

Frequently Asked Questions *about the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative*

What is the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative?

The Columbia Pike Transit Initiative is a proposal to implement a streetcar line in a five-mile corridor between the Baileys Crossroads/Skyline area in Fairfax County and Pentagon City in Arlington County, Virginia. Additional information about the project can be found online at www.piketransit.com

The Columbia Pike Transit Initiative is one element of the ongoing effort by Arlington and Fairfax Counties to accommodate growing demand for transit service along this redeveloping urban corridor. Citizens, planners, and community leaders have expressed a desire for a modern, higher capacity transit system that supports expected growth associated with redevelopment and reinforces the "Main Street" environment envisioned for Columbia Pike.

A previous study, completed between 2004 and 2006, recommended a modern streetcar line along Columbia Pike, and the Arlington and Fairfax County Boards endorsed this "Modified" Streetcar Alternative, which is included in the current Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) Constrained Long Range Plan, and serves as the basis for the current phase of the study. Since completion of that study Arlington County and Fairfax County have continued to refine the technical analysis and develop funding strategies for transit investments in the corridor.

The current study effort is a combined Federal Alternatives Analysis (AA) and Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) guidance and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Upon completing this study the counties will pursue Federal funding assistance for design and construction of the streetcar line.

Who is involved?

The Columbia Pike Transit Initiative is being led by Arlington County and Fairfax County, with WMATA as the technical lead for the study. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is the lead Federal agency.

What is the timeline?

The combined AA/EA process is expected to be complete by the end of 2011, with preliminary engineering and project development occurring from mid-2011 to 2013. Design and construction would begin in 2014, with systems testing and revenue service beginning in 2016.

What is the proposed route?

The route runs from Pentagon City in Arlington to Skyline in Fairfax County. From Pentagon City it runs on South 12th Street, South Hayes Street and Army Navy Drive to South Joyce Street, along Columbia Pike to the Arlington/Fairfax County line, and then along South Jefferson Street to Skyline.

How will the project be funded?

The Counties have prepared preliminary capital budgets that demonstrate local funding commitment to the project and the financial capacity to operate and maintain the transit improvements. Arlington County and Fairfax County also intend to apply for funding through the FTA New Starts/Small Starts program, the Federal funding mechanism for new transit capital projects.

Who will run the system?

Arlington and Fairfax Counties have engaged WMATA for the planning and conceptual engineering of the project. As the project moves into its next and later phases, the Counties will create a new transit organization responsible for preliminary engineering, final design, construction, operation and maintenance.

How can I participate?

Information about the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative can be found online at www.piketransit.com, where people who are interested in the project are encouraged to submit comments or questions and sign up to receive email alerts about the project. As the study continues, there will also be opportunities to participate at public meetings.

What is “NEPA”? How does it relate to this project?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is legislation that requires Federal agencies to assess the potential effects of their actions on the built and natural environments. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is the lead Federal agency for the project, and has recommended an Environmental Assessment (EA) as the appropriate class of action (level of environmental analysis). Arlington and Fairfax Counties are required to comply with NEPA guidelines in order to maintain eligibility for Federal funding.

What alternatives are being considered?

The environmental documentation must evaluate the proposed streetcar “build” alternative against a “no build” alternative. Also, as this project seeks Federal funding through the FTA New Starts/Small Starts program, the documentation must include a comparison of the Build alternative with low-cost bus improvements, described as a Transportation Systems Management (TSM) alternative.

What is meant by “No Build”?

The No Build Alternative serves as the basis for comparison for potential impacts of the proposed project. It includes all transportation projects within the study area that have been committed for funding as part of the region’s Transportation Improvement Program and Constrained Long Range Plan, as well as projects in the Arlington County and Fairfax County Capital Improvement Programs. Transportation-related improvements that are committed to be in place by 2015 and 2030, whether physical or operational, are assumed to be part of the No Build Alternative.

