



Legislation Text

File #: 24-1683, Version: 1

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 16, 2024

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: JAMES F. PARAJON, CITY MANAGER /s/

FROM: ADRIANA CASTAÑEDA, DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of Grant Applications to the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation for the FY 2025 State Aid Grant Programs for Capital and Operating Assistance, Commuter Assistance Program grants, and Transit Ridership Incentive Program. [ROLL-CALL VOTE]

ISSUE: Consideration of a resolution to support grant applications to the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) for the FY 2025 State Aid Grant Programs.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

1. Approve a resolution (Attachment 1) to support application and submission to DRPT by February 1, 2024, for the following:
 - Up to \$37,000,000 in eligible expenses for State Aid Transit Operating Assistance;
 - Up to \$400,000 for State Aid Capital Assistance for Hybrid Bus Spare Parts;
 - Up to \$350,000 for the Commuter Assistance Program (CAP);
 - Up to \$110,000 for the Public Transportation Workforce Development Program;
 - Up to \$300,000 for the Demonstration Project Assistance Program;
 - Up to \$500,000 for the Transit Ridership Incentive Program; and
2. Authorize the City Manager and the DASH General Manager to apply for State Aid Grants through the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) and enter into any necessary agreements with the Commonwealth of Virginia and/or NVTC to accept and implement the grants.

BACKGROUND: The City applies annually to the Virginia DRPT for grant funds that support transit operating assistance and capital expenses for DASH, Metro, DOT/Paratransit, and commuter outreach

programs. State aid grants reimburse the City for funds spent on transit activities. These funds go directly to the City's Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) Fund and are used to pay the City's annual WMATA operating budget.

The City operates a commuter outreach program, known as GO Alex, that provides information, encouragement, and incentives to support Council's goal of increasing transit ridership and transportation options other than a single-occupant vehicle while still ensuring that residents, workers, and visitors can reach destinations within Alexandria. This strategy is endorsed in the "Mobility Options" chapter of the Alexandria Mobility Plan. In FY 2024, some of these funds were used to promote DASH's free fares and the all-day network. DASH submits applications annually for the demonstration project assistance and an intern.

Additionally, DRPT recently announced passenger amenities as an eligible expense under the Transit Rider Incentive Program (TRIP). The City responded to a mid-cycle application for interim bus shelters at the West End (formerly Landmark) Transit Center until the full build-out can be implemented.

DISCUSSION: The City and DASH plan to submit applications for five DRPT grant programs that will help offset City expenses and provide greater support for DASH. The programs all work toward the City's goal of supporting multimodal transportation options and reducing single-occupancy vehicle trips to relieve congestion. The summaries below reflect the proposed applications and align with the guidelines and criteria outlined by DRPT for each pot of funding:

FY 2025 MERIT - State Operating Assistance (State Aid Grant)

City of Alexandria Transit Operating Assistance - (total eligible expenses - \$37,000,000):

Operating assistance to jurisdictions is allocated based on system size and system performance for both DASH and DOT paratransit. Operating costs have increased over the past few years due to labor and fuel costs. The amount the Commonwealth can provide in operating assistance varies annually but has typically been between 20% and 30%.

FY 2025 MERIT - Capital Assistance (State Aid Grant)

Hybrid Spare Parts - (up to \$400,000):

The Capital Assistance Program provides reimbursement to the City for a portion of the money spent on the purchase of transit capital assets. In FY 2025, DASH will purchase hybrid bus batteries and spare parts that will help maintain a safe and reliable fleet by extending the useful life of its hybrid buses. These purchases are eligible for reimbursement, and the funds that come back to the City are used to offset general fund dollars required for transit operational costs, such as WMATA. In previous years, the City has been reimbursed up to 68% for capital purchases, but the number can vary year to year.

FY 2025 Commuter Assistance Program

GO Alex - (up to \$350,000):

The Commuter Assistance Program grant provides reimbursement to the City for operating dollars spent on GO Alex programming and staffing. These funds will maintain current staffing and fund future programming such as promoting different transportation options in the City, including DASH, Metro, and Capital Bikeshare. A 20% local match is required.

