

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 22, 2008

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE AMENDMENTS TO THE RECOMMENDED COMPREHENSIVE TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN

ISSUE: Possible amendments to the recommended Comprehensive Transportation Master Plan.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council: (1) hold the public hearing, and (2) following the public hearing refer the Plan and the matters discussed below to the Planning Commission for consideration.

BACKGROUND: Some questions and concerns that have been raised by Council members suggest the need to consider some amendments to the language in the transportation plan as recommended to Council by the Planning Commission. This memorandum responds to those questions and concerns, and provides staff suggestions for possible amendments.

(1) Potomac Yard and Eisenhower Valley Metrorail Stations - Included in the Planning Commission's recommendation of the transportation plan was an amendment to include specific reference to possible new Metrorail stations in Potomac Yard and Eisenhower Valley. A correction to this amendment, as adopted by the Commission, is needed prior to plan adoption. This correction is to require that a feasibility study and funding plan for a new Eisenhower Valley station be included as part of the Eisenhower West Area Plan, not the Landmark/Van Dorn small area plan. Given the Landmark/Van Dorn planning process is ongoing and the area is already served by the Van Dorn Metrorail station it would not be appropriate to hold up that Landmark/Van Dorn plan until the concept of adding an additional Metrorail station in the Eisenhower Valley was studied. Below is the amendment adopted by the Planning Commission that is marked up with the requested correction. This text would replace the text for strategy T6 on page 1-14.

T6. The City will ensure that development and redevelopment does not preclude efforts to expand public transit infrastructure.

- T6.A. The City will ensure that any amendment to the Potomac Yard/Potomac Greens Small Area Plan for the purpose of increasing density beyond what is currently approved shall study the feasibility of the development and funding of an additional Metro Rail Station.*
- T6.B. The City will ensure that any amendment to the ~~Landmark/VanDorn Small Area Plan~~ Eisenhower West Area Plan, the King St. Metro/Eisenhower Ave Small Area Plan or the Seminary Hill Small Area Plan that includes land in the Eisenhower Valley (~~including the anticipated Eisenhower West Small Area Plan~~) and that proposes an increase in density beyond what is currently approved shall study the feasibility of the development and funding of an additional Metro Rail Station.*

(2) Address the feasibility of providing fully dedicated transit lanes through the full length of all corridors – The Task Force recognized that the proposed transit concept would have to be developed in a context sensitive manner and that dedicated transit lanes (running ways or rights-of-way) might not be feasible along the entire length of any one particular corridor due to prevailing constraints. Under these circumstances, it was recognized that dedicated running ways may have to be combined with other transit priority techniques, such as operating in mixed traffic with transit priority at signalized intersections and “queue jumping” in critical congestion areas, in order to achieve a feasible implementation plan. Despite its recognition of this possibility, the Task Force felt strongly that the City should pursue the concept of fully dedicated transit running ways until such time as prevailing constraints might force acceptance of lesser transit priority treatments in specific segments of the proposed corridors. In order to clarify this point in the recommended plan, staff recommends incorporating the text that is presented after discussion of the next issue – factors to be considered in developing implementation plans for the transit corridors.

