


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 20, 2011

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A PROPOSED LETTER TO THE COMMONWEALTH TRANSPORTATION BOARD REGARDING THE DRAFT SIX-YEAR IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR FY 2012 TO FY 2017

ISSUE: Proposed letter to the Commonwealth Transportation Board regarding the Draft Six-Year Plan for FY 2012 to FY 2017.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council approve the attached letter to the Commonwealth Transportation Board in regard to the Draft Six-Year Improvement Plan for FY 2012 to FY 2017.

DISCUSSION: Historically, the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) has held public hearings around the Commonwealth each fall to solicit input on the upcoming Six-Year Program. This input is used by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) to prepare a draft Six-Year Program that is released for public comment in the spring of the following year. However, this regular cycle has been disrupted during the past several years by the State's process of cutting \$4.6 billion worth of projects out of the Six-Year Program as transportation revenues have declined significantly, and have not been replaced by new sources of revenues. Public hearings were not held in the fall of 2010. The Commonwealth Transportation Board is now expected to release to localities the draft FY 2012 to FY 2016 Six-Year Program for review on April 21, 2011. The Northern Virginia public hearing is scheduled for May 4, 2011, at 7:00 p.m. in VDOT's Northern Virginia District Office. Since the release date of the Draft Six-Year Improvement Plan and the date of the hearing are so close together, the only opportunity that City Council will have to approve a letter to the CTB is at Council's April 26, 2011, meeting, only days after the Six-Year Program is released. Thus, staff has provided the attached draft letter which may be modified after City staff review the Draft Six-Year Program, as well as seek input from the City's Transportation Commission members. Any modification will be transmitted to Council prior to the Council meeting on April 26, 2011.

FISCAL IMPACT: The fiscal impact of inadequate State transportation funding is substantial. Prior to the most recent funding crisis, the State provided \$8 million to \$10 million in Urban Funds to the City per year for capital programs. Now the City receives nothing, and only has

prior Urban Fund allocations remaining for transportation capital projects. These funding cuts have resulted in a growing list of unmet transportation needs, as well as the City increasing its local funding of transportation capital and operating programs. It is also one of the factors that led to the City's current serious consideration of adopting the General Assembly authorized transportation add-on tax.

ATTACHMENT:

Attachment 1: City's Draft Letter to the Commonwealth Transportation Board

STAFF:

Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager

Richard J. Baier, P.E., LEED AP, Director, T&ES

Abi Lerner, P.E., Deputy Director, T&ES

Jim Maslanka, Division Chief, T&ES

DRAFT

Attachment 1

April 26, 2011

The Honorable Chair and Members
Commonwealth Transportation Board
1111 East Broad Street, Room 3054
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Secretary Connaughton and Members of the Commonwealth Transportation Board:

In lieu of testifying at the Commonwealth Transportation Board's April 26 hearing, the following letter presents the City of Alexandria's input on the FY 2012 to FY 2017 Six-Year Program and a number of other key transportation matters.

- The City of Alexandria wants to thank the Commonwealth for all of the assistance it has provided regarding providing vehicular access to the Mark Center BRAC-133 site. We appreciate your efforts in programming \$80 million for a new variable direction transit ramp from the HOV lanes at I-395 to Seminary Road.
- On the transit side, Northern Virginia thanks the Commonwealth for including the Virginia match of \$50 million for Federal dedicated funding for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. We appreciate this significant commitment to maintaining Metro's assets and ensuring that Metro can continue to safely and efficiently meet the region's transportation needs. It appears that the federal government will supply its \$150 million, which will be invaluable in keeping the Metrorail system safe and in a state of good repair.
- The City of Alexandria requests that the Commonwealth Transportation Board advocate to the Governor and the General Assembly for new or expanded sources of revenue to reinvigorate needed transportation infrastructure and transit capital programs. Revenues from all major transportation funding sources continue to deteriorate, yet needs continue to rise. For example, the City formerly received \$8 million to \$10 million in new transportation Urban Funds each year from the Commonwealth. Now we receive no new Urban Funds. New funding must cover major transit needs, as well as road construction and maintenance. Any new transportation funding should not be taken by the State from traditional core service General Fund programs, such as education and public safety.
- The City also supports the continuation and expansion of the Virginia Department of Transportation's revenue sharing program. This program allows localities to match State funding with local funding to make crucial improvements to the locality's street and highway system.

- We are appreciative of the work of VDOT, DRPT, and CTB in resolving the HOT lanes issue on I-95 and I-395. While we understand that the transit analysis of the corridor has been uncoupled from the HOT lanes project, we believe that it will be necessary to utilize transit to the greatest extent possible to maximize the use of this important regional facility. We will fully participate in the current Transit and TDM study of I-95. In the end, The City thinks the study will find that additional funds will be needed to subsidize new transit capital and operating expenses. We hope you will review any such recommendations favorably and act upon them.
- We urge you not to reduce transit funding levels once they are approved at the beginning of the fiscal year. Since local government budgets and tax rates are generally set in the spring, reducing the State assistance contracts mid-year (as has been done in two recent fiscal years) may result in disruptive service cuts and fare increases. At a time when transit usage has increased, and the City is relying on increased transit services and usage to reduce congestion, hence making such cuts can be extremely counter-productive.
- As the CTB proceeds in its deliberations to the degree that additional funds may be identified, we would request that the CTB focus on funding projects in the City contained within the regional Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP).
- In addition to addressing the foregoing major issues, the City requests that:
 - the CTB treat transit operating expenses like VDOT maintenance expenses and make these expenses a higher priority than new capital projects;
 - the CTB, DRPT and VDOT support, promote, and encourage walking and bicycling as more viable modes of transportation, and in concert with U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood's policy direction, look for opportunities to enhance pedestrian and bicycle connectivity in Northern Virginia.
 - the CTB support the policy that major transportation corridor studies related to facilities wholly within one VDOT construction district, should be managed by that construction district rather than the VDOT Central Office. Regional VDOT staff is better equipped to address the concern of the affected citizens and local governments.
 - the Commonwealth adopt policies that streamline transportation project review by further delegating the design review process from VDOT to the local governments and by adopting a uniform timeframe for plan reviews that remain under VDOT jurisdiction. These efforts would save Virginia taxpayers money and simultaneously result in timely approvals of contextually appropriate projects, and
 - the CTB adopt a policy for an earlier release of the annual draft plan to facilitate a more comprehensive review by counties and local governments.

Finally, we want to thank you for your time, efforts and dedication in seeking solutions to the Commonwealth's many complex transportation issues in a time of inadequate resources.

Sincerely,

William D. Euille
Mayor