



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** JANUARY 6, 2021

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

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

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Consideration of a Grant Application from DASH and the City of Alexandria for the FY 2022 to FY 2023 I-395/95 Commuter Choice Grant Program. [ROLL-CALL VOTE]

**ISSUE:** Consideration of a grant application from DASH and the City of Alexandria for the FY 2022 to FY 2023 I-395/95 Commuter Choice Grant Program.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council:

1. Approve the resolution (Attachment 1) to support the two I-395/95 Commuter Choice Grant application requests for up to \$11 million over two years; and
2. Authorize the City Manager to apply for these grant funds and enter into any necessary agreements to accept this grant.

**BACKGROUND:** The purpose of the I-395/95 Commuter Choice program is to identify and provide funding support for transportation projects that maximize person throughput in the corridor and improve overall mobility options. The program is managed by the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) and the Potomac Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC), which oversee the distribution of \$15 million in annual funding from I-395/95 Express Lane toll revenues.

For the inaugural FY 2020 to FY 2021 I-395/95 Commuter Choice program, DASH and the City were awarded funding for two bus service enhancement projects: The AT-1 Plus (Van Dorn Metro/Seminary Plaza) and the AT-9 (Mark Center/Potomac Yard). Funding increased the service frequency, increased hours of operation, included specially branded buses and added real-time bus arrival displays. The lines began operating in October 2019.

As a result of the service improvements, pre-pandemic monthly ridership on the AT-1 Plus and AT-9 increased by 25 percent and 45 percent, respectively, during the first five months of service and when compared to the same period in the previous year. By comparison, total monthly passengers on all other DASH routes were down by over 5 percent during the same five-month period. Although transit ridership has fallen dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, these two routes experienced only modest declines. Average weekend passenger boardings in the first quarter of FY 2021 increased for both routes as compared to the same time period in FY 2020 due to the large number of transit-dependent riders that are served by both routes.

**DISCUSSION:** Staff propose to submit what are, in effect, “continuation” grant applications to build and improve on the enhancements in the two corridors that received initial funding.

While the two recommended projects will be given new route names, they are virtually identical to the two highly successful DASH routes that were awarded I-395 Commuter Choice (Round One) funding and serving areas with larger numbers of low-income and minority residents. The proposed applications will provide operational funding for enhanced service, marking and communication, and capital projects along the routes including Transit Signal Priority (TSP) upgrades, bus stop improvements, and real-time passenger information displays. No additional buses will be required for either of these service enhancements.

While the FY 2022 to FY 2023 projects represent a significant increase in requested funds as compared to the previous projects that were awarded during the first cycle, the grant enables DASH to implement several key service improvements recommended in the 2022 Alexandria Transit Vision Plan that would otherwise require a major increase to the annual operating subsidy from the City. The funding awarded can be scaled down based on the routes' scoring and assessment, and City staff believe it is likely that NVTC views the projects favorably, although this is a very competitive program. The following projects are being submitted for funding.

**Project 1 - DASH AT-1 Plus Enhanced Service (new route name: Line 35) - \$6,810,000**

Project 1 is the proposed priority project (as it was in the first round) and would provide service expansion for the new DASH “Line 35”, which will enhance the existing AT-1 Plus DASH route and extend to the Pentagon via Park Center and Interstate 395 to provide a key regional connection for West Alexandria (Attachment 2). These service improvements build on the pre-pandemic AT-1 Plus ridership increases along the planned West End Transitway corridor, serve as a potential future source of operations funding for the transitway, and advance the goals and implementation of the Alexandria Transit Vision (ATV) Plan. Line 35 service enhancements are expected to cost roughly \$3,500,000 in FY 2022 and \$3,310,000 in FY 2023 for a two-year total of \$6,810,000.

**Project 2 - DASH AT-9 Enhanced Service (new route name: Line 36)” - \$4,180,000**

Project 2 proposes service enhancements for the new DASH “Line 36”, which slightly modifies the current AT-9 DASH route (Attachment 2) which will increase service along this corridor so that it runs every 15 minutes, all-day, seven days each week. The AT-9 also received FY 2020 to FY 2021 Commuter Choice funding to enable runs every 20 to 30 minutes. In the five months between the implementation of the AT-9 service enhancements and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AT-9 recorded a 45 percent increase in total ridership, by far the largest increase of any DASH route over that period. Line 36 service enhancements are expected to cost roughly \$2,150,000 in FY 2022 and \$2,030,000 in FY 2023 for a two-year total of \$4,180,000.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The City is applying for a total of \$10,990,000 in grant funding, and there are no fiscal impacts associated with the application or award of I-395/95 funds. However, if the City does not receive any funding through this program, the frequency of bus service on these routes and some service areas would be reduced to baseline levels of service that are being contemplated in the preparation of the FY 2022 operating

budget, which still has an increased level of service for these routes when compared to service levels prior to the Round 1 I-395/95 fund enhancements. Line 36 would revert to all-day 30-minute headways, and Line 35 service would be reduced during the day to between 10- and 20-minute headways with less trips to the Pentagon.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1: Resolution

Attachment 2: Service Maps

Attachment 3: Endorsement Letters from the Transportation Commission and ATC  
Board of Directors

Attachment 4: Presentation

**STAFF:**

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