

Docket Item #7
MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT #2008-0001
Transportation Master Plan

Planning Commission Meeting
February 5, 2008

ISSUE: Consideration of an amendment to the transportation element of the City's Master Plan.

APPLICANT: Department of Transportation and Environmental Services

LOCATION: City of Alexandria

SUMMARY

The proposed amendment to the City's Master Plan is a comprehensive update of the transportation plan that was adopted in 1992. This amendment replaces the 1992 transportation plan with a concept-oriented, multi-modal transportation plan that includes guiding principles, six supporting sections dedicated to transit, pedestrian, bicycle, streets, parking, and funding, and implementation.

The goal of the proposed transportation plan is to integrate and link the City's transportation modes, providing connectivity and accessibility to all of Alexandria's economic, cultural and recreational assets as well as other communities and assets in the region. The broader vision in the proposed plan is one that encourages the use of alternative modes of transportation in order to reduce dependence on the private automobile. The plan seeks to promote a balance between travel efficiency and quality of life, providing Alexandrians with transportation choices, local and regional mobility, continued economic development and a healthy environment.

The transportation plan that is proposed is the result of the efforts and findings of the Ad Hoc Transportation Policy and Program Task Force created by Alexandria City Council in 2004. Council tasked this task force to:

1. Guide and facilitate preparation of an updated and revised transportation element of the City of Alexandria Master Plan and completion of other components of the City's Comprehensive Transportation Policy and Program project;
2. With staff assistance, undertake studies, analyses, meetings and hearings, and other activities necessary to undertake these tasks; and
3. Present an updated and revised transportation element of the Master Plan to the Planning Commission (and ultimately the City Council), along with any other necessary or desirable documents or materials, that will set out the mid- and long-range multi-modal transportation policies, plans and programs for the City of Alexandria.

Staff recommends approval of the proposed transportation plan as a full replacement of the 1992 transportation plan that is currently in the City's Master Plan.

DISCUSSION

The existing transportation element of the City's Master Plan that was adopted by City Council in 1992 was based on three primary goals: (1) developing a safe, comprehensive transportation system consistent with the City's land use policies; (2) balancing development and necessary transportation improvements and (3) providing parking to adequately address needs of each land-use type. This plan's objectives were to (1) minimize impact of traffic, especially on residential neighborhoods; (2) improve the safety and efficiency of the existing street system and flow of traffic; and (3) increase the availability and use of public transportation. The plan specified sixty-six (66) individual projects, forty-seven (47) of which were road improvements. The remaining nineteen (19) projects included fourteen (14) transit project and five (5) bicycle projects.

In 2002, the City began working on a comprehensive transportation policy and program to address its changing transportation needs and priorities. Between 1990 and 2000, the City's residential population grew by almost a third, along with similar growth in its workforce. With this came more pedestrian activity, more bicycles, more auto travel, more transit demand and increased congestion along major travel corridors. The initial phases of the comprehensive transportation policy and program efforts, data collection and public input, were completed in the fall of 2003.

In 2004 City Council created the Ad Hoc Transportation Policy and Program Task Force to guide the preparation of an updated transportation plan reflecting the City's changing needs and priorities. With members appointed by the City Council and the Planning Commission, the task force began work, considering demographic, employment and population trends and forecasts, transportation and travel trends and forecasts, regional transportation issues, concerns and needs expressed by the community, the City's existing transportation systems and their associated opportunities and constraints.

Based on these considerations, the Ad Hoc Transportation Policy and Program Task Force came to four primary conclusions:

1. The demand for mobility will increase, both locally and regionally;
2. Opportunities for (and interest in) additional street capacity is limited;
3. Automobile congestion cannot be eliminated; and
4. Alexandria needs a new strategy

With these conclusions in mind, the task force examined expected future conditions both in Alexandria and the region through 2030, focusing on areas most likely to be key activity centers with increasing population and employment, and mobility needs throughout the city. The task force identified three necessary characteristics of a new transportation plan for the city:

1. It must support the City Council's 2004-2015 Strategic Plan, specifically Goal #3: "An Integrated, Multimodal Transportation System that Gets People from Point "A" to Point "B" Efficiently and Effectively;
2. It must focus on improving mobility and connectivity for all Alexandria residents, workers and visitors; and
3. It must provide transportation alternatives that reduce the impacts of through traffic

To guide development and subsequent implementation of a new transportation plan responsive to the needs of the entire resident and business community, the task force established seven guiding principles. These are:

1. Alexandria will develop innovative local and regional transit options.
2. Alexandria will provide quality pedestrian and bicycle accommodations.

