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Mr. Mayor and members of the council: Today, I want to highlight the need to provide the local Dash bus system with consistent, financial backing. Sandy Modell, as general manager of the Alexandria Transit Co., has created a top notch, qualitative organization that is readily apparent to any taxpayer who spends any real time commuting. In fact, I would like to encourage everyone here to consider using Dash more often and experience just how well a local system can function. The drivers remain courteous and helpful and grateful to have their jobs even though they have shown up for work now for over two years without a raise. They respect Ms. Modell and trust she will do the best she can for them and for the transiting public. The problem is she cannot do it alone...

As an interested citizen of my community, I have advocated for various groups over time. My background is in early childhood special education, teaching very involved kids, working with their parents and training master level teachers. And yes, often trying to do it all on a shoestring budget. The observation I have made in trying to speak on behalf of Dash is that unlike schools or senior services or healthcare systems, people by and large take the existence of public transportation for granted. In some way it's hard to put a human face on a bus system. It's as if we don't quite think about it as a vital service because it's just there and always will be. Until it isn't or effective leaders and good employees either burn out or move on to greener pastures as sometimes happens.

We know Ms. Modell is strong and maybe we rely on that fact a little too much, hoping she can work more magic. I don't begin to grasp the intricacies of budgeting and I empathize with the hard choices that have to be made to keep our city functioning during these difficult times. But why, for example, was the decision made last year to hold \$200,000 of transit money in contingent reserves for over six months and then move it back over to Dash this January? And did we just square that circle on paper or did Dash in effect lose out on \$200,000? I honestly don't know but I believe our transit system could have used that money last fall just as they will now need new, dedicated funds for 2011.

If we are going to make a serious attempt at meeting current and new challenges including the transit needs of the many BRAC commuters, we will want to effectively utilize the new Dash facility to create steady expansion and improve bus service: keeping buses clean and safe, increasing bus frequencies, planning some new across town routes, beefing up existing schedules. But Dash can't exist on bus fumes and inconsistent promises of support - carefully, prudently budgeting limited resources and then not knowing if or when the money will come in. I have only recently learned of the idea of a commercial add on tax for transportation projects. I don't know if this is viable and how it would impact small businesses but we need to be open to looking at new ideas. I do think it is time for Alexandria to accept transportation as a core service and for Dash to have monies it can count on. So that Dash transit growth and expansion can become a reality and not something we keep talking about while we raise fares, cut services and withhold money. Thank you.

i.e. needing a dedicated funding source. (source)

Thank you city council for listening to all of us
Meredith MacTab 😊
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