

Cameron Station Civic Association
200 Cameron Station Blvd.
Alexandria, VA 22304

October 1, 2021

Via Email

Members of the Planning Commission
City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Re: Concerns Regarding the August 2021 Draft Alexandria Mobility Plan (Docket Item # 6)

Members of the Planning Commission:

The Board of the Cameron Station Civic Association is writing to note that, while it supports a number of the policies and ideas set forth in the August 2021 draft Alexandria Mobility Plan (“Mobility Plan”), the Mobility Plan contains certain serious flaws which need to be addressed before it is approved. In this regard, the Mobility Plan:

1. Does not adequately address all forms of transportation, particularly car traffic.;
2. Does not update or revise those portions of the Mobility Plan relating to the bike and pedestrian plan that was done over four years ago.; and
3. Suggests that City staff, basing their judgement primarily on data rather than resident input, will have the ultimate say on what will happen in neighborhoods with respect to transportation.

There are certainly many sound reasons why the City should continue to strive to make it easier for residents to use mass transit, bikes, walking and other alternatives to driving a car. Nevertheless, the fact remains that nearly 70% of all Alexandrians drive a car to and from work.¹ Further, the majority of the remaining 30% of Alexandrians who work from home, take mass

¹ See <https://www.bestplaces.net/transportation/city/virginia/alexandria>. See also Mobility Plan *Appendix III-B: Civic Engagement Findings Summary August 2021* at p. 6. See generally “Mobility Plan” chapter titled “Supporting Travel Option” p. 4.

transit, bike or walk to work, use their cars to go to the grocery store and for travel around and away from the City.²

Notwithstanding the fact that the majority of persons use a car as a primary mode of transportation, there is not one chapter or portion of any chapter in the Mobility Plan that tries to address alleviating the severe traffic congestion in our City by expanding or preserving roadways or by building multimodal bridges in key parts of the City. The closest the Mobility Plan comes to addressing the issue is the portion of the Plan relating to smart mobility. The main solution proffered is regulating traffic lights which will help somewhat with traffic congestion. However, it alone is unlikely to solve the issue of moving cars rapidly through the City. The Mobility Plan should expressly state that the City is in favor of building multimodal bridges such as the north-south multimodal bridge that will connect pedestrians, bikes, transit, and cars from South Pickett Street to the Van Dorn Metrorail Station. It should also state that, where feasible, the City is in favor of expanding rather than narrowing traffic lanes to alleviate traffic congestion.

Moreover, the Mobility Plan seems to favor options that would make driving significantly more difficult by eliminating parking and adding bike lanes on major arterial roads. Road diets may make sense in certain areas, but not on major arterial roads. Going in that direction is contrary to what many residents want as evidenced by the 2020 Residents Survey where “respondents gave lower marks to traffic flow, car travel, overall ease of travel, public parking, and traffic enforcement compared to 2018. The rating for traffic flow is the lowest ranking since the survey began in 2016.”³

The Mobility Plan also seems to indicate that future decision making will not be primarily driven by what residents need or want, but rather by City staff judgements based mainly on data at the expense of resident viewpoint. The Mobility Plan states that the “City of Alexandria will be proactive and data-driven in decision-making and when implementing projects and initiatives that advance plans and policies. While community requests and input are an important supplement for decision-making and implementation, time and resources are best—and most equitably—used for proactive decision-making based on data.”⁴ This statement in the Mobility Plan and the paragraph in which it is contained should be deleted in its entirety. It is the people who live in the various neighborhoods of the City who know best what works where they live and play.

Lastly, the Mobility Plan notes that it “was developed during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically changed travel patterns and the way we live our lives.”⁵ It is premature to think that post pandemic there will be a dramatic downturn in the number of people

² See generally “Mobility Plan” chapter titled “Supporting Travel Option” p. 4.

³ See “Mobility Plan” chapter titled “Streets” p. 5.

⁴ See “Mobility Plan” chapter titled “Overview” p. 23.

⁵ See City Staff Report for Docket Item #6 at p. 4.

using cars to get to work and for non-work-related travel. Yet, as noted above, the Mobility Plan fails to adequately address the City's severe and growing traffic congestion. In fact, public input received during the public outreach on the Mobility Plan notes that traffic congestion is one of the most important transportation issues to Alexandrians.⁶

In sum, the Mobility Plan is unacceptable as currently drafted since it fails to adequately address all modes of transportation and also implies that future decision making will marginalize input from the voting public and be given to unelected individuals like City staff.

If there are any questions concerning these comments, please contact the undersigned at cameronstacivic@gmail.com, or by phone at (703) 567-5075.

