



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 5, 2014

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of a Resolution to Establish a Policy Advisory Group for the Van Dorn/Beauregard Transitway Alternatives Analysis/Environmental Assessment. [ROLL-CALL VOTE]

ISSUE: Establishment of a Policy Advisory Group (PAG) for the Van Dorn/Beauregard Transitway (Corridor C) Alternatives Analysis/Environmental Assessment (AA/EA).

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Approve the resolution establishing a Van Dorn/Beauregard Transitway Policy Advisory Group as discussed below
- (2) Request that the Chairs of the Transportation Commission, Planning Commission, Environmental Policy Commission, Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee each nominate a member of their group to serve on the Advisory Group; and
- (3) Authorize the City Manager to appoint the remaining members and designate the Chair of the Advisory Committee

BACKGROUND: The City's Transportation Master Plan, adopted by Council in 2008, identified three priority corridors that would offer high-quality, high capacity, and reliable transit service within the City. These three corridors (Route 1, Duke Street/Eisenhower Avenue, and Van Dorn/Beauregard) connect existing and future development areas that have high densities of residential land use, major activity and employment centers, and connectivity to regional transit including the City's existing and future Metrorail stations.

In 2010, the City began the Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study. As part of the study, a High Capacity Transit Corridor Work Group (CWG) was formed to provide input on issues such as route alignment, cross-sections, methods of operation, vehicle type, land use, ridership, and financial implications for all three corridors.

The project team conducted an analysis of existing conditions, needs and alternatives, and presented these to the CWG. For the Van Dorn/Beauregard corridor, an initial set of seven alternatives was screened and four alternatives were carried forward for a more in-depth evaluation. Based on this analysis, the CWG made the following recommendation for the corridor on May 19, 2011:

“Alternative D (Bus Rapid Transit in dedicated lanes between Pentagon and Van Dorn Metro) is the preferred alternative for phased implementation of transit in dedicated lanes in Corridor C (Beauregard/Van Dorn) until such time as Alternative G (Streetcar in dedicated lanes between Pentagon and Van Dorn Metro, via Columbia Pike) becomes feasible and can be implemented.” (Attachment 2)

City Council held a public hearing on September 17, 2011. Following the public hearing, the City Council adopted the recommendation of the CWG, with the addition that staff optimize the alignment to better serve the Northern Virginia Community College.

In December 2013, the City kicked off an Alternatives Analysis (AA) and Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze and refine the alignment as defined by the CWG and City Council, and to identify any impacts and potential mitigation associated with the recommended alternative. The study is partially funded by a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and is the first step towards applying for a federal Small Starts grant for project design and construction.

The AA will evaluate three alternatives developed with input from FTA:

- (1) The No Build Alternative includes the existing and planned transportation network
- (2) The Transportation Systems Management Alternative includes system improvements such as transit-signal priority but stops short of a major capital investment such as dedicated lanes
- (3) The Build Alternative includes dedicated transit lanes between the Van Dorn Metrorail Station and the Pentagon as described above

At the outset of the AA, the project team will also focus on defining a Build Alternative. This requires additional analysis to resolve specific issues related to the project alignment and cross section, including:

- Optimizing service to the Northern Virginia Community College, particularly in light of the recent Campus Master Plan;
- Balancing stop spacing along the corridor to best serve existing and planned development while at the same time keeping the “rapid” in “bus rapid transit;”
- Refining access to Landmark Mall based on recent development plans; and
- Determining the initial curb-to-curb cross section required to achieve dedicated lanes along Van Dorn Street.

The results of the AA will provide information to local officials on the benefits, costs, and impacts of each alternative so that a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) can be identified. The AA process will also identify local funding sources for implementation and operation. The work completed during the AA will support the City’s potential application for federal Small Starts competitive grant funding and will also provide baseline information for the completion of the environmental review process and preliminary engineering.