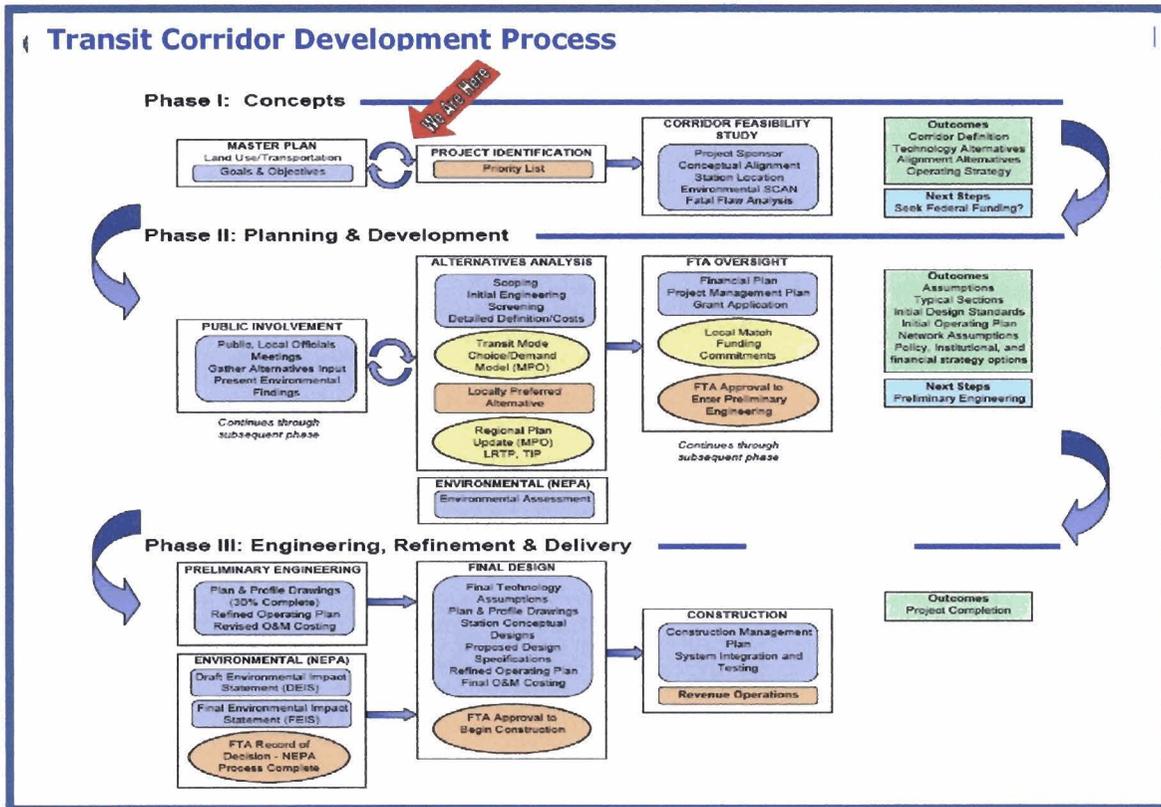
(3) Provide examples of the factors that will be evaluated in developing plans to implement the proposed transit corridors – In order to preserve eligibility for federal funding to support implementation of the proposed transit corridors, the process that will be followed requires the identification, evaluation and documentation of potential project impacts in several areas of concern, and ongoing public involvement. A key requirement of this process is the preparation of environmental impact documents pursuant to the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) to ensure that information is available for public officials and citizens to properly balance infrastructure development, economic prosperity, health and environmental protection, community and neighborhood preservation, and quality of life issues. Specific resources and potential impacts that are required to be considered in environmental evaluations for transit projects include: air quality; endangered species; environmental justice; floodplains; hazardous materials and brownfields; historic, archaeological and cultural resources; navigable waterways and coastal zones; noise and vibration (both during construction and operation); parklands and historic sites; social and economic impacts (factors influencing the character and nature of the community); transportation (including traffic and parking); water quality; and wetlands.

In order to provide this information in the recommended plan and address the previously discussed issue regarding the feasibility of fully dedicated transit lanes, staff recommends

Council consider incorporating the following text as a new implementation section following the end of the funding section on page 1-13.

Implementation

The transit concept that is presented in this plan is an innovative and ambitious proposal that will challenge City leaders and residents throughout the implementation process. The proposed transit corridors and services must be developed from a concept level to an operating transit service following a process that will be context sensitive, provide ongoing opportunity for public involvement and preserve eligibility for federal funding to support implementation. As illustrated in the graphic below, the development process that will be followed is intended to identify and evaluate increasingly refined alternatives based on information that becomes broader in scope and more detailed during each development phase. Progressing from the initial corridor feasibility studies through alternatives analyses, environmental impact assessments, and preliminary and final engineering to construction and initiation of service, the process is open for public input as key implementation decisions (such as the preferred transit route and mode for a particular corridor, the level of service to be provided, the type(s) of transit priority that will be provided in individual corridor segments, and the locations of stations and stops) are being made. For any individual corridor, this development process may take six to ten years to complete.



During the implementation process, it may be determined that providing fully dedicated transit lanes or running ways along the full length of the corridor may not be possible due to prevailing constraints. Under these circumstances, it may be necessary to employ other transit priority techniques, such as operating in mixed traffic with transit priority at signalized intersections and “queue jumping” in critical congestion areas, in certain corridor segments in order to achieve a feasible implementation plan.