Sincerely,

/s/

Arthur A. Impastato
President
Cameron Station Civic Association

cc: Hillary Orr, Deputy Director Transportation and Environmental Services
Christopher Ziemann, Transportation Planning Division Chief
Jen Slesinger, Mobility Plan Project Manager

⁶ See Mobility Plan *Appendix III-B: Civic Engagement Findings Summary August 2021* at pp. 45, 47, 98 and 107.

October 4, 2021

Via Email

Members of the Planning Commission
City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Re: Concerns Regarding the August 2021 Draft Alexandria Mobility Plan (Docket Item # 6)

Members of the Planning Commission:

On behalf of the Board of Strawberry Hill Civic Association I am writing regarding our concerns with the August 2021 draft Alexandria Mobility Plan ("Draft Mobility Plan"). This matter is scheduled as item #6 at the Planning Commission hearing on October 5, 2021.

Strawberry Hill CA, supports several of the policies and ideas set forth in Draft Mobility Plan however the Plan contains a number of serious flaws that need to be addressed before it is approved. As currently drafted the plan:

1. Does not adequately address all forms of transportation, particularly car traffic;
2. Does not update or revise those portions of the Mobility Plan relating to the bike and pedestrian plan that was done over four years ago; and
3. Suggests that City staff, basing their judgement primarily on data rather than resident input, will have the ultimate say on what will happen in neighborhoods with respect to transportation.

There are certainly many sound reasons why the City should continue to strive to make it easier for residents to use mass transit, bikes, walking and other alternatives to driving a car yet the fact remains the vast majority of Alexandrians drive a car to and from work. And those who either work from home, take mass transit, bike or walk to work, use their cars to go to run errands (i.e. grocery shopping, take their children to sports and other extracurricular activities) as well as for travel around and away from the City.

Despite the fact that the majority of residents use a car as a primary mode of transportation, there is not one chapter or portion of any chapter in the Mobility Plan that tries to address alleviating the severe traffic congestion in our City by expanding or preserving roadways or by building multimodal bridges in key parts of the City. The closest the Mobility Plan comes to addressing this issue is the portion of the Plan relating to smart mobility. The main solution proffered is regulating traffic lights which will help somewhat with traffic congestion yet alone is unlikely to solve the issue of moving cars rapidly through the City. The Mobility Plan should expressly state that the City is in favor of building multimodal bridges such as the north south multimodal bridge that will connect pedestrians, bikes, transit, and cars from South Pickett Street to the Van Dorn Metrorail Station. It should also state that, where feasible, the City is in favor of expanding rather than narrowing traffic lanes to alleviate traffic congestion.

The Mobility Plan goes further in favoring options that would make driving significantly more difficult by eliminating parking and adding bike lanes on major arterial roads. Road diets may make sense in certain areas, but not on major arterial roads. Going in that direction is contrary to what many residents want and have responded as such in many surveys such as the 2020 Residents Survey.

Perhaps most egregiously, the Mobility Plan seems to indicate that future decision making will not be primarily driven by what residents need or want, but rather by City staffs' judgements based mainly on data at the expense of resident viewpoint. The Mobility Plan states that the "City of Alexandria will be proactive and data-driven in decision-making and when implementing projects and initiatives that advance plans and policies. While community requests and input are an important supplement for decision-making and implementation, time and resources are best— and most equitably—used for proactive decision-making based on data." (See "Mobility Plan" chapter titled "Overview" p. 23) This statement in the Mobility Plan and the paragraph in which it is contained should be deleted in its entirety. It is the people who live in the various neighborhoods of the City who know best what works where they live and play.

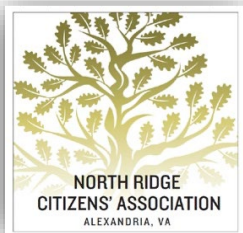
Finally, the Mobility Plan was developed in 2020 during COVID-19 pandemic and we all know the pandemic dramatically changed everyone's lives and travel patterns. We really have yet to see how this manifests over time as we eventually emerge from the pandemic. It is premature to think that post pandemic there will be a dramatic downturn in the number of people using cars to get to work and for non-work-related travel. Yet, as noted above, the Mobility Plan fails to adequately address the City's severe and growing traffic congestion. Traffic congestion is definitely a concern and one of the most important transportation issues faced by the residents of Alexandria and has been for some time.

In conclusion, the Mobility Plan is unacceptable as currently drafted as it fails to adequately address all modes of transportation, most pointedly the use of personal vehicles as well as implies that future decision making will marginalize input from the voting public and be given to unelected individuals like City staff.

