

Staff Updates for September 2, 2009
City of Alexandria
Transportation Commission Meeting

Alexandria-Arlington County Transitway Coordination

Alexandria and Arlington County have had a long history in developing a transit solution for Potomac Yard. When the RF&P Railroad decided to abandon Potomac Yard as the largest rail marshalling yard on the East Coast, and took up most of the railroad tracks in the Yard, it left a very large parcel of developable land. Since both Alexandria and Arlington County wanted to develop this land intensively, preliminary studies suggested that some type of higher capacity transit service was needed to serve development in the Yard.

In order to determine what method of high capacity transit would be best in the Yard, the Commonwealth of Virginia performed an Alternative Analysis study of various transit options from 2001 through 2003, in cooperation with Alexandria and Arlington County. This study concluded that either bus rapid transit, light rail, or a Metrorail station in Potomac Yard are equally feasible and desirable options. The primary differentiation was one of price for the improvements. The basic alignment was to begin in Alexandria at the Braddock Road Metro station and to travel north terminating at the Crystal City Metro station.

In order to advance this project, another study was commissioned by the Commonwealth of Virginia to look at short and long term implementation strategies for transit development in the Yard. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) was the mode which appeared to be the most feasible for providing transit in the Yard in the short term, and an implementation plan was developed to provide BRT service in the Yard. This study was completed in December, 2005.

While this was occurring, Alexandria and Arlington County were acquiring funds to start building transit improvements in the Yard from the federal government. In order for these funds to be used, an environmental document had to be developed to document if the transportation improvement has any unforeseen impacts on the environment. It was determined that this project required a “categorical exclusion” document instead of an environmental impact statement. This document was completed for the entire corridor in 2006, but the portion in Alexandria could not be completed as no official determination had been made concerning the status of exclusive transit lanes between Monroe Avenue and East Glebe Avenue in Alexandria. This categorical exclusion document was finished by a consultant for Alexandria, Arlington County, and WMATA in December, 2006. Arlington County was granted a categorical exclusion for the portion of the transitway extending from the Four Mile Run to the Crystal City Metro station.

The City of Alexandria conducted a series of public hearings to determine the community and City Council’s preference for location – either curbside or median – for an exclusive transitway on Route 1 north of the Monroe Avenue Bridge. These hearings resulted in

the City's decision to adopt a plan which called for an exclusive transitway in the median of Route 1, from Monroe Avenue to East Glebe Road. Concurrently, during development of Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan, there was extensive discussion about the route south of the Monroe Avenue Bridge. The plan includes the following language on page 78: "The community expressed a preference for a transit route that would be located along the service road adjacent to the Metro Rail tracks after and connecting with First Street at Route 1. The final transit alignment is contingent on right-of-way access to the service road and operational analysis, such as turning radii. Many in the community expressed opposition to bus rapid transit and any potential transit corridors in any location within the Braddock Metro neighborhood."

The City and County continued to have discussions on a variety of issues involving how transit and other transportation facilities would coordinate in Potomac Yard. This summer has been an especially busy time for these coordination efforts since major efforts are occurring in both the City and the County which may alter some of the plans which were developed for Potomac Yard previously. These include the City upzoning Landbay G, the City conducting a feasibility study to build a new Metrorail station in Potomac Yard, and new planning efforts for Landbay F.

On the Arlington County side, the plans for Potomac Yard have remained intact, but the County has been developing plans which change its vision for Crystal City in the future, with much more density. Arlington staff has also been tasked with an effort to build a streetcar in Crystal City and Potomac Yard to serve this increased density. The City and County have had ongoing monthly coordination meetings, in which a wide variety of coordination issues, such as matching up services and modifying environmental documents are discussed as well as deciding when the two agencies should bring the amended plans to regional, state and federal agencies.

Alexandria Inputs to TPB'S TIGER Grant

City of Alexandria staff has continued to provide inputs to the TPB TIGER grant, which is expected to be filed by September 15, 2009. TIGER is an economic stimulus grant administered by the entire federal DOT, and not by a modal administration. Almost any type of large transportation project (over \$20 million) is eligible for this source of money (\$1.5 billion). TPB staff gave the TPB Board a basic set of programs which could be funded by a TIGER grant. No TIGER grant can be for more than \$300 million.

Alexandria is requesting money for two projects and is participating in one regional application.

The City's first application is for funding to build the exclusive transitway in the median of Route 1, next to Potomac Yard, between Monroe Street and East Glebe Road. The City is requesting \$8.5 million for this project. The second project is to develop some very high quality passenger stops, queue jumps to allow buses to advance through intersections without waiting in queues, and traffic signal priority on a new bus rapid transit line we hope to operate on the west side of Alexandria on Van Dorn Street and Beauregard Street. We are requesting \$670,000 for this project. We hope to receive

operating and capital funds for this service from the I-395 HOT lanes concession payments. Our application, along with all of the others submitted by different jurisdictions in the metropolitan area and WMATA will be reviewed by the federal DOT with a number of criteria, and we should find out if our region has been awarded a grant by February or March, 2010.

Alexandria is also one of four jurisdictions jointly applying for TIGER funding to develop a regional bicycle sharing program that would include Washington, DC, Arlington County, the City of Alexandria and Montgomery County. The \$10 million application is intended to provide capital funding for five years and operating expenses for two years. The regional bicycle sharing program would be coordinated with other proposed transit improvements.