



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 17, 2019

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of a Resolution to Support the I-395/95 Commuter Choice Grant Program Project Funding Request. [ROLL-CALL VOTE]

ISSUE: Consideration of the I-395/95 Commuter Choice Grant Program project funding requests.

RECOMMENDATION: That the City Council:

1. Approve the resolution to support an I-395/95 Commuter Choice Grant application request for a total of \$4,989,000 and;
2. Authorize the City Manager to apply for these grant funds and enter into any necessary agreements to accept this grant.

BACKGROUND: As part of the December 2017 agreement for the 37-mile High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes on I-395/95 from Spotsylvania to the Washington, D.C. line, the toll operator (Transurban) is required to provide grant funding for the I-395/95 Commuter Choice Program. The program is intended to support projects that maximize person throughput in the corridor and implement multimodal improvements. Tolls provide the revenue necessary to fund new projects which must benefit toll payers by improving mobility, supporting new, diverse travel choices and enhancing transportation safety and reliability.

The Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC), OmniRide/PRTC (Potomac/Rappahannock Transportation Commission), the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the Commonwealth of Virginia signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that will provide a minimum of \$15 million annually to fund transit-related improvements in the I-395/95 corridor as early as 2019 and for 70 years thereafter. The funding includes a 2.5% annual escalation. A second MOA, approved by the two transportation commissions in January, will guide NVTC's administration of the I-395/95 Commuter Choice program.

All jurisdictions and transit agencies within these two transportation commissions are eligible to apply (including DASH and the City of Alexandria). Eligible projects include new and enhanced bus service, roadway improvements, transportation demand management and carpooling among others. Projects will be rated on a scale that includes technical merit (55 points), cost effectiveness (15 points), applicant preference (10 points) and whether they can be ready on “toll day one” (20 points). Tolling is expected to commence on or around October 30, 2019.

Applications are due May 15, 2019. After the application is submitted, NVTC and PRTC will evaluate projects and provide recommendations to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB). A public comment period will occur in July and August, with the final proposed program adopted in September or October 2019.

DISCUSSION: After consideration of the eligible project types and project scoring, City staff recommend working jointly with DASH to request funding for two projects to enhance DASH bus service through the I-395/95 Commuter Choice Grant Program.

The proposed top priority project would provide weekday peak and off peak, Saturday, and Sunday service enhancements for the AT1. This project is recommended as the top priority because it would build ridership along the planned West End Transitway corridor, serve as a potential future source of operations funding for the transitway, and may align with the Alexandria Transit Vision plan. The second project proposes weekday peak and off peak, Saturday, and Sunday service enhancements for the AT9. The AT9 provides service to key destinations along the I-395 corridor including the Mark Center and the future Potomac Yard Metro Station. This project would also be a stepping stone towards the future transit vision plan.

More detailed descriptions of the two projects and related funding requests are provided below:

Project Priority 1: AT1 Service Improvements (“The AT1 Plus”)

City and DASH staff recommend applying for funding to significantly increase peak and off-peak service levels on the existing AT1 to build transit ridership along the I-395 corridor between Van Dorn Metrorail Station and Seminary Road in anticipation of the planned West End Transitway. The proposed service improvements would allow the AT1 to operate every 10 minutes during weekday peak periods, and every 20 minutes during mid-days and evenings. Weekend enhancements would allow the AT1 to run every 30 minutes from 8:00 AM to 11:00 PM on both Saturdays and Sundays.

This proposal is consistent with the anticipated recommendations of the ongoing Alexandria Transit Vision Plan, which encourages increased bus frequencies in high-density transit corridors, and the provision of consistent all-day service on both weekdays and weekends to allow passengers to establish a transit-centric lifestyle.

The AT1 currently averages nearly 1,600 boardings per weekday, which represents a growth of 11 percent over the last four years. On Saturdays and Sundays, the route averages roughly 900 boardings and 500 boardings, respectively. With the proposed “AT1 Plus” service enhancements, staff anticipates that average weekday ridership could increase by 45 percent to 2,380 boardings, while the average ridership on Saturdays and Sundays could increase by as much as 110 boardings (12 percent) and 250 boardings (50 percent), respectively.

These improvements will be specially-branded as the “AT1 Plus” (or something similar) for marketing purposes. The project also includes funding for 12 additional solar-powered real-time info displays to let

customers know when the bus will arrive, and additional fareboxes and onboard equipment. The proposed funding request for this project totals \$2,022,000 annually or \$3,040,000 over the first 20-month award period (October 2019-June 2021). A breakdown of costs is provided below.

