



Ad Hoc Motorcoach Task Force

Meeting Minutes
23 June 2008
City Hall, Room 2000

Attendees

Task Force Members: Councilman Paul Smedberg (chair), Rob Aronson, Chief David Baker, Stephanie Brown, Bert Ely, Charlotte Hall, Hubert Herre, Ellen Stanton, Sarita Schotta, Denielle Vendetti, Tara Zimnick-Calico, Yon Lambert (staff), Williamsburg Police Chief Mike Yost (guest speaker).

Guests: Joanne Platt, Sgt. Jamie Bartlett, Wellington Watts, Mary Anne Russell, Christa Annett, Roger Fleming, Van Van Fleet, Don Annett, Louis Marcus, Betty Ward, Richard Klingenmaier, Mamey Keleher, Tom Byrne.

Below is a summary of the City of Alexandria's Ad Hoc Motorcoach Task Force meeting conducted on 23 June 2008.

Executive Summary: The primary meeting topics included a presentation by Williamsburg Police Chief Mike Yost and a group mapping exercise. The meeting began at 7:10 pm and concluded at 9 pm.

1. Welcome & Introductions

Mr. Smedberg opened the meeting with a review of the agenda and reminder that the Task Force was focusing on issues specific to motorcoaches.

2. Review Minutes

Mr. Smedberg requested changes to the draft meeting minutes from the June 9 meeting. Ms. Brown requested that Item #4 in Section #4 be changed to reflect that Mr. Smedberg requested only Ms. Hall provide a business perspective on motorcoach traffic in Old Town. Ms. Brown also requested that on future agenda items regarding other cities, staff use the term "Alternative Strategies" instead of "Best Practices." There being no further discussion, the changes were accepted and the June 9 meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

3. Presentation

Mr. Lambert introduced Mr. Yost, the Police Chief of Williamsburg, Va. Mr. Yost referred to a map of Williamsburg provided to Task Force members and guests to discuss strategies that Williamsburg has adopted to manage motorcoach traffic.

(over)



(A summary of Williamsburg management strategies and the map itself is available under the June 23 meeting items on the Motorcoach Task Force website at: www.alexandriava.gov/motorcoach) Mr. Yost mentioned several key points including:

- Williamsburg is different from Alexandria in that there is comparatively little residential housing near the historic area and Colonial Williamsburg
- The City learned that it could communicate effectively with motorcoach operators but not necessarily drivers
- Two distinct types of buses visit Williamsburg. The first are buses that schedule trips to Colonial Williamsburg (CW). These buses, which may number in excess of 500 per day during the summer, are managed by CW and pose few issues for the City. The second set of buses that visit Williamsburg are not scheduled through CW. The City has not performed counts of these buses and does not have any hard estimates of visitation. However, the City seeks to encourage these buses to use the Penske site and abide by rules posted on the City website.
- Williamsburg has developed and is currently improving its wayfinding sign program
- The city has posted "No Thru Bus" signs at three neighborhoods adjacent to Colonial Williamsburg

Several members of the Task Force and the public had specific questions for Mr. Yost including:

Q: Is there a philosophy in place regarding regulation for size of buses?

A: No

Q: What are the neighborhoods like in the area where buses are regulated?

A: The only residents are CW employees.

Q: Is it correct that the perimeter of the historic area has several other places that are not marked specifically on the map for loading and/or unloading?

A: Yes. Buses can also load and unload on Francis Street.

Q: What was the regulatory process for Williamsburg?

A: We posted the streets as "No Thru Bus" after we passed the enabling legislation. We also raised the fine for parking.

Q: What were the criteria for "No Thru Bus" signs?

A: Whether it was residential. The signs are also posted on streets where it is just too tight for buses to travel.

Q: How many fines have you given to buses?

A: We have contacted many owners, but have not written more than a half dozen summons.



Q: What is the process the tour bus loading/unloading at hotels?

A: It is dealt with at the hotels on hotel property.

Q: Where did the term "non-scheduled" buses in the Williamsburg city code originate?

A: It's unclear. This was most likely included to address transit.

Q: Chief Yost mentioned that there were some problems early with regards to communicating on the website. Have they been resolved?

A: The City still works to get better publicity for its website. The City Manager has raised the issue of kiosks and whether they are needed in certain areas. We do have a consultant working on a sign program.

Q: Can you explain how the city of Poquoson was included in the state code?

A: Mr. Lambert responded that based on a discussion with Mr. Bernie Caton we understand that Poquoson most likely grew into the population bracket which had been defined in an early iteration of the code.

Q: How many neighborhoods in Williamsburg have "No Thru Bus" signage?

A: Three and all within a block or two of the historic area. These are areas that are entirely residential and there is no reason for buses to travel there.

Q: How else is Williamsburg communicating its bus management strategies?

A: The city's internet communication has improved dramatically. However, it really boils down to each independent driver. While not a constant presence, the Police is available in the event that a driver does something unsafe.