A key element of the project development process is the preparation of environmental impact documents pursuant to the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) to ensure that information is available for public officials and citizens to properly balance infrastructure development, economic prosperity, health and environmental protection, community and neighborhood preservation, and quality of life issues. The potential project impacts that are required to be identified, evaluated and documented in these environmental evaluations include several factors that have already been identified as early community concerns. These include: air quality; environmental justice; historic, archeological and cultural resources; noise and vibration (both during construction and operation); historic sites; social and economic impacts (factors influencing the character and nature of the community); and transportation (both traffic and parking).

(4) Include specific priorities for implementing sections of the proposed transit corridors – Prioritization of the proposed corridors is addressed in strategy T3 on page 1-14. Recognizing that the information that is currently available is limited in scope and detail for purposes of prioritization of these corridors, staff strongly recommends that this strategy be retained as drafted and that prioritization remain part on the implementation process, during which more complete and detailed information will be available.

However, if Council determines that an initial prioritization is necessary in the plan, staff suggests adding the following as action T3.C on page 1-14. The prioritization below relates to the likely areas where redevelopment is likely to occur in what order it may occur.

T3.C. Until such time that the implementation process may develop information to indicate otherwise, the City’s initial priorities for implementing transit corridors are: (1) completion of the Crystal City/Potomac Yard Transit Corridor that is currently being implemented; (2) the Van Dorn / Beauregard Corridor in the vicinity of Landmark Mall; (3) the Van Dorn / Beauregard Corridor extended to the Pentagon; (4) the Duke Street Corridor; and (5) the Route 1 corridor through the Old Town area.

(5) Include specific reference to coordination of transit technologies with surrounding jurisdictions – In order to ensure that Alexandria’s future investments in transit information technologies are coordinated among regional transit service providers for seamless user access, staff recommends Council consider adding the following as action T7.C on page 1-15 as follows.

T7.C. The City will coordinate the development and deployment of transit information technologies with regional service providers to provide seamless delivery to transit users.

(6) Include beautification and traffic calming as part of future street improvements –

These items are addressed in the plan as recommended to Council. Action S1.C on page 4-9 calls for continued funding of the city's traffic calming program, which is also embraced in actions S2.A and B. Strategy S6 calls for the inclusion of landscaping, street trees, pedestrian amenities and public art in street improvements. The streetspace design manual strategy (S7 on page 4-10) also includes these issues, although in a less explicit manner.

Should Council feel that this issue should be more explicitly addressed, staff suggests adding the following as action S6.C on page 4-9.

S6.C. Incorporate traffic calming features in street improvement projects whenever possible.

(7) Include an evaluation of the City's existing high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes –

Specifically, this request was to evaluate the need to expand the operating hours of the existing HOV lanes on Patrick and Henry Streets and on Washington Street. If Council desires, staff recommends amending strategy S8 on page 4-10 as follows.

S8. The City will explore opportunities for the implementation of additional or expanded HOV travel lanes or reduction of existing HOV travel lanes on City streets to enhance the use of high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes as a traffic management strategy for periods of peak travel demand.

S8.A. The City will study its existing HOV travel lanes to determine if changes in their operations would improve traffic flow during peak travel periods.

S8.B. The City will evaluate opportunities for implementation of additional or expanded HOV travel lanes or reduction of existing HOV travel lanes on City streets.

(8) Include a parking reduction near metro stations in the final plan – This is primarily a land use issue that is addressed in the City's current zoning ordinance. Although omitted from the parking requirements table shown on page 5-3, there is a parking district 6 that includes properties within 2,000 feet of a Metro station. Within this district, parking requirements are reduced for commercial land uses; however, not for residential uses. Currently, this issue is being addressed as those small area plans that include metro station sites are being updated, such as the Eisenhower East and Braddock Road Metro plans. Strategy P1 on page 5-5, completion of a comprehensive parking study, will also include consideration of this issue within actions P1.1.a and b.

Should Council feel that this issue should be more explicitly addressed, staff suggests adding the following as action P1.5 on page 5-5.

P1.5. The City will review its parking requirements for properties proximate to Metrorail stations and revise them as appropriate to support the principles of transit-oriented development/redevelopment.

