



Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan

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EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP #3: *TRANSPORTATION* OCTOBER 29, 2007 MEETING SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Robert Kramer began the meeting, recounting the events that have occurred over the last several weeks, including a town meeting, two educational workshops and a walking tour, and reminding the audience about upcoming events, including the November 2 "Meet and Greet" and the all day charrette on Saturday, November 3, and five community work sessions in November, December and January.

Discussion of land uses and densities west of the Braddock study area

Faroll Hamer, Director of Planning and Zoning, discussed an issue that was raised in several questions at last Saturday's session: the land uses and densities on land to the west of the Braddock Metro study area. She explained that most of the area to the west is a stable residential area zoned for single family, two family dwellings, town houses and small apartment buildings. Like much of the Braddock neighborhood, there is no intent to tear down and rebuild these stable residential areas. Nor is there a plan to redo the George Washington Middle School or its fields, immediately west of the Braddock Metro station. That complex was redesigned, expanded and redeveloped within the last ten years at significant public investment.

There are, however, some areas where significant development will occur, especially on the 17 acre Potomac Yard Landbay L area adjacent to the northern part of the Braddock study area. The approved Potomac Yard plan provides for mixed use office and residential land uses with retail on Landbay L, and will include large buildings. Overall, there can be up to 473,000 sq.ft of office and 358 residential units. Two buildings may be as tall as 82 feet; others can be 60 feet tall. In addition to Landbay L, increased density will be located at the Town Center on Landbay G, and in the redeveloped shopping center north of it. As approved, Landbay L is the second densest part of Potomac Yard, with only the Town Center being denser.

One other development site is located on the south side of Braddock Road near the Metro station, where the 7-Eleven is located now. The entire site has three owners: Southland Corp. (7-11; the owner of the adjacent gas station; and the City). If the three could get together and agree on a redevelopment scheme consistent with the site's location near Metro but also near a low density residential neighborhood, as City staff has encouraged, then there is potential for redevelopment there.

Finally, Ms. Hamer explained the distinctions among the various planning areas near the Braddock Metro area, and noted that all of this information is included in a handout being disseminated at tonight's meeting and posted on the department's webpage.

EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP: TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Hamer introduced the transportation consultants who will be assisting with the Braddock Metro Neighborhood Plan and are the featured speakers for tonight's educational session: Yolanda Takesian and Brandon Nevers of Kittelson & Associates.

A key purpose for these community education work sessions is to provide useful background information to enable everyone to work together constructively at the charrette Saturday. Tonight, the focus is on transportation. Our resource person is Yolanda Takesian, a planner known for her leadership in context sensitive transportation, working with communities with transportation issues where there is an effort to build a sense of place. Typically when people think about "transportation" as a topic, they think of cars, but that is not the only way to move. Before working with Kittelson Associates, Ms. Takesian headed the Neighborhood Conservation program at the Maryland State Highway Administration, where she was one of the team that pioneered the idea of context sensitive transportation design. The title of a book she wrote - "When Main Street is a State Highway" -- signals that transportation is about more than moving cars.

Yolanda Takesian, Kittelson & Assoc, began her discussion explaining that she wants to start a dialogue with the community about their neighborhood and their concerns so that she can understand them. Tonight, she intends to describe the basics of a complete transportation system, to give information about the Braddock transportation context and conditions, and then to talk about ways to manage transportation resources.

A complete transportation system consists of

- streets
- transit
- off-road paths
- parking
- planning and regulation; and
- users: travelers and neighbors.

The traditional transportation classification system for streets, from freeways down to local streets, provides an important element of the transportation framework and is the traditional way that engineers look at the system. Still, the classification system is only the start of the planning effort because, while a good model, it is auto-oriented.

Great streets are ones that convey more than cars. They are a place for pedestrians and matter as a place in themselves. It is important when considering streets to understand the user needs, from tires to feet, and to decide on priorities. In some instances, feet or pedestrians will be more important than cars. What is important is to have a connected network that keeps local streets local, keeping them appropriate and comfortable for bikes and pedestrians, and even for children playing on them. There is a relatively clear hierarchy in the Braddock neighborhood, even though Route 1 does not fit easily into a traditional arterial classification, because it has people living on it.