3. Alexandria will provide all its citizens, regardless of age or ability, with accessibility and mobility.
4. Alexandria will increase the use of communications technology in transportation systems.
5. Alexandria will further transportation policies that support livable urban land use and encourage neighborhood preservation.
6. Alexandria will lead the region in promoting environmentally friendly transportation policies.
7. Alexandria will ensure accessible, reliable and safe transportation for older and disabled citizens.

The proposed transportation plan that resulted from the efforts and findings of the Ad Hoc Transportation Policy and Program Task Force consists of six integrated sections outlining key concepts and supporting actions and strategies. Briefly, these are:

The **Transit Section** presents a progressive vision for the future of travel throughout the city with a system of transit vehicles operating along three primary corridors within rights-of-way dedicated exclusively to transit use. These corridors, compatible with multiple transit service alternatives (light rail, trolley, bus rapid transit, etc.), integrated with neighborhood circulators and other transit services, and supported by user-friendly stops, shelters and stations, are key to an innovative vision for clean, efficient, accessible and enjoyable transit service that enhances mobility throughout the city and region for residents, workers and visitors alike.

The **Pedestrian Section** calls for a community where public spaces, including streets and off-street paths, offer a level of convenience, safety and attractiveness that encourages and rewards the choice to walk regardless of age or ability.

The **Bicycle Section** proposes that the City become significantly more “bicycle-friendly” through routine accommodations on “complete streets” and pathways that enable safe travel for all users.

(Both the pedestrian and bicycle sections of the plan are supported by the recently completed citywide Pedestrian and Bicycle Mobility Plan, a supporting element of the proposed transportation plan. This plan can be found at http://www.alexride.org/bikeped_study.php.)

The **Street Section** of the plan recognizes that streets represent the largest public resource within the City and focuses on integrated solutions for connectivity with a flexible street classification system, effective transportation demand management strategies and neighborhood protection.

The **Parking Section** identifies guiding principles for managing parking and curbspace priorities to increase parking efficiency and support the City’s overall transportation vision.

The **Funding and Implementation Section** identifies funding options available to the City for plan implementation, and provides processes and policies for developing implementation and project funding priorities.

COMMUNITY INPUT

In multiple community meetings reaching back to 2003, Alexandrians have made clear that major change is needed in the way the city addresses transportation issues. In multiple forums, the community has consistently reiterated its desire for sustainable transportation alternatives that promote choice; enhance connectivity and mobility; and support quality of life issues throughout the City.

Building on the community input received during the earlier Comprehensive Transportation Policy and Program project, the Ad Hoc Transportation Policy and Program Task Force conducted two series of community meetings in 2006 and 2007, participated in the 2007 City-wide Transportation Forum, provided member and staff briefings for several civic and business organizations, and city-established bodies such as the Commission on Aging and Environmental Policy Commission. Prior to the most recent series of community meetings that were held in the fall of 2007, a near-final draft of the proposed transportation plan was made available for public comment. As a result of this public review, the task force received over 100 oral and written comments from the community which it considered for incorporation into the final plan now proposed for adoption.

Based on the many positive comments that were received on the draft plan for public comment, community support for the concepts in the proposed plan appears strong, particularly with regard to its initiatives for transit, pedestrian and bicycle transportation. Among the comments received, many raised good points that deserve careful consideration as specific initiatives and projects are being developed during plan implementation. These, along with all other comments, have been documented as matters for further consideration during plan implementation. However, some comments reflected concerns with certain aspects of the proposed plan, three of which are discussed below.

One area of concern was the absence of an enumerated list of specific projects that are to be implemented based on the proposed plan. Seeking to develop a concept-based plan that will provide long-term guidance to the development of the City's transportation systems, the task force proposes an implementation process that includes ongoing community participation in maintaining a comprehensive and regularly updated long list of transportation improvement needs that would be prioritized for project development and implementation as part of the City's overall capital improvement program. The task force feels this ongoing process will more effectively serve the City's future needs than would a more static transportation plan as was adopted in 1992.

