streetcars or trams are outside the scope of this project. The kinds of projects mentioned by the Councilmember are more suited to capital projects which include more funding, longer timelines, and more scope for staff and consultants to undertake a fuller analyses and modeling effort.

cc: Emily A. Baker, Deputy City Manager