Thank-you for your consideration,

Fran Vogel
President, Strawberry Hill Civic Association
president@strawberryhillcivicassociation.org

cc: Hillary Orr, Deputy Director Transportation and Environmental Services
Christopher Ziemann, Transportation Planning Division Chief
Jen Slesinger, Mobility Plan Project Manager



NRCA, P.O. Box 3242, Alexandria, VA 22302

October 5, 2021

Planning Commission
c/o Department of Planning & Zoning
P.O. Box 178
Alexandria, VA 22314

Delivered Via Email: PlanComm@alexandriava.gov

**Re: Oct. 5, 2021 Docket Item #6, Master Plan Amendment #2021-00011—
*Draft Alexandria Mobility Plan***

Dear Chairman Macek and Planning Commission Members:

North Ridge Citizens' Association ("NRCA") commends the City's efforts to update its Transportation Master Plan in order to provide enhanced mobility options in response to land use changes that bring services such as mass transit, bicycles, scooters, walking and other alternatives to residents. It is positive to see the City formally recognize that congestion and neighborhood cut-through traffic are real issues for Alexandrians. We also cheer the inclusion of a representative of the Alexandria Federation of Civic Associations ("AFCA") to the AMP Advisory Committee.

However, the Alexandria Mobility Plan ("AMP" or "Plan") has some important deficiencies that need to be addressed:

- Cars/vehicles are the predominant form of transportation for the vast majority of North Ridge and City-wide residents—both now and for the foreseeable future. Unchecked congestion and forced cut-through traffic pose risks for everyone using our roads. Yet the Plan gives minimal attention to the interests of drivers, with just two chapters that are relevant: Smart Mobility and Streets. Using high-tech solutions such as electric vehicle support infrastructure to help move traffic might be beneficial, but there are faulty objectives in the Plan as well. For example, trying to restrict the 42% of drivers who are currently passing through Alexandria to local highways is unrealistic. There are few real priorities in the Plan to adequately demonstrate that City investments in easing congestion and cut-through traffic are being adequately prioritized and funded, and no clear metrics are established for measuring such improvements.
- It is unclear what the Plan's mandate to "reduce automobile dependency" means in practical terms for residents in low-density residential neighborhoods without mass transit. North Ridge residents enjoy and support safe, walkable/bikeable streets, but they depend heavily upon car travel for mobility needs, including ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft. Seniors, commuters, and families with young/school age children may bear the burden of any inequities which inherently result from adopting the Plan. How will mobility efforts be objectively assessed in North Ridge, and other similar areas of the City?

- The Plan has not made a convincing case that demand for all forms of non-car travel have uniformly increased—particularly in light of the COVID-19 global health pandemic. In North Ridge, for example, bus service had been reduced due to declining ridership demand. What data can the City provide to residents to better demonstrate the AMP’s claims?
- While the Plan mentions the need to address cut-through traffic, it fails to acknowledge the significant negative impact of the City’s imposition of “road diets” and related measures on low-density residential areas—including emergency response/safety issues. The City’s Transportation and Environmental Services (“T&ES”) Department has a poor track record on transparency and responsiveness, and it should be required to collect ample road performance data before and after road diets are implemented to better understand any resulting changes in traffic congestion levels, traffic volumes, and public safety/emergency response. The data should be mandated in the Plan⁵ and made easily available to the public.
- The Plan appears to support a paternalistic form of decision-making led by City staff that falls far short of the stated goals of being “inclusive” and “intentional” in its approach. The Plan should state plainly and clearly that “engagement with neighborhood groups is necessary in order to establish priorities” for City projects. The Seminary Road Diet debacle serves as a powerful example of what can go wrong without adequate public engagement.
- The Plan should require prior public notice of all City grant applications for mobility projects and should post them on the City website for transparency. All major “transit way” planning efforts should be announced with a full decision-making timeline from start to implementation.
- The Plan should require T&ES to make readily available traffic data and analyses to show successes and challenges for specific roadway/transit projects proposed by the City.
- Since the Bicycle/Pedestrian chapter of the Plan was not updated at all from the input last collected in 2014, the City should commit to a formal update in the near-term. The update should be based on a full, transparent, and data-driven evaluation of the 2014 plan.

In sum, the Alexandria Mobility Plan fails to adequately address the City’s severe and growing traffic congestion, which Alexandrians consider to be the most important transportation issue.¹ We hope that you will consider requiring the Plan to address some of the major deficiencies outlined in this letter.

Finally, since Planning Commission Member Melissa McMahon served on the City’s Advisory Committee in drafting the Alexandria Mobility Plan, we ask that she be recused from any Commission votes on adoption or approval of the Plan.

Sincerely,



John Fehrenbach, President

¹ Alexandria Mobility Plan, *Appendix III-B: Civic Engagement Findings Summary August 2021*, at pp. 45, 47, 98, and 107.