Another related concern is the perceived lack of proposed street improvements in the plan. Believing that the City's street network is substantially developed, the task force feels that future street improvements will be primarily focused on effective use and management of existing capacity, relief of bottlenecks to improve safety and operations, and neighborhood protection, rather than extensive increases in the City's overall roadway capacity. These types of street improvements are believed to be best considered as implementation projects and, as needed and consistent with community objectives, major capacity enhancement and new street infrastructure projects should be considered case-by-case for implementation based on their specific individual merits.

Concerns were also raised regarding the potential impacts of the proposed transit corridors on residents and neighborhoods along these corridors, particularly the Route 1 corridor in the Parker-Gray neighborhood. These concerns primarily focused on possible damage to historic structures, loss of parking, noise, pollution and community disruption. While the task force recognizes that these concerns merit careful consideration, it believes that they are premature based on speculative conclusions as to the specific route the dedicated rights-of-way will follow, the type of transit service that will be operated and how that transit service will impact other street uses. The task force identified and considered several general corridors within which dedicated transit rights-of-way might be developed to improve mobility within, to and from Alexandria, and based on currently available information, concluded that the Route 1, Duke Street and Van Dorn/Beauregard corridors were the most critical for initial consideration. Recognizing these corridors are major travel routes and are expected to continue serving significant local and regional travel needs, the task force believes they are the most appropriate corridors for development of major new transit services. However, as is noted in the plan, this is a concept proposal. It does not specify or recommend specific alignments for the dedicated transit rights-of-way (e.g. on the "named" street itself or on another facility in the general area), how the transit running way will be configured (a dedicated lane on an existing street, on an independent right-of-way or possibly in mixed traffic on an existing street), what type transit service will be operated (trolley, light rail, bus rapid, etc.), or where stations and stops will be located. The project development process necessary to take this proposal from concept to reality will examine alternative alignments, configurations and types of service, provide significantly more detailed information on the potential benefits and impacts of these corridors, and permit continuing public involvement and discussion. Based the outcomes of this process, there will be an increasingly more complete basis for making the informed decisions that will be necessary for this concept to become reality.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of a Master Plan amendment to replace the transportation plan adopted in 1992 with the attached plan prepared by the Ad Hoc Transportation Policy and Program Task Force.

STAFF

Rich Baier, Director, Transportation and Environmental Services

Faroll Hamer, Director, Planning and Zoning

Tom Culpepper, Deputy Director/Transportation

RESOLUTION MPA 2008-0001

WHEREAS, under the provisions of Section 9.05 of the City Charter, the Planning Commission may adopt amendments to the Master Plan of the City of Alexandria and submit to the City Council such revisions in said plans as changing conditions may make necessary; and

WHEREAS, an amendment is proposed to replace within the Master Plan the transportation plan adopted in 1992 with a new transportation plan developed by the Ad Hoc Transportation Policy and Program Task Force that was established by the City Council for that purpose; and

WHEREAS, city staff have analyzed the proposed amendment and presented their findings and recommendations to the Planning Commission; and

WHEREAS, a duly advertised public meeting on the proposed amendment was held on February 5, 2008 with all public testimony and written comment considered; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission finds that:

1. The proposed amendment is necessary and desirable to guide and accomplish comprehensive and coordinated transportation objectives, which are consistent with the City's land use objectives;
2. The proposed amendment is generally consistent with the overall goals and objectives of the Master Plan of the City of Alexandria;
3. The proposed amendment reinforces the Planning Commission's long-range objectives for comprehensive and well planned transportation systems for the City; and
4. Based on the foregoing findings and all other facts and circumstances of which the Planning Commission may properly take notice in making and adopting amendments to the Master Plan of the City of Alexandria, the proposed amendment will be in accordance with the City's land use objectives, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the residents of the City.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Planning Commission of the City of Alexandria that:

1. The transportation plan adopted for the City of Alexandria in 1992 as amended be replaced in its entirety in the Master Plan of the City of Alexandria by the transportation plan proposed by the City's Ad Hoc Transportation Policy and Program Task Force, dated January 25, 2008.
2. This resolution shall be signed by the Chairman of the Planning Commission and attested by its secretary, and a true copy of this resolution shall be forwarded and certified to the City Council.

Adopted the 5th day of February, 2008.

Eric Wagner, Chairman
Alexandria Planning Commission

Attest:

Faroll Hamer, Secretary