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Title:	Public Hearing and Consideration of a Request for Council to Approve a Resolution Denoting the City of Alexandria Position on the Operation of the Seminary Road HOV/Transit Ramp [ROLL-CALL VOTE]		

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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
9/15/2012	1	City Council Public Hearing	approved as amended	

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 5, 2012

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Public Hearing and Consideration of a Request for Council to Approve a Resolution Denoting the City of Alexandria Position on the Operation of the Seminary Road HOV/Transit Ramp [ROLL-CALL VOTE]

ISSUE: The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has requested that City Council approve a resolution denoting the City of Alexandria position on the operation of the Seminary Road High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV)/Transit ramp.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council (1) hold a public hearing on September 15; (2) after the public hearing approve the attached resolution supporting the design and operation of the Seminary Road HOV/Transit ramp precluding northbound right turn movements during the AM peak period and westbound left turn movements during the PM peak period, (3) indicate to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that if the option with these turns is approved, measures to address degradation of traffic operations and/or safety should be taken and (4) communicate the results of the public hearing to VDOT.

BACKGROUND: VDOT is proposing to construct a new HOV/Transit ramp at the I-395 Seminary Road interchange. This HOV/Transit ramp will provide a connection from/to the HOV/Transit lanes south of the Seminary Road Interchange to/from the existing Seminary Road Interchange. The HOV/Transit ramp will operate as a reversible lane with traffic traveling northbound during the AM peak period and southbound during the PM peak period. FHWA issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for this project based on the recently completed Environmental Assessment in June 2012. FHWA is reviewing the Interchange Modification Report (IMR) for this project and approval by FHWA is anticipated in September 2012.

DISCUSSION: FHWA is reviewing the design concepts for the HOV/Transit Ramp at Seminary Road. One of the concepts under consideration at the request of the City precludes the right turns at the top of the ramp during the AM peak period (and complementary prohibition of westbound left turns in the PM peak period). The other concept allows right and left turn movements at the right terminus. The City supports the construction of the HOV/Transit ramp and has requested that FHWA approve the concept that precludes the right turn movements in the AM peak period and the left-turn movements in the PM peak period to help avoid safety and operational impacts to the school and residential areas east of I-395. City Council discussed this issue on January 24, 2012 and June 13, 2012, and there was consensus of Council that the ramp should be constructed to help mitigate traffic impacts for the areas west of the interchange and that the ramp should be operated in a way that precludes northbound right turns in the AM peak period and westbound left turns from Seminary Road during the PM peak period.

VDOT has completed the analysis of traffic operations with and without right turns at the top of the ramp. The analysis is documented in the April 2012 Interchange Modification Report (IMR). The 2015 forecasts by VDOT for the HOV/Transit ramp are 80 northbound right turns during the AM peak hour and 225 westbound left turns in the PM peak hour. In 2035, these volumes are expected to increase to 100 northbound right turning vehicles in the morning and 300 westbound lefts in the afternoon. There is significant pedestrian activity immediately east of the I-395 interchange due to the presence of a Francis Hammond Middle School, a public library and commercial development. More than 100 pedestrians cross the intersection of Seminary Road and Library Lane during the AM and PM peak hours.

While the City of Alexandria supports the construction of the ramp with the northbound right turn prohibitions in the morning and westbound left turn prohibition in the afternoon, it appears that FHWA may determine that the option that does not preclude these movements is the one to be implemented. In order to address potential impacts on traffic operations and safety on the areas east of I-395, if FHWA approves the concept with full movements at the top of the ramp, the City of Alexandria requests that the following tasks/measures be undertaken:

1. Continue to evaluate and determine if safety improvements can be implemented at the Seminary Road and Library Lane intersection prior to the opening of the HOV/Transit ramp in 2015;
2. Measure vehicular and pedestrian counts and queue lengths annually for a minimum of two years after the HOV/Transit ramp opening, however, given the safety problems it is recommended that action be taken immediately;
3. Collect accident data for this intersection on an annual basis for the same time periods;

4. Calculate the level of service for the AM and PM peak hour;
5. Implement mitigation measures if the intersection is determined to operate at level of service “E” or “F” or there is significant degradation in pedestrian and vehicular safety;
6. In the event no options can be implemented to satisfactorily address the safety and operations issues, VDOT and/or the City will approach FHWA and request that the northbound right turns be precluded in the morning and westbound left turns be precluded in the afternoon; and
7. The counts, analysis and assessment of mitigation measures will be conducted by VDOT and will be reviewed by FHWA and the City of Alexandria. If funding is identified, construction of mitigation measures will be the responsibility of VDOT.

Finally, it is proposed in the resolution that FHWA and VDOT agree in writing to take actions to preclude the AM peak right turn and PM peak left turn movements if certain criteria (listed in the resolution) are met.

FISCAL IMPACT: The HOV/Transit ramp is being built by VDOT. The implementation of this improvement has no fiscal impact on the City.

ATTACHMENT: Resolution Regarding the Design and Operation of the Northbound I-395/Seminary Road HOV/Transit Ramp

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