Parking is part of the transportation system. It is a form of access to a place, and is called a “mode converter” because it turns a driver into a pedestrian. It is important to note that parking serves a variety of users and uses and that in a mixed use area, priorities must be determined. Typically, parking for residents takes priority, although parking also supports businesses, provides a buffer for pedestrians, and can, if there is too much, add to traffic in an area.

One of the important things to understand about “transit” as part of the transportation system is that it can take a number of forms and what may work in one place may not work in another. The Transit Mode Comparison on p. 5 of the handout shows a variety of different forms of transit, and there are additional types such as regional and connector buses that are not even included. Another point, sometimes overlooked, is that, especially in urban areas, people want transit systems that work well. WMATA for example has done a good job of introducing special technology where trains can communicate with the system and the scheduling software. From an operational standpoint and for on time schedules, this technology is especially important whether transit vehicles work in mixed traffic or in their own lanes. It is also important to have transit vehicles that are attractive and comfortable, such as the DC Circulator. And it is important to realize that there are a variety of propulsion methods, including electricity, and natural gas fuels that reduce noise and pollution.

Another key aspect of successful transit is the ability to communicate with customers easily and clearly. New systems that announce or display arrival times and provide good information about maps and directions are critical if we are to be successful moving people from cars to transit. Metro has shown a 30% increase in ridership over the past few years, due in part to the rise in gas prices and the expansion of the system, but also to its success in communicating with its customers. Bus systems face similar challenges and successes when good maps and information are provided. The Pike Ride in Arlington is a good example. The DASH system is good but can be improved. Finally, transit needs to be accessible to people who are old, and may need help with walkers or wheelchairs, as well as to younger riders.

As transit ridership increases, the bike network needs to improve as well, both on the street and off. Bikes are not just for recreation; they are also a mode of transportation. Making a good bike system means more than just adding a stripe here or there on the roads. It is important to really understand where the bike mode fits in the whole system. The City has a good starting point with its Bike and Trail Master Plan, and is starting to implement it now.

Walking is also a mode of transportation, and streets and paths need to be made conducive to walkers. That takes more than just a wide sidewalk. It also takes a transparent street edge, a buffer from the roadway traffic and dynamic and active public places that connect uses and activate the street to attract walking activities. The street as a public place – whether the street is public or private -- is a key component of the overall transportation system. Some good examples are shown in slides from Silver Spring, with its active new street and fountain activity, and from Boulder with its farmers market.

When planning for growth it is important to plan how the transportation system and the growth will be integrated into the existing neighborhood, not only in terms of more trips,

but as to each of the elements of the system we have talked about. In Arlington, when they planned for their Metro and transit corridor, the County also planned for a very hard edge around it in order to protect the small scale residential neighborhoods, even though they were immediately adjacent to the transit corridor. In Boulder, as shown in the photo, the transit corridor abuts a rural area. Alexandria may not want to adopt the specific Arlington or Boulder model for the Braddock Metro area, but these examples show ways existing areas to be preserved can coexist with higher density transit areas.

Current trends in travel behavior show that, city wide, Alexandrians tend to either drive alone or use transit. In the last six years, those two modes have increased, but carpooling has decreased, and this is likely the result of regional locations of employment. In other words, the area has developed in a sprawl pattern; if you work in Tysons Corner, there is no way to get there easily without a car. The slides display 2000 census data regarding where the highest residential densities (east of Braddock station), solitary drivers (away from station) and transit users (close to station) are, as well as where vehicle ownership is highest (typically, away from station) and lowest (closer to station). There are many no car families and a significant number of one car families in the area.

To understand worker commuting patterns, the Bureau of Labor Statistics provides information about where the people who live in Virginia work. The people who work in the Route 1 corridor area, which includes the Pentagon, Crystal City and down to the Beltway, live mostly south and west of the City.