The EA (which follows the AA if the AA does not select a No Build Alternative) will evaluate potential transportation, socio-economic and environmental effects, focused directly on issues concerning the public, the FTA, and state and local agencies. The EA will analyze construction impacts as well as longer-term effects resulting from the project, and will identify mitigation measures as appropriate. If the project receives a Finding

of No Significant Impact (FONSI) following completion of the EA, the project will be eligible for federal funding.

DISCUSSION: Staff is recommending appointment of a Policy Advisory Group (PAG) that will provide guidance on the project. Larger community meetings will complement the PAG, focusing on providing information and soliciting feedback from the public. The project team will supplement public meetings with non-traditional outreach activities, such as tours of the corridor and booths at community events. The project team will also make use of the internet and social media to engage the public in the process. Public input will be sought at specific points in the process, aligned with the PAG tasks as described below.

Mission: The mission of the PAG is to provide input on key deliverables and project recommendations related to the Van Dorn/Beauregard Transitway AA/EA.

Tasks: Members of the PAG will be responsible for reviewing and providing guidance on issues, including:

- Definition of the project Purpose and Need
- Refinement of alternatives
- Evaluation measures and priorities
- Evaluation results and determination of the LPA
- Results of the environmental analysis

Advisory Group Composition: The PAG is proposed to consist of nine members. The City Manager will designate one of the members to serve as the Chair of the Committee. The PAG is proposed to have the following representation:

Transportation Commission	(1)
Planning Commission	(1)
Environmental Policy Commission	(1)
Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee	(1)
Professional in the transit industry	(1)
Community representatives	(3)
Developer representative	(1)
Total	(9 members)

The Chairs of the above-named groups will be asked to nominate a member of their group to serve on the PAG. The remaining slots will be appointed by the City Manager based on a call for nominations publicized through the City's eNews service, notices to civic, community, and business associations, and the City website.

Process and Reporting: The PAG will rely on the following to guide decision-making:

- Formal voting will only be used to get a sense of the group preferences
- In cases where common ground cannot be identified, dissenting members may include a minority opinion report or letter to ensure an accurate reflection of the viewpoints of the PAG
- The PAG will support the public outreach process by reporting back to the boards, commissions, groups and civic groups that they represent and communicate to the PAG any positions, comments, or advice from the groups they represent

Expectations of Members:

- Attend all meetings. When absence is unavoidable, members are encouraged to review all information and complete any assignments provided for the missed meeting;
- Arrive at meetings prepared by completing any assigned reading or tasks; and
- Serve as a conduit to the community or commissions by keeping them informed of the activities of the planning effort and bringing their ideas and concerns back to the group.

Responsibilities of the Chair:

- Presiding over meetings;
- Serving as a spokesperson for the PAG; and
- Working with City staff to set agendas for PAG meetings.

Communication and Outreach: Consistent with the principles of *What's Next Alexandria*, City staff will keep the public informed of the schedule, issues, materials and progress of the PAG through the project webpage as well as other outreach methods including eNews, social media, and community volunteers. PAG meetings will be open to the public.

Staff Support: Department of Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES) staff, supplemented by a consultant team and staff from other departments, will provide support to the PAG.

Next Steps: It is intended that the PAG will begin meeting in Spring 2014 and will meet regularly throughout the process to discuss the topics outlined above.

Sunset: The PAG will sunset upon submission of the Environmental Assessment document to the Federal Transit Administration.

FISCAL IMPACT: The support provided by staff will be conducted within the allocated operational budgets for each department, and the support provided by consultants has been assumed in their contract. No additional funding will be needed to help coordinate the PAG tasks.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Resolution

Attachment 2: Recommended Alignment

Attachment 3: Presentation

STAFF:

Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager

Richard Baier, Director, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services

Jerome Fletcher, Special Assistant to the City Manager

Sandra Marks, Acting Deputy Director, T&ES

Antonio Baxter, Division Chief, Strategic Management Services, T&ES

Marti Reinfeld, Division Chief, Transit Services, T&ES

Lee Farmer, Principal Transportation Planner, T&ES