What features will the streetcar system include?

- Modern streetcar vehicles operating in shared traffic lanes within existing streets.
- Station stops with improved shelters, passenger amenities, and real-time information.
- Streamlined fare payment and integration with WMATA’s SmartTrip system.
- Frequent all-day service supplemented by transit buses during peak hours.
- One primary operations and maintenance facility.

What is a “streetcar”?

A streetcar is an electric transit vehicle that runs on steel rails set flush into the surface of the street. Streetcar vehicles are generally bigger than buses but smaller than typical light rail vehicles in use in Baltimore, Charlotte, and elsewhere, and are much smaller than commuter trains (such as VRE) or heavy rail transit (such as Metrorail). Streetcars frequently operate in mixed traffic. Most streetcars are powered by electricity via overhead wires, although some systems derive power from an in-ground power source or on-board batteries (generally the batteries have a limited range). Streetcars use a single overhead wire that is less intrusive visually than multiple overhead utility lines.

What will the streetcar stops be like?

Most station stops will be located approximately ¼ to ½ mile apart. Stops are located to optimize transit operations and support development at current and planned activity centers. Station stops will include enhanced shelters, raised bus and streetcar boarding areas, improved lighting, up to date travel information, and real-time display of next-vehicle arrival.

As the first phase of implementing enhanced station stops along Columbia Pike, Arlington County has approved the design and construction of Super Stops at three locations. A super stop will include large shelters, heated seats, heated floors, new lighting, glass walls and WiFi capability.

How does this project relate to other ongoing local projects?

Columbia Pike Multimodal Project

Arlington County has initiated a related project, the Columbia Pike Multimodal Project (Multimodal Study). The objective of this project is to conduct environmental documentation and preliminary design for multimodal street improvements along the entire length of Columbia Pike in Arlington County. The Multimodal project addresses all modes of transportation along Columbia Pike, including right-of-way parameters, environmental features, and utilities issues. The technical aspects and public involvement efforts of the study inform and coordinate with the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative as both projects move forward.

The Multimodal Study has involved community representatives in a Columbia Pike Implementation Team (CPIT) Working Group similar to how the Pike Transit Initiative project is engaging members of the Community Coordination Committee (CCC). Project managers from both projects attend each other's team meetings and will attend each other's public meetings to further coordinate the technical work of the two distinct studies. The studies' websites are linked to assist the public's understanding.

Baileys Crossroads Planning Study

The recently completed Baileys Crossroads Planning Study assumes implementation of streetcar service along the Pike Transit Initiative proposed alignment from Columbia Pike through South Jefferson Street into the Skyline complex. The study recommends the redevelopment of Baileys Crossroads into a mixed-use area, with improved pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access, and increased green space. The densest development is envisioned along South Jefferson Street and north of Leesburg Pike, incorporating mixed-use buildings with ground-floor retail, a tree-lined grid of streets and a new arts center.

Crystal City Potomac Yard (CCPY) Corridor Transit Improvements Project

The purpose of the CCPY Corridor Transit Improvements Project is to provide high-capacity and high-quality bus transit services in the five-mile corridor between the Pentagon and Pentagon City in Arlington County and the Braddock Road Metrorail Station in the City of Alexandria. The project is jointly sponsored by Arlington County and the City of Alexandria in cooperation with WMATA and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT). The project is designed to respond to rapid development and redevelopment occurring in the corridor. Build-out of Potomac Yard over the next ten years will result in a substantial increase in new retail, office, hotel, and residential space. The new transit system will add transportation capacity along the corridor and provide better connections to Metrorail and other activity centers in the area. The planned alignment meets the proposed Columbia Pike Transit Initiative alignment at Pentagon City.

Route 27/244 Interchange Modification Project

VDOT plans to reconstruct the bridge and interchange where Route 244 (Washington Boulevard) crosses over Columbia Pike. As the bridge/interchange design will impact possible Columbia Pike cross-sections in areas adjacent to the interchange, representatives from both projects meet periodically to stay abreast of pertinent issues.

