


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** OCTOBER 20, 2010

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

**SUBJECT:** CONSIDERATION OF A COOPERATIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH ARLINGTON COUNTY TO PARTICIPATE IN AN ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS IN ORDER TO CONSIDER IMPLEMENTING A STREETCAR LINE WITHIN THE CRYSTAL CITY-POTOMAC YARD CORRIDOR

**ISSUE:** Should the City participate with Arlington County in an environmental analysis in order to consider implementing a streetcar line within the Crystal City-Potomac Yard corridor?

**RECOMMENDATION:** That Council authorize City participation with Arlington County in environmental planning and preliminary engineering in order to consider implementing a streetcar line within the Crystal City-Potomac Yard corridor.

**DISCUSSION:** In 2008, the City of Alexandria designated three travel corridors in the City as High-Capacity Transit Corridors. Transit in these corridors could be bus rapid transit or streetcar lines. The feasibility of implementing these modes is being analyzed by the High Capacity Transit Corridors Feasibility Study. In the Washington Metropolitan region, there have been similar efforts to plan for or construct intermediate types of transit services. The District of Columbia has a very ambitious plan to build a network of streetcars; Arlington and Fairfax Counties have decided to develop a streetcar line along Columbia Pike, from Pentagon City to Baileys Crossroads, which could terminate at the Alexandria campus of Northern Virginia Community College. Streetcar discussions are also occurring in suburban Maryland.

In the Crystal City-Potomac Yard Corridor, Alexandria and Arlington have approved development plans with much higher densities than are currently in place. The infrastructure required to transport people to the activities envisioned by the plan requires transit service in this corridor be enhanced. The first step is to build an interim busway, utilizing such federal funds such as Alexandria's \$8.5 million TIGER grant.

While Arlington is planning to initially provide high-capacity transit service in the corridor with dedicated bus rapid transit service, the County adopted plan is to build a streetcar line serving Crystal City and the Arlington section of Potomac Yard. This plan was affirmed on September 28, when the Crystal City Development Plan was approved by the Arlington County Board. Since Potomac Yard is a cross-jurisdictional development, Alexandria could benefit from participating in the assessment of streetcar operations for the following reasons:

- The level of density forecast for Potomac Yard in Alexandria and Arlington is sufficient to warrant the assessment of a transit mode with greater capacity than rapid bus operations. A streetcar could be less expensive to operate than buses, but has a higher upfront capital cost.
- Streetcars have been shown to have very positive economic benefits to adjacent land.
- Continuing cross-jurisdictional cooperation in this project would likely assist in eventually gaining federal funds. This is important, as some federal transit programs such as the competitive New Starts program pay for up to 80% of upfront capital streetcar costs.

In order to place a streetcar in service in the Potomac Yard-Crystal City corridor, Arlington County developed and released a Request for Proposals (RFP) document to hire a consulting firm to document and perform the environmental planning and preliminary engineering. This is a necessary step to be eligible for federal funding. At this point, the study is labeled an “environmental analysis” as it is too early to determine if the study will be an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Preliminary engineering is needed as part of an environmental analysis as well as to determine technical feasibility, and to better estimate construction and operating costs. Arlington County has offered to include Alexandria as a full participant in this study, and if the City so chooses and funds its share of the study, has included the following text in Arlington’s solicitation to allow the City to participate:

“It is envisioned that transit service could be extended into the City of Alexandria to the proposed Potomac Yard Metrorail Station or as far south as the Braddock Road Metrorail Station. In addition, transit service is anticipated to integrate with the Columbia Pike Streetcar project, whose eastern terminus is near the intersection of South Hayes Street and 12th Street South. It is anticipated that this National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) study will conclude that transit service in the Pentagon City, Crystal City, and Potomac Yard sections of Arlington County has independent utility with logical termini. Other future extensions could include extending north to the Pentagon, northeast to Long Bridge Park, and south to the Braddock Road Metrorail Station. Should such extensions be incorporated into the scope of this project, the geographic extent of the study area would require modification and the project budget would require negotiated revisions.”

Responses for this solicitation were submitted to Arlington on October 19. If City Council approves participation in the study, staff could immediately begin to review the proposals received by Arlington County. The study is estimated to take several years. By combining efforts with Arlington, there are likely significant study cost savings that the City and County will benefit from, as well as important synergies in planning what would be an inter-jurisdictional system together.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** This study, where costs will be equitably shared between Alexandria and Arlington. This is expected to be a multi-year effort which will cost the City potentially as much as \$1,000,000. When the study costs are negotiated and known, staff will return to Council and seek a capital allocation to fund the streetcar study from identified funds. This project is proposed to be funded by: a) paying down a portion of the quarterly WMATA capital subsidy payments owed by the City with earned interest credits currently held by WMATA, and then b) reprogramming budgeted WMATA capital subsidy funds already in the City’s CIP, to c) cover the City’s share of this streetcar study. This shift of funds is necessary as the earned interest credits can only be used for WMATA activities.

**STAFF:**

Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager

Bruce Johnson, Chief Financial Officer

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James Maslanka, Division Chief of Transit, T&ES

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21  
10-26-10



**COA Contact Us: Streetcar Coalition letter for Docket Item 21 for 10/26 mtg**

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jackie.henderson, elaine.scott, rob.krupicka,  
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10/26/2010 08:55 AM

**Please respond to Janet Gregor**

1 attachment



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**Time: [Tue Oct 26, 2010 08:55:14] Message ID: [25254]**

**Issue Type:** Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members  
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**Subject:** Streetcar Coalition letter for Docket Item 21 for 10/26 mtg  
**Comments:** This letter is on behalf of the Northern Virginia Streetcar Coalition  
**Attachment:** 2f03953f421034555d6c735806b54bee.doc



October 26, 2010

Hon. Mayor William D. Euille  
Members of the Alexandria City Council  
301 King Street  
Alexandria VA 22314

Re: Docket Item 21, October 26, 2010

Dear Mayor Euille and Members of City Council:

The Northern Virginia Streetcar Coalition is pleased that the City Council is considering joining in to Arlington's already-underway Environmental Analysis process regarding the potential for a streetcar line along the Potomac Yard-Crystal City corridor. Streetcars have already been shown to be a successful mode of mass transit, particularly along urban revitalization corridors, and could potentially be helpful in reducing automobile traffic along the Alexandria portion of the Transitway as well as inducing the start of new commercial development and redevelopment in the Route 1 corridor.

Since Arlington County has already made a commitment to streetcar use in Crystal City and its portion of Potomac Yard, it is rational for Alexandria to explore this option. Given Arlington's head start in these matters, Alexandria can only benefit by joining in to an ongoing process rather than waiting a few years and starting its own studies later. It would be disastrous to public opinion of our fair city to have people get off an Arlington streetcar, cross Four Mile Run, then take a bus in Alexandria. We encourage seamless convenient public transit – otherwise people will be less inclined to use transit.

Accordingly, we recommend that Alexandria join in to Arlington's already-defined process, which they have graciously kept open to Alexandria participation. The potential cost of participating in the study is less than the opportunity cost of bypassing a potential streetcar solution and being left behind; not considering a streetcar option would reduce the appeal for redevelopment of the Route 1 properties in Alexandria. In addition, working with Arlington on the Environmental Analysis would allow the two jurisdictions to maintain regular communications, and, we hope, a cordial relationship.

Sincerely yours,

Tim Lovain  
Chairman

Board members:

**Tim Lovain**  
Chairman  
City of Alexandria

**Inta Malis**  
Arlington County

**James McClellan**  
At-Large

**Sasha Gong**  
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