Brandon Nevers continued the discussion, focusing on Route 1 and the existing roadway network in and around the Braddock Metro area. He gathered his information from the many studies that have been done for the City, from discussions with staff from planning and transportation, from his time with the community last Saturday and from his first hand observations. His first point is that the neighborhood has natural transportation barriers, including the railroad and Metro tracks to the west, the bridge to the north, 395, Duke Street and the Route 1 pair. It is an obvious neighborhood problem that regional traffic competes with residential traffic on Route 1. East-West movements are less constrained, and the City has recently changed the timing of lights to favor the east-west traffic more than the north-south. The grid pattern of local streets is effective for carrying local traffic and also well designed for pedestrian traffic.

As everyone in the neighborhood knows, there is congestion on Route 1, because of the limited access to major destinations within the Route 1 corridor, including Old Town, the Eisenhower Valley and D.C. to the north. There really are few alternatives to Route 1 traffic in the region. During the evening peak, the congestion spills over to include other north-south routes. Mr. Nevers showed a series of photos demonstrating the backed up traffic traveling south on Route 1 at Duke Street, traveling west on Duke Street at Henry, traveling south on Henry at Cameron, and traveling south on Washington and Alfred Streets. Route 1 is also heavily influenced by Beltway traffic and incidents. And it is hard to tell how much. In other words, when the work on the Woodrow Wilson Bridge is complete, will the congestion problems be less?

Over the last five years, there has not been a substantial growth in traffic but at the confluence area (King St, Duke St and Route 1) the streets are saturated with traffic in the evening peak. The charts on p. 13 of the handout show the effects of growth on hourly traffic flow for the future. Because the network is saturated, the traffic volumes at

specific times will not become greater; there is no more room for additional traffic. Instead, the length of time when streets are congested will grow; people will leave work earlier and later, so the peak traffic times will spread out and exist for a longer time.

Parking in the area was studied before and the chart on p. 14 shows the result of one study. Specifically, it shows that at some locations in the area studied, parking is approaching effective capacity, which is considered to be 85% of capacity. At that level or below, a driver can still find a space without significant effort. At higher levels, the driver must drive around the block, maybe more than once, in order to find a space. To provide more and better parking in the future, we should consider the following specific measures which have been successful elsewhere:

- reduce time stay limits
- provide more on -street if possible
- maintain meter enforcement
- maintain permit zone enforcement
- promote shared parking opportunities

This last idea, shared parking, is especially suited to the Braddock area, to the extent there will be new development and mixed uses. In addition, by providing alternative means of access, such as transit service, bicycle and mixed land uses, the reliance on additional parking is reduced.

Putting all of the above together, we need to promote uses near Metro that make the environment comfortable for walkers and bicyclists, that are transit oriented and that do not exacerbate peak and regional travel. We also need to provide incentives for non SOV (single occupancy vehicles) travel. Additional steps to manage traffic include timing signals, restricting peak period movements, such as turn prohibitions and “do not enter” signs. These and other management efforts are part of the toolbox to manage traffic in the future.

Mr. Nevers’ final point was about the traffic impact of new development within the neighborhood. First, parts of the network are already saturated at some times during the day. It will be that way in the future, with or without future development. While it is not feasible or desirable to expand the network, even if it could be expanded, it would fill up because there is already so much demand in the region. Second, Route 1 is most heavily influenced from regional traffic, and access to the Beltway affects it directly. Finally, the incremental increase in development that has been talked about, over and above what is already allowed by zoning, will not create a noticeable increase in congestion on the network. Therefore, this neighborhood should focus on how best to manage traffic that it has and will have, and how to guide future development so that what occurs is consistent with the neighborhood’s vision for more transit use and less Beltway use.