Annual Operating Costs for “AT-1 Plus” Service

Weekday Peak	\$686,000
Weekday Off-Peak	\$568,000
Saturday	\$33,000
Sunday	\$115,000
Marketing (advertisements and bus wraps)	\$ 50,000
Planning/Marketing Labor	\$40,000

Capital Costs for “AT-1 Plus” Service

Real-Time Transit Displays (12 units @ \$5K ea.)	\$60,000
Fareboxes/ITS Equipment (4 units @ 40K ea.)	\$160,000
Bus Repairs and Maintenance	\$160,000
Onboard Farebox/ITS Equipment (4 units @ \$30,	\$120,000

Contingency **\$150,000**

TOTAL (ANNUAL) **\$2,022,000**

TOTAL (20-MONTH FUNDING PERIOD) **\$3,040,000**

Project Priority 2: AT9 Service Enhancements

City and DASH staff also recommend applying for funding to increase service levels on the AT9, which serves the Mark Center, Southern Towers, Shirlington, Parkfairfax, Arlandria and the future Potomac Yard Metro Station. The proposal includes increasing weekday service to run every 20 minutes during peak periods, and every 30 minutes during mid-days and evenings. Saturday AT9 service would run every 30 minutes instead of hourly, and AT9 service would be introduced on Sunday, which is currently the only day it does not run. With these proposed improvements, the AT9 would run until 11:00 PM seven days per week.

If implemented, these improvements would bolster transit ridership to/from the Mark Center, Southern Towers, and Shirlington, and provide a first step to implementing some of the major service concepts identified in the transit vision plan. If implemented, these enhancements could also strengthen the connection from Parkfairfax and the West Glebe Corridor to Potomac Yard, where customers may transfer to the Metroway or the future Potomac Yard Metrorail Station.

The AT9 currently averages over 500 boardings per weekday, which is a 33 percent increase from four years ago. On Saturdays, the route averages roughly 200 boardings, which is a 49 percent increase from four years ago. With the proposed service enhancements, staff anticipates that average weekday AT9 ridership could increase by approximately 60 percent to 800 boardings, while the average ridership on Saturdays could increase

by as much as 140 boardings (70 percent). The new AT9 Sunday service is projected to have about 430 average daily boardings once the service gains a foothold in the corridor.

In addition to the operating costs of these service enhancements, this project also includes funding for eight (8) additional solar-powered real-time info displays to let customers know when buses will arrive. The proposed funding request for this project totals \$1,264,000 annually or \$1,949,000 over the first 20-month award period (October 2019-June 2021). A breakdown of costs is provided below.

Annual Operating Costs for AT-9 Enhancements

Weekday Peak	\$279,000
Weekday Off-Peak	\$300,000
Saturday	\$113,000
Sunday	\$253,000
Planning/Marketing Labor	\$25,000

Capital Costs for AT-9 Enhancements

Real-Time Transit Displays (12 units @ \$5K ea.)	\$40,000
Fareboxes/ITS Equipment (2 units @ 40K ea.)	\$80,000
Bus Repairs and Maintenance	\$80,000
Onboard Farebox/ITS Equipment (2 units @ \$360,000)	

Contingency **\$94,000**

TOTAL (ANNUAL) **\$1,264,000**

TOTAL (20-MONTH FUNDING PERIOD) **\$1,949,000**

FISCAL IMPACT: The I-395/95 Commuter Choice Program will allow DASH to implement several major service improvements that would otherwise require a major increase to the annual operating subsidy from the city. These improvements will also allow DASH and the City of Alexandria to begin implementing first steps towards the ultimate goals of the Alexandria Transit Vision Plan. Improvements to the AT1 - which include operating costs funded by the grant - may be transferrable to the future West End Transitway.

DASH plans to retain four to six of the 120-passenger used buses that were recently purchased to support shuttle bus operations during the WMATA's Summer 2019 Platform Improvement Project. DASH anticipates that these vehicles can be maintained for two additional years, at which point they will reach the end of their useful service lives. Capital funding is available through FY2018-2023 Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) 70% Funding and FY 2021 SmartScale Funding for expansion vehicles that will be used to operate the expanded service on these two routes by FY 2022. These vehicles will have an expected life of 12 years. However, the service will require adding to the overall DASH fleet. The grant funding includes contingency for other potential escalation (i.e. labor or materials).

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Transportation Commission Endorsement Letter

Attachment 2: Resolution

Attachment 3: Presentation

STAFF:

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