



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 2, 2015

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of Receipt of an Update on the Northern Virginia Regional Commission Commuter Ferry Service Project.

ISSUE: Consideration of Receipt of an Update on the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) Commuter Ferry Service Project.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

1. Receive the update on the Commuter Ferry Project; and
2. Authorize the Mayor to send a letter on behalf of Council (Attachment 1) to NVRC expressing support in concept utilizing the Potomac River serving as a regional transportation corridor, and expressing serious concerns with proposed shore-side facilities in Alexandria due to potential parking and traffic impacts on Old Town.

BACKGROUND: The concept of a high-speed commuter ferry service on the Potomac River has been the subject of several studies and stakeholder groups since the April 2000. As it is currently envisioned, the NVRC Commuter Ferry Service Project is exploring connections between employment and residential centers located along the Potomac, Occoquan, and Anacostia Rivers. The ferry would provide a water based alternative for moving passengers and freight within the region and is also intended to increase the resiliency of the existing regional transportation systems. The project has published three (3) studies in the last 15 years to evaluate Feasibility (2000), Services and Routing (2009) and most recently Service and Market Analysis (2015).

In June 2015, NVRC held a stakeholder meeting in order to provide an overview of the results of the Service and Market Analysis study. A planned Fast Ferry Summit, initially scheduled for October 22, 2015, is being rescheduled.

DISCUSSION: The recently released market analysis performed for the NVRC suggests that there is a

sustainable market for commuter ferry services along four corridors. One corridor was found to have a viable market for access to military installation and another corridor was found to have potential but is not financially sustainable under today's conditions. The corridors selected were based on market size and travel time. They include:

- SE and SW Washington, DC to the City of Alexandria
- National Airport/Crystal City to SE and SW Washington, DC
- Joint Base Anacostia/Bolling (JBAB) and Department of Homeland Security HQ to City of Alexandria
- Woodbridge (Eastern Prince William County) to SE Washington, DC

The market analysis proposes that shorter connections between Alexandria and Washington, DC including JBAB and Reagan National Airport and Washington, DC have market potential that could be pursued and are likely, in the long-term, to be commercial viable and operate without a public operating subsidy. To date, the project has received a \$3.3 million capital grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) which NVRC has indicated would be used to purchase two vessels and retrofit existing docks to support ferry service. In order to receive the FTA funds an environmental analysis would be required for the project. Any required subsidies to operate the service for routes that are likely to need a public subsidy have not been identified.

At the June 2015 stakeholder meeting, City staff communicated to NVRC that the current analysis had not taken into consideration any of the City's concerns Councilman Smedberg and Councilwoman Pepper (who represent the City on NVRC) and City staff have expressed the City's serious concerns to NVRC about the impact of JBAB ferry service on Old Town traffic and parking. Neither the availability of sufficient parking near any shore-side facilities nor the transportation impacts of commuters headed for the City Marina in Old Town a mile away from the King Street Metro Station were considered. At the June meeting there was discussion of some of the benefits of docking at National Airport since there is a Metro station and parking facilities. Additionally, the City has previously expressed concern with ongoing transportation impacts created by ongoing BRAC-related master plan implementation at the JBAB site. The City should not serve as JBAB's parking lot because the Federal government failed to provide adequate parking at JBAB when it substantially expanded the federal workforce at that site. The Department of the Navy's final Environmental Assessment (EA), released in September 2010, noted that implementation of base consolidation at the site would result in a 27% net increase over current levels of vehicles accessing or exiting the base during morning and afternoon peak hours. The EA also notes that no additional employee parking would be built. The JBAB population is now over 18,000 people. The 2010 EA also notes that the Navy should pursue a more robust Transportation Management Plan and pursue transportation alternatives to assist with vehicle trip reduction.

The NVRC's next step on this project includes a Fast Ferry Summit (now postponed) at which it proposes to hold information sessions on implementation issues including governance, environmental review, finance and operations planning.

FISCAL IMPACT: As noted above, the NVRC has received a \$3.3 million from the FTA to purchase two vessels and retrofit existing docks to support ferry service.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Letter to NVRC
2: Presentation

STAFF:

Emily Baker, P.E. Acting Deputy City Manager
Yon Lambert, AICP, Acting Director, T&ES
Sandra Marks, Deputy Director, T&ES
Ramond Robinson, Division Chief, Transit, T&ES