Ms. Takesian spoke at this point about Traffic Demand Management, which is the name for the group of strategies that can be used to lessen the number of commuter driving trips in SOVs. Programs include carpooling, transit incentives (with guaranteed ride home), providing lockers and bike storage at work sites, FlexCar parking, and “unbundling” parking. The parking question is tied to the concept of shared parking and asks whether there are ways to loosen the ties of a development to actual parking requirements, so that available parking is not limited to users of the development only. For example, if there is a residential condo building, must new owners purchase a parking space with their unit if they do not have a car? By not requiring it, and having a

reliable method for ensuring the purchasers are not parking on the street, the price of the units can be reduced to make them more affordable. Transit, Flexcar programs and bike storage all reduce the number of cars on the road.

The pie chart on p. 15 demonstrates a national finding that commuter trips make up only 27% of the total number of driving trips on the road. In addition, people drive to shop, to go to school or church, to visit friends, and for a variety of other purposes.

Today, there are significant transit subsidies offered by the Federal Government for federal employees. And Alexandria has, for a long time, required Transportation Management Plan (TMP) measures by developers of medium and large developments. TMP requirements include transit subsidies, shuttle buses, car sharing, and bicycle lockers and racks.

These strategies can be successful in getting people out of their cars and onto transit, but they need to be expanded and strengthened. In addition, one idea the City is talking about that we support is what elsewhere is called a Transportation Management Association. This is typically a group of employers coming together and paying for an administrative person to promote, organize and enforce transit measures within a given area. It could be done voluntarily by a group of businesses or employers; it could also be required of new development in an area, as a district wide TMA or TMP.

For the Braddock Metro area specifically, Ms. Takesian made several recommendations: First, the overall transportation system and the transit system in the Braddock area both need to be enhanced. With additional development, there is a need to complete the system of connections through the area, including by additions to the existing network. New connections do not have to mean additional regular streets.

In addition, the public transportation system can be enhanced by ensuring that new development is designed to be attractive and comfortable for riders of the Metro, by planning upgrades for Metro and Dash and by providing a premium transit service, such as Metro Extra. Metro Extra is a new transit service along Georgia Avenue designed to give better on time service, with signal priority and limited stops to make trips quicker. And there are other forms of surface transportation options, such as BRT Light, which means there is less investment in major features such as right-of-way and bus stops. A BRT system might start light and be planned for future evolution to something with more investment.

Walkability is another key ingredient. Alexandria has a tradition of walking and is one of the best models in the country for it. Pedestrians need a defined, comfortable space for walking, with parking to separate the pedestrian realm from the vehicles. A full 61% of people who use Metro are walking to it. So, the area around Metro needs to be planned very carefully to ensure it meets these criteria. The Braddock Place plaza is not inviting and could be made much better. Especially when you consider that the Jaguar development site to the north will have many people walking to Metro, you need to consider ways to activate the space.

Tom Culpepper, Deputy Director of Transportation, T&ES, spoke next regarding the BRT (Bus/Rapid Transit system) initiatives. He used a chart which shows the steps in the process from having a conceptual idea for new transit to actually seeing it take place as service. The process is not an overnight phenomenon.

The City has been working on the Crystal City/Potomac Yard Transit Corridor Project since 1999 and 2000 with Arlington. The intent is to develop a high capacity transit corridor connecting to destinations in Arlington and Alexandria. The impetus for the transit corridor was the respective approvals in Arlington and Alexandria of new dense development in Potomac Yard and the understanding that the road network would not be enough by itself to accommodate the new users. An alternatives analysis was conducted as part of the work that looked at different transit systems, including Metro stations, and BRT and many different alignments were reviewed. One problem was that all federal funding in the region for Metro is being earmarked for the Dulles Metro extension. BRT became the choice because it is a non-rail alternative.

The corridor for this new transit service runs along Route 1 generally, although it does leave Route 1 in some places. This project has been added to the City's master plan and is a real project moving to completion. An Environmental Impact Statement was recently completed, although it will have to be amended to show proposed stations to be constructed. The map disseminated shows in red the portions of the route that will have dedicated right-of-way. The parts of the route shown in purple will be mixed traffic areas. In the purple areas we can be more flexible, especially for example in the southern end from the Braddock Station up to the Monroe St. Bridge. The area from Glebe Road down to the Monroe Street Bridge is approved for construction now. South of the bridge, the plan is to invest in a couple of stations, but we have yet to start the final design for that portion of the system. Ms. Takesian emphasized that the community can reconsider the locations for the southern part of the route. There may be other ways to get to the Braddock Metro station.