FY 2025 Public Transportation Workforce Development Program

DASH Public Transit Intern - (up to \$110,000):

This grant will allow DASH to continue funding for the Planning Intern program through FY 2025. This

grant will fund two interns and allow them to gain valuable experience in the public transportation industry. A 20% local match is required.

FY 2025 Demonstration Project Assistance Program

DASH Passenger Information Screen Pilot- (up to \$200,000):

This pilot would allow DASH to install two information screens onboard up to 10 buses that would display upcoming bus stops, transfer connections, service alerts, advertisements, and other customer outreach information. These infotainment screens would enhance overall accessibility and ease of use for DASH riders. DASH would be one of the first transit agencies in the state to install such screens on their buses and could install the screens on all buses going forward if the pilot is successful. A 20% local match is required, and staff estimates that this support would cost an additional \$10,000 to \$15,000 annually in operating funds.

DASH Thru Vision Blindspot Camera Pilot - (up to \$100,000):

This grant would provide funding to DASH to install a state-of-the-art camera system on up to ten DASH buses that would help bus operators see objects or people who are in the blind spots created by the two front pillars. The screens would be mounted on the pillars to effectively remove these dangerous blind spots for bus operators. This could greatly improve bus and pedestrian safety and would promote ongoing Vision Zero objectives. A 20% local match is required.

FY 2025 Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP)

Bus Stop Enhancements - (up to \$500,000)

This grant can be used to fund passenger amenities. As such, this grant would provide funding for upgrades to bus stops, including bus shelters, lighting, benches, bus arrival screens, ADA improvements, and other potential minor concrete work. The City recently updated the bus stop inventory and is in the process of prioritizing stops for improvements based on ridership, need, and equity. The cost of purchasing and installing a new shelter is approximately \$30,000, and the cost of amenities is estimated at between \$5,000 and \$10,000. This amount would improve 12 to 15 bus stops Citywide but could be more depending on individual stop needs. These improvements would enhance safety, comfort, and convenience for transit riders, making the bus a more practical and convenient option to reduce SOV driving. Both the Alexandria Transportation Commission, and the ATC Board of Directors have been requesting that staff seek funding for transit access and amenities over the past few years (Attachment 2). There is a 32% local match for these projects.

If approved by DRPT, funds would require formal adoption by the Commonwealth Transportation Board and incorporation into the state's six-year program in the spring of 2024. Funds would be available on or after July 1, 2024.

FISCAL IMPACT: Operating and Capital Assistance funds provided by DRPT to jurisdictions do not require a local match, as these are treated as a reimbursement to localities for funds spent on transit. Funding will be allocated by a regional formula depending on which expenditures qualify for reimbursement; as such, the expected award or grant amount is unknown at this time. Based on the funding rates for FY 2024, the city could expect to be awarded approximately \$5 million in operating assistance and \$272,000 in capital assistance.

The estimated local match for the Workforce Development Program and the Demonstration Project Assistance funds would require a \$82,000 local match which would need to be identified in the FY 2025 budget or supplemental appropriation process. If the required local match is not available and DASH cannot determine a local match, the DASH Board of Directors may withdraw, amend the grant applications, or decline to enter into

the necessary agreements.

The total local match would require a \$70,000 local match for the Commuter Assistance Program, which would need to be identified in the FY 2025 budget or supplemental appropriation process. If the required local match is not available, the City may withdraw or otherwise amend the grant application.

For the TRIP grant, the total local match would be \$160,000, which could be funded by a combination of sources, including funding received by new developments under the Transportation Management Plan Policy's Go Alex fund, any existing projects with local funding that could act as a match, or Northern Virginia Transportation Authority 30% funding. If the local match could not be identified, the City may withdraw or otherwise amend the grant applications.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Resolution

Attachment 2: Letters of Support

Attachment 3: Presentation

STAFF:

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