(9) Include strategies to better manage our municipal parking – This is the overall goal of strategies P1, 2 and 3 on page 5-5, and a specific outcome of action P1.2. By bringing the management, allocation, enforcement and development of parking together as a consolidated responsibility, the City’s municipal parking resources can be more effectively managed.

Should Council feel that this issue should be more explicitly addressed, staff suggests adding the following as action P1.6 on page 5-5.

P1.6. The City will identify, evaluate and adopt appropriate “best practices” for municipal parking management to more effectively manage its parking resources.

(10) Discourage surface parking lots all areas, not just commercial districts – Staff recommends amending strategy P4 on page 5-5 as follows to address this issue.

P4. The City will implement policies to discourage the development of surface parking lots in commercial districts.

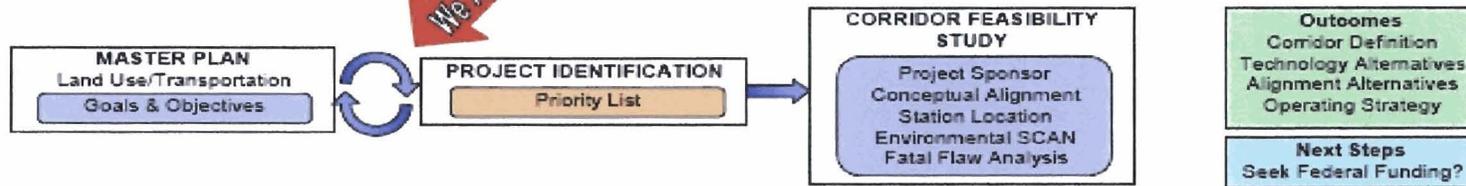
I hope this information satisfactorily responds to your questions and concerns. If any additional information is needed, please contact either me or Tom Culpepper.

ATTACHMENT: Transit Corridor Development Process

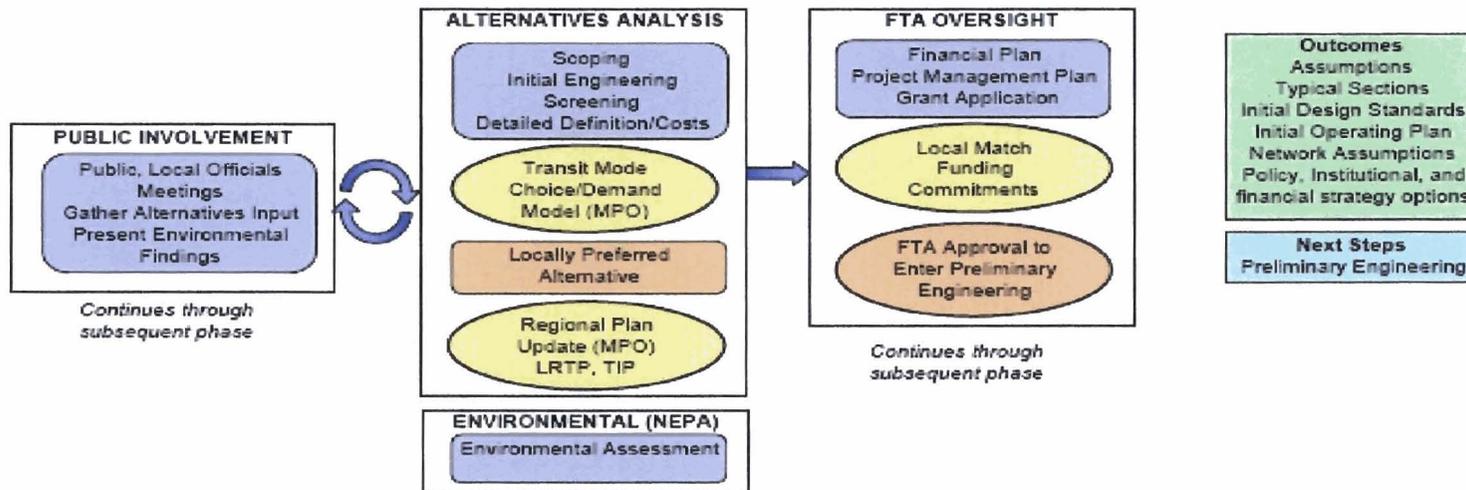
cc: Larry Robinson
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Transit Corridor Development Process

Phase I: Concepts



Phase II: Planning & Development



Phase III: Engineering, Refinement & Delivery