Mr. Culpepper explained that the Crystal City/Potomac Yard BRT work had been going on for seven years. Very different from that plan is an idea that has emerged from the Transportation Master Plan Task Force. After a long and in-depth study of travel characteristics in the area, the Task Force recognized that congestion levels will continue based on growth and regional pressures. They also recognized that there is not a lot of appetite or ability to widen roads. Therefore they found attractive a transit alternative to serve people within Alexandria and those coming to or going from Alexandria. If it also serves regional drivers, that is okay. Their draft plan shows three conceptual transit corridors for the future: one generally along Route 1 in the eastern part of the City; one to serve the southern part of the City in the vicinity of Duke Street; and one to focus on the Landmark/Van Dorn north south travel patterns. There could also be more in the future, including even Quaker Lane.

The type of system to be used in these transit corridors has not been defined. It could be streetcars, buses, BRT or light rail. The Task Force concept is to develop a time competitive transit system, preferably with exclusive right-of-way and supported by local connector buses. The Task Force also recognized that it may not get 100% of its vision; it may not be possible to have dedicated travel lanes. It also recognized and stated its concern for neighborhood protection with minimum disruption to citizens.

At this point, Bob Kramer concluded the presentation by clarifying the different information in the "Transit Initiatives in the Braddock Metro Small Area" handout. With regard to this second transit corridor idea, p. 2 gives the history of the concept and p. 4 shows the map of the three general locations in the City. He repeated the difference between this transit corridor concept which is in the initial stages of consideration and is

just beginning to go through the public process and the Crystal City/Potomac Yard system which has taken over seven years to get to the point of construction.

Mr. Kramer stated that it is appropriate for the community to have input on that part of the Crystal City/Potomac Yard system between the Monroe Street Bridge and the Braddock Metro station and identify a preferred route for it. It is also appropriate for the community to talk about the conceptual corridor and how it might be affected by it. From a facilitation standpoint, we have to approach the Braddock Metro plan to include transportation.

Questions and Answers

Q: At Jefferson Village, there are at least 50% excess parking spaces that are not used every night. Why cannot the neighborhood park there?

A: That sounds like a good example of a shared parking opportunity.

Q: Given that the Crystal City/Potomac Yard corridor parallels Metro, will it serve areas that are not already served by Metro? The new transit is going from Metro stop to Metro stop. Where is a document saying why my taxes are paying for this?

A: Yes, the route is roughly parallel to Metro, but it does serve new users, such as shoppers at Target and the shopping center. Destinations in Potomac Yard are not served now.

Q: Do you agree with Ms. Takesian that we can look at alternatives for the southern portion of the route?

A: Yes, for the purple section of the route south of the bridge.

Q: Can we do that in this process for the Braddock Road Metro Neighborhood Plan?

A: Yes. If there is a better way to serve that corridor, we should consider it.

Q: Will the BRT eliminate parking on Route 1?

A: The idea of a transit corridor somewhere in the vicinity of Route 1 is only a concept right now. We have no detail. There is no plan to remove parking from the street, which would certainly be disruptive to the neighborhood. It could be located in what now is the HOV lane.

Q: Doesn't the BRT serve Potomac Yard and not this community?

A: We will provide additional information regarding the communities that would be served by the Crystal City/Potomac Yard system.

Q: Is Metro an option instead of the BRT?

A: There would have to be at least one and maybe two Metro stations. The City did reserve a place within Potomac Yard for a station but the proposed Potomac Yard development is not at a high enough density level to justify a new station. The Crystal

City/Potomac Yard BRT will cost approximately \$20 million. A new Metro station costs about \$150 million. We hope the Crystal City/Potomac Yard transit corridor is available for service in 2009.

Q: Hasn't there been sufficient additional development since 1999, when the BRT corridor was first considered, to justify a Metro station?