Q: Are school buses and hotel shuttles addressed by Williamsburg code?

A: Almost every school bus that visits goes straight to the Visitors Center so those vehicles are not a problem.

Q: Are there any houses in the historic area that are tourist bait?

A: No.

Q: How does Williamsburg deal with overnight parking?

A: Much of it is confined to the Visitors Center. Unscheduled buses that visit use the Penske Center. This site is approximately two miles from the City, out in the woods.

Q: How important are the facilities at Penske to drivers?

A: Very important. The lounge is important and it has kitchen facilities and bathrooms. These were major considerations in the design and construction of the site.

Q: How many buses can park in the Penske area?

A: Possibly 60 or 75. A specific answer was not available.



4. Group Exercise

The Task Force members split into two groups to complete the exercise using the Walking Shed Maps provided. The groups had two objectives: (1) Review Motorcoach Walking Shed maps to address opportunities & constraints at existing parking areas and (2) Review Walking Shed Maps to determine map elements missing or necessary to address drop-off, parking and designated routes. The groups had 30 minutes to complete the exercise and report back.

Upon re-convening, Group #1 provided the following points:

- The drop-off and parking areas are incorrect at 700 King Street (should be 100 N Washington) and the 400 block of King Street is hotel drop-off, not motorcoach drop-off. Items to consider for future versions of the maps include:
- Show width of streets
- Locations of historic buildings (and degree of historic value)
- Color registration needs to be addresses on future maps. The colors chosen are difficult to differentiate.
- Is it possible to have a series of maps to work from?
- Can we show one-way streets?
- Is it possible to section or zoom certain sections of the maps?
- Can we differentiate between types of city owned land?
- Can we differentiate between open space and vacant land?
- Is there a drop off at the Lyceum?
- What is the definition of hospitality?
- Can we designate dock areas?
- Show more street names
- Show King Street Metro station

Group #2 provided the following input:

The loading/unloading areas are incorrect at Christ Church (Washington Street), the Lyceum (Washington Street), Friendship Firehouse (Alfred St) and the Hotel Monaco. Other points include:

- The focus of parking is the waterfront. There is no drop off near Upper King Street.
- Although the parking and drop-off and focused on the waterfront area, this area is heavily residential.
- Is there a way to provide greater dispersion for motorcoach parking in Old Town?
- What role does the Trolley play in dispersion?
- The routes into and out of Old Town are limited and heavily used.



- The most used bus drop-off sites are at four points: Lower King Street, City Hall, Christ Church and the Strand. These areas are all clustered near the waterfront and require passing some residences.
- Can we show the trolley route on future maps?
- Can we also look at other areas for short-term parking including East Eisenhower. If the Masonic Temple is not a viable long-term parking location (15 spaces only) we need to identify another location.
- Look at Jones Point as a potential short-term parking area.

5. Meeting Topic Schedule

Mr. Smedberg requested that staff add a presentation to the schedule for August 11 which would include a synopsis of issues addressed since the 2005 Task Force. The city presentation on August 11 would then alter the schedule as follows:

- July 14: Perspectives on Tourism (UMA and ACVA)
- July 28: Review of City of Alexandria Management Process & Current Opportunities
- August 11: Alternative Management Strategies: Charleston, SC (**Note this date has been changed.)
- August 25: Parking, Designated Routes and Alternate Distribution Strategies
- Sept. 8: Wayfinding and Communications

Several Task Force members questioned the need for a Legislative Subcommittee. After some discussion, it was agreed that all future meetings should include time for discussion about Legislative approaches to motorcoach management. The Task Force assented by voice the following:

- a. A Legislative Subcommittee is not needed.
- b. All future meetings should include time for Legislative process updates.
- c. The Task Force does not want to rule out the decision of whether to ask for legislation in 2009, but it may not be prepared to do so by August.

6. Public Comment

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

- a) A citizen requested an opportunity to discuss ghost tours, which do not generally use motorcoaches for transporting customers.
- b) A citizen asked whether it is legal for buses to park at the corner of N Fairfax and Queen. (The answer is no.)
- d) There were questions raised about the choice of cities for further study by the Task Force and specifically whether Charleston was appropriate. Several other cities were raised including Washington, DC and Annapolis, Md.
- d) A representative of the Holiday Inn of Old Town expressed his desire to see the Task Force make a commitment that buses were welcome in Old Town. The primary issues are finding places to park and determining adequate routes in and out of Old Town.



e) A resident of Pendleton Street expressed concerns that she is not hearing a balance in discussion about protecting residents. She specifically asked whether the Task Force was examining whether there is any benefit to residents and explained that the primary issue for residents is that the level (volume) of bus traffic continues to rise.

f) A resident expressed concerns about possible redevelopment plans for Robinson Terminal and how that would impact existing short-term parking.

g) A business owner representing Ghost Touring asked the Task Force to continue balancing the rights of businesses with the rights of residents.

There being no further comment, the Task Force adjourned.

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