
3-10-10

Kimberley Kaplan

418 Queen Street

Alexandria, VA 22314

City Council's Budget Public Hearing – March 10, 2010

Public transportation is one of our City's core services. WMATA provides service that connects Alexandria with the region, and DASH provides complementary service that feeds into the Metro system and makes possible local mobility and connectivity.

WMATA is in crisis, but let me first say a few words about DASH. The City Manager's budget keeps funding for DASH flat. This is a big improvement from discussions just last month that DASH would be cut \$600,000. A \$600,000 cut would have eliminated all Sunday service, and resulted in severe cuts to Saturday and mid-day weekday service. But even a flat budget forces service cuts. And, as the Mayor said at the dedication of the new DASH facility in November, we built that facility because the City NEEDS more bus service.

DASH's budget was cut last year by over \$500,000. \$200,000 of that was added back in contingent reserves and used by DASH to restore some service. The City Manager's budget this year does not include that \$200,000.

To make up this budget gap, DASH riders will do their part. Fares are going up 20%, the third fare increase in three years. One of the other ways that DASH proposes to fill the gap is by eliminating all off peak service on the AT 4.

During peak hours, the AT 4 is a very productive route. It is the primary transit option for people in Potomac Greens and along Slaters Lane. Providing a base level of service on this route throughout the day is important. Commuters need to know that they can get to work after 9:30 am, and won't be stranded if they need to come home early or work late. Taking away mid-day and evening service will chip away at peak commute ridership. It will also hurt transit-dependent residents of Mason Hall and other locations along the route for whom the route is a lifeline.

I suggest that you put the money that DASH needs to continue running the AT 4 on weekdays in contingent reserves. If ridership grows, as is expected as unemployment comes down, DASH will not need the full amount. If revenues do not increase as anticipated, the portion of the money DASH needs to continue operating the service could be released mid-year. This does not save Saturday service, but I hope you will understand why this route needs to run all day during the work week.

My husband will speak about the crisis facing Metro later, but let me say that Metro, despite its problems, has been the key to our region's success. At a time when other cities were constructing highways, our region came together to create Metro. And Alexandria continues to stake its future on Metro. We need to do everything we can not only to keep the system from collapsing but to ensure it thrives. This takes money. The City must partner with riders who will be paying much higher fares next year. Do your part to give Metro the subsidy it needs to maintain current service and the system's safety and reliability. As a tax payer, I would support raising the tax rate to provide additional subsidy to Metro if that is what is needed to avoid the deep service cuts proposed.