A: In 1999, all the future development, even if it was not built, was taken into consideration.

Q: Back in 2006, as part of the Braddock small area plan work, a traffic consultant told us that Route 1 was operating at or over capacity and will only get worse, even get "out of control." At the Task Force meetings I attended, there was political discussion about getting Council to support the BRT so that the City Manager would implement it. There was also the notion that if you keep the north south corridor on Patrick and Henry, there will be fewer enemies of the proposal. Isn't the process before the Planning Commission and City Council a done deal? Will the Transportation Master Plan take precedence over the Braddock plan?

A: The process and approval of the Transportation element of the Master Plan is not a done deal. There will be a work session with the Planning Commission in January, and they will consider the plan at a public hearing in February. If it is approved then, it will be considered by the City Council at a public hearing, which could be in February but may not be. It would not be on the same day as the Commission meeting. Even if the draft plan with the corridor is approved, it is still a concept approval only, not a project approval.

Q: Of the \$20 million budget for the Crystal City/Potomac Yard transit corridor, how much is Alexandria paying from taxpayer money?

A: About \$800,000.

Q: Can the traffic consultants tell us: How much of the Route 1 traffic is regional that we have no control over, and what is the projection. What is the capacity of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge and will it attract more trips to the Route 1 corridor? We get so fascinated by local traffic that we forget to address the regional issues.

A: We agree, these are good questions, and we are trying to get a handle on the regional model to get these answers for you.

Q: Braddock Road is a major east-west corridor in the City and an alternative to Duke Street. If we are adding new development at Potomac Yard and in Braddock area, then don't we need to address the impact on the residential neighborhood along Braddock Road, but outside the study area?

A: Yes, we do.

Q: While the BRT appears to be an opportunity to deal with through traffic, it appears to serve more of Arlington than Alexandria.

A: You can find the figures on the service area, and how many people will use the new system under Alternatives Analysis on the Transportation webpage. The site is also listed on the handout.

Q: There is a road on the west side of the Braddock Metro tracks with a circular drive at the southern end. Is there a plan to have access to the station on the west side?

A: That roadway is part of Potomac Yard, and was originally planned for a bus or shuttle to take people down to Braddock where they can walk to the Metro. No western access point is planned, and definitely not for vehicles. The road you see gets progressively narrow as it travels south where it is only 15 feet wide.

Q: Why is the Braddock plan so focused on cars and parking instead of walkability? Alexandria has a very serious problem with SOV trips. We need incentives to get people out of their cars.

A: Ms. Takesian explained that she included the concept of walkability in her talk, and could spend much more time on it. The community has choices, and there are changes that could be made to make the area even more walkable.

Q: It is unfair to place jurisdictional limits on what we can consider at the charrette. Why can we not consider Landbay L in Potomac Yard or the Transportation plan in the charrette as part of the trade off discussion?

A: Transportation is one of the issues to be considered in the trade-off discussions.

Q: The area is concerned about crime. Shared parking, especially in a residential building and with underground parking, is therefore unrealistic.

A: We are not planning on changing parking in existing buildings, unless the building wants to do that. But we must investigate possibilities, and shared parking is becoming more and more common.

Q: Brandon Nevers did a good job sharing some realistic statements about Route 1. How will BRT help that?

A: Mr. Kramer explained that this is the same question as the one about who will be served by the Crystal City/Potomac Yard transit corridor, and we will provide the answers.

Q: The Rosslyn-Ballston corridor has done a good job of handling traffic and transit in a high density area. The Braddock Metro is similar to Clarendon in terms of ridership. And the Braddock area is growing, so ridership will also be growing. If we are increasing ridership, then what is the rationale for BRT?

A: The Alternatives Analysis for the Crystal City/Potomac Yard corridor looked at that, and took the future growth at Braddock into consideration. Please consult this March 2003 document on the website.

Q: How will it help people living south of the City in the Mount Vernon area?

A: It is not designed to help them. It came out of the planning for Potomac Yard and is designed to serve the Alexandria and Arlington County portions of Potomac Yard as well as the broader area.