

## City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 19, 2003

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *ps*

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF ESTABLISHING A TRANSPORTATION  
COMMISSION FOR THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of establishing a Transportation Commission for the City of Alexandria.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council approve the concept of a Transportation Commission for the City, as outlined in this memorandum, and request the City Attorney to prepare an ordinance establishing such a Commission for introduction in January 2004.

**DISCUSSION:** Providing a highly effective and efficient transportation system within Alexandria is one of the most important functions of the City. In addition, transportation, generally, in the City is one of the most consistent and pressing concerns of the community. Moreover, each year, over \$50 million is invested, either by or on behalf of the City, in meeting the transportation needs of our residents and businesses. These investments provide capital and operational support for regional rail and bus transit, pedestrian and cyclist accommodations, the DASH bus system, and the City's streets. For these reasons, and as several Council members have suggested, we are proposing the establishment of an Alexandria Transportation Commission, with the makeup and functions described below, to advise Council in the area of City transportation policy, services and activities. This Commission would have to be created by ordinance.

The recommended Transportation Commission would consist of seven members, as follows:

- 3 City resident members, with one such member from each of the three planning districts,
- 1 member representing the business community and nominated by the Chamber of Commerce,
- 1 member with training and professional experience in transportation engineering,
- 1 member with training and professional experience in urban transportation and or transit planning, and
- 1 member with training and professional experience in finance and/or economics.

Council would appoint the commission members for staggered three-year terms.

The fundamental functions of the Transportation Commission would be:

- (a) to work with City staff in the development and, as needed the revision, of long-term transportation goals for the City in all areas or modes of travel, and of appropriate policies, infrastructure investments, programs, services and other activities that would help meet these goals;
- (b) to work with staff on the ongoing Comprehensive Transportation Policy and Program project, and ultimately to review the product of that project;
- (c) to review proposed City applications for transportation grant funding;
- (d) to review City projects that staff has identified for inclusion in the Virginia Department of Transportation's Six-Year Improvement Program;
- (e) to review, as appropriate, plans, projects and other actions affecting Alexandria that are proposed by regional and state transportation bodies, such as the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government (e.g., its Constrained Long-Range Plan), the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, the Virginia Department of Transportation, and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation; and
- (f) to further engage the residents of Alexandria in an on-going dialogue involving their city-wide transportation system.

In performing these functions, the Commission would serve in a purely advisory capacity, providing advice and guidance to City Council through the City Manager. The Commission would not function in any formal decision making mode, and would not be charged with reviewing any development or land use applications.

The Commission would receive staff support from the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** Transportation Commissioners would serve without compensation and staff support would be provided by current T&ES personnel. There will be no fiscal impact on the City.

**STAFF:**

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

Thomas H. Culpepper, P.E., Deputy Director, T&ES

Rose Boyd, Executive Secretary for Boards and Commissions



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11/25/2003 10:42 AM

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Subject: Transportation Commission, Docket No. 29

November 25, 2003

The Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers  
City Hall  
301 King Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314

RE: City Council Docket Item No. 29, 11/25/03  
Proposed Transportation Commission

Dear Mayor and Members of City Council,

I am writing on behalf of Alexandrians for Sensible Growth regarding Item No. 29 on the November 25, 2003 docket. The concept of the proposed Transportation Commission is intriguing and merits an opportunity for further study and discussion. The proposal also provides a much needed and long overdue impetus for discussing the issues of comprehensive transportation planning and citizen participation.

However, there does not seem to be any urgent need to proceed with preparing an ordinance for the Transportation Commission for public hearing in January. Therefore, ASG respectfully requests that this item be deferred so that citizens may have a proactive opportunity to provide feedback on this proposal. More citizen input now will safeguard the integrity of this new commission and ensure that there is consensus as to the purpose, need, function and membership of this committee.

Some of the initial issues raised by the proposed Transportation Commission are provided below. ASG would appreciate the opportunity to participate in more formal discussions about this concept.

#### Proposed Transportation Commission

Business interests on the proposed Transportation Commission are represented by segments of the business community who would favor automobiles over other transportation alternatives, such as bicycles and mass transit. Business interests should also be represented by employers from government and the private sector who participate in Metro Check or other work trip reduction programs.

Citizen representation needs to be increased and should come from the following: a representative from the Federation of Civic Associations, a resident who is a regular transit user, a physically challenged resident who cannot drive and a resident who is also a small business owner.

The appropriateness of professionals serving on boards and commissions and

donating their services must be given serious reconsideration. If a city department needs more professional expertise to carry out its functions, then sufficient funds need to be budgeted for that purpose. The risk is great that the professionals who are donating their services via membership on the proposed Transportation Commission or other advisory committees are actually promoting the viewpoints of their employers. And it is inappropriate to exclude concerned, well-informed residents and include professionals who duplicate the expertise of our city staff.

Also, the city's Comprehensive Transportation Policy and Program will not be completed until Summer, 2004. It would seem reasonable to wait to review the results of that plan to see if there is a need for a Transportation Commission and what its mission should be.

#### Comprehensive Transportation Planning

ASG wholeheartedly supports comprehensive transportation planning and applauds all efforts to engage in such planning. However, meaningful transportation planning must be done in conjunction with land use planning. To create a separate body that advises solely on transportation planning without reviewing land uses is counterproductive.

Furthermore, the Planning Commission already provides land use and transportation planning. An advisory committee on alternative transportation modes, such as telecommuting, light rail or rapid bus transit, might be useful to the Planning Commission and its staff; however, such a need is best determined by that department.

#### Citizen Participation

Given the anticipated budgetary restraints, the decision to create another commission should be made very carefully. There are always costs associated with advisory commissions and those costs must be taken into consideration prior to establishing a new board. Additionally, such a decision should not be made without first looking at the existing transportation boards and commissions, such as the Traffic and Parking Board and the DASH Board of Directors, to ensure that they do not have duplicative responsibilities.

The entire commission and board structure needs to be evaluated given that there are now over 70 such entities. Collectively, the boards and commissions require substantial city resources. At a minimum, the city need to be receiving equivalent benefits from these boards and commissions in return for the staff support it provides.

The staff memo in support of the Transportation Commission is primarily a listing of funding sources, not an analysis of perceived flaws in the current process nor a discussion as to how such a commission can address these flaws. We as a community simply need to know more about what the perceived problems are and to carefully analyze the benefits and costs of this commission before concluding that another committee is the best solution.

And the membership of any proposed Transportation Commission needs to be rigorously evaluated and examined to ensure the commission best serves our community. It is simply premature and unnecessarily rushed to commence drafting a statute when there is no consensus as to how such a committee will improve transportation planning and policies in Alexandria.

The opportunity to comment and further study the creation of a Transportation Commission is very much appreciated. ASG looks forward to participating in future discussions about transportation planning and

citizen participation.

Sincerely,

Ginny Hines Parry, President  
Alexandrians for Sensible Growth