Northern Virginia Community College Master Plan for Alexandria Campus

The Northern Virginia Community College Master Plan for Alexandria Campus was adopted in 2009 and is undergoing an update. It includes a number of new buildings and additional open space built on the site of existing parking lots and reconfigured roadways. It provides for a potential streetcar maintenance facility near Dawes Avenue in the northeastern corner of the NOVA property, and a potential streetcar stop in the vicinity of the Schlesinger Center. The Columbia Pike Transit Initiative team is coordinating with NOVA officials and representatives from the City of Alexandria regarding the feasibility of locating a streetcar station, an operations and maintenance facility, and a railroad training facility at the campus.

Pentagon Reservation Master Plan

The Pentagon Reservation is located at the eastern end of Columbia Pike. The primary uses on the reservation include government office space, a public transit station, parking, and auxiliary functions that support the mission and operations of the Pentagon. The Pentagon Reservation Master Plan constitutes a policy framework for the long-term development of the Master Plan area – an area of approximately 220 acres within the larger Pentagon Reservation. The Master Plan primarily focuses on the following improvements within the Master Plan area:

- Implementing new security measures;
- Improving vehicular circulation;
- Consolidating existing surface parking into parking structures; and
- Increasing landscaped areas.

The Columbia Pike Transit Initiative team is coordinating with Pentagon planners through this process.

Department of Defense Study of Realignment of Columbia Pike

The Department of Defense (DOD), Arlington National Cemetery, and Arlington County are negotiating a land swap to expand the cemetery property and provide land (part of the Navy Annex site) to Arlington County for a future museum and community center. Future cemetery expansion could result in the realignment of Columbia Pike at its intersection with Joyce Street. Such realignment could affect the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative; the current transit study includes a design option that would follow a realigned Columbia Pike.

Are extensions to the initial project currently being evaluated?

The Columbia Pike Transit Initiative is intended to serve Pentagon City, Columbia Pike, Baileys Crossroads, and Skyline. No extensions are being evaluated as part of this project. However, there are other studies and projects in the region which may include connections to the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative in the future to achieve an integrated regional transportation system. Some of these ongoing studies are briefly described below:

City of Alexandria Transportation Master Plan (2008)

This plan focuses on providing connectivity and accessibility to Alexandria's recreational, cultural, and economic assets as well as the assets of the greater Northern Virginia region through integration of walking, biking, and transit.

The transit element of the plan identifies three primary transit corridors where transit service would be provided in dedicated transit lanes. These corridors would provide access to the City's major population and activity centers as well as connectivity to local and regional destinations. One of the corridors, Corridor C, connects to the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative study area. Corridor C starts at the border with Arlington County along Beauregard Street, linking the Mark Center, Landmark Mall area, and Van Dorn Metrorail Station. The plan calls for coordination and integration of service with Arlington County to provide a seamless connection to the Pentagon via Corridor C.

Beauregard Corridor Plan (Ongoing)

The study area includes a portion of the Beauregard Street corridor in Alexandria near the Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) campus. The purpose of the project is to examine options for future development and examine how to integrate the proposed dedicated transit corridor along Beauregard Street into the area in accordance with the citywide transportation strategy. The Beauregard Corridor study area covers a portion of Corridor C identified in the City's *Transportation Master Plan*.

BRAC-133 Mark Center project

The BRAC 133 project is a new office complex being developed at Mark Center, an established mixed-use business park in Alexandria, for Department of Defense (DoD) personnel. The project is part of the U.S. Army's Fort Belvoir, VA BRAC initiative. The new complex will consist of two multi-story office towers – a 15 story building and a 17-story building, two parking garages and a public Transportation Center. The Transportation Center will provide multiple transportation options for DoD employees and Mark Center commuters and visitors.