

Summary of November 2010 Public Meetings

1.0 Overview

Arlington County and Fairfax County are considering construction and operation of transit improvements along Columbia Pike (Route 244) and South Jefferson Street between Skyline/Baileys Crossroads in Fairfax County, and Pentagon City in Arlington County. The Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA) is providing technical oversight of the current phase of the study.

Project goals and objectives seek to improve access to transit and overall mobility (including connections to the regional transit system) for the study corridor's residents, employees, and visitors. The recommended improvements will contribute to Arlington County and Fairfax County's vision for the study area as a multimodal corridor, linking its walkable, mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhoods to each other, the Washington, DC area transit network, and the region's major activity nodes.

The project team conducted two public information meetings, one on November 15, 2010 and the second on November 18, 2010. The purpose was to provide the public with a progress update on the project, as well as solicit public input on the alignment, station locations, operations and maintenance facilities, existing conditions, and potential project effects.

At the November 15, 2010 meeting at Goodwin House in Fairfax County, 112 members of the general public attended. At the November 18, 2010 meeting at Walter Reed Community Center in Arlington County, 145 members of the general public attended. Attendees included members of the project's Community Coordination Committee and Technical Advisory Committee. The meetings were held from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. and consisted of a presentation, followed by a question and answer session and then break-out sessions, where members of the public were able to discuss specific elements of the project with staff members at exhibit boards. At the conclusion of both public meetings, attendees reconvened and project representatives shared participant comments and questions discussed during the break-out sessions.

Attendees at both meetings received a copy of the meeting agenda, project Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), a glossary of frequently used terms, and a comment sheet.

2.0 Discussion/Questions from the November 15, 2010 Public Meeting

The project team welcomed questions and comments from the public after the presentation and prior to the break-out sessions. The topics covered by the questions are addressed below.

Funding: Members of the public asked about potential funding sources, and the proportion of the project that would be paid for by Arlington County and Fairfax County.

Response: Plans assume the project will pursue federal funding through the New Starts/Small Starts process. Fairfax County and Arlington County would split the local costs based on the amount of service provided in each jurisdiction.

Alternatives: Members of the public asked about the alternatives being evaluated, and whether additional transit modes had been considered.

Response: Alternatives being evaluated as part of the AA/EA include the No Build, Transportation Systems Management (TSM), and Streetcar Build Alternatives. Other modes (such as trolleybus) were considered in previous studies.

The TSM Alternatives include improved bus operations, streamlined fare collection, and provision of additional bus service. Transit demand in the corridor is growing rapidly due to the increase in local population, as shown by the large increase in ART bus ridership over the past few years.

Relationship to Other Projects: Members of the public asked about the relationship of the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative to other projects, and whether extensions were being considered. Of specific interest were connections to the Crystal City/Potomac Yard project and a possible extension to the Mark Center.

Response: There are a number of other ongoing project studies in the study area. The project team is coordinating with these studies, to ensure plans are complementary. The Pike Transit Initiative alignment and the Crystal City/Potomac Yard Transitway would connect at South Eads Street and 12th Street South in Pentagon City. Alexandria is currently conducting a transit study in the Beauregard Corridor. Plans could eventually include a connection to the Pike Transit Initiative alignment, but planning is still at an early stage.

Construction Impacts: A member of the public asked whether construction on the streetcar route would result in closures of the roads intersecting Columbia Pike.

Response: The environmental analysis currently being conducted will study the project's impacts on all major crossroads and bus services. No permanent road closures are anticipated as a result of the transit project. During construction, the intent would be to minimize the scale and duration of road closures.

Project Cost: A member of the public asked what the projected cost estimate was for the project.

Response: As part of the AA/EA, the project team is developing detailed capital and operating cost estimates. These cost estimates are not yet available, as several project components are still to be determined during this phase of planning.

Vehicle Characteristics: A member of the public asked for specifics on the length of the streetcar vehicle proposed for the project.

Response: Project planning assumes the same streetcar vehicles that are currently in use in Portland and Seattle. The vehicles are approximately 66 feet long.

Examples of Modern Streetcar Systems in the U.S.: A member of the public asked for examples of modern streetcars in the U.S.

Response: U.S. cities with operating modern streetcar systems include Portland, Seattle, and Tampa. Several other U.S. cities are planning or constructing modern streetcar lines, and many others are operating or constructing light rail transit systems.

Bus Service: A member of the public asked whether Metrobus services would run only in peak hours.

Response: Most of the Metrobus and ART service in the corridor would remain under all alternatives and would continue to be improved to serve local and commuter trips. The ART 41 would see an increase in service under the TSM and Streetcar Build Alternatives. Streetcar would replace the Metrobus 16G and 16H routes.

2.1 Comments Received from the Break-out Sessions at the November 15, 2010 Meeting by Category

During the break-out sessions, the project team staffed four exhibit areas: Planning/Process Issues,

Stops, Alignment, and Maintenance Facilities. At each exhibit, attendees discussed topics with the project representatives and the project team recorded the public's comments on easel pads and aerial corridor maps. Shown below are the comments received.

Planning/Process Issues

Comments on planning and process issues focused on general as well as specific concerns. While a number of comments expressed support for the project, participants also expressed the need for more public outreach and a better understanding of the alternatives. Specific issues noted included:

- Visual and construction effects to historic structures;
- The potential for disturbance of hazardous materials;
- Cost-benefit trade-offs of implementing streetcar;
- The need for better bicycle infrastructure in the corridor;
- Potential for traffic delays and traffic congestion; and
- Noise and light pollution, particularly as it might impact the residences near NOVA.

Stops

Comments about stops focused on the distance between stops, as well as the destinations served by specific stops. Participants expressed concern that stops spaced too widely apart would create long walk distances which would be particularly arduous for people with limited mobility, such as the elderly, the disabled, and people with small children. The distance between the stops at Glebe and Randolph and between Randolph and Buchanan were noted specifically, as there are steep hills in this area.

Participants noted that stops should serve existing or future activity. Placing a stop at Goodwin House would serve elderly residents, which was seen as positive. However, it was noted that the stop at Joyce Street near the Pentagon does not serve any existing or future development, based on current plans, and could be removed.

Alignment

Comments on alignment included concerns related to slope, elevation and alternative alignment options. Participants expressed support for the yellow line option at NOVA and suggested adding a stop at Route 7 and George Mason Drive in the blue line option. Participants also expressed concerns regarding the orange line alignment at NOVA, stating

that twists and turns in the alignment could cause bottlenecks and increase congestion. Participants also expressed the need to retain left turning movements along Columbia Pike to maintain neighborhood access.

Maintenance & Facilities

Comments regarding maintenance facilities focused on the appropriate location of the activities expected to take place at the facility, as well as the potential for expansion. The North Tract was seen as a good location due to existing light industrial uses and less potential for neighborhood disruption. However, another comment expressed support for the NOVA site due to the capacity for expansion and extension of the alignment. Concerns were expressed regarding noise pollution and the potential for neighborhood disruption. In addition, participants expressed concerns regarding overhead wires, poles, and power.

Other

Other comments expressed concerns regarding seating and capacity; fare collection and payment methods; and hours of operation. There were concerns related to existing and continuing bus service along Columbia Pike including express buses, as well.

3.0 Discussion/Questions from the November 18, 2010 Public Meeting

The project team welcomed questions and comments from the public after the presentation and prior to the break-out sessions. The topics covered by the questions are addressed below.

Ridership: Members of the public asked about current and projected ridership on the system.

Response: Current ridership on PikeRide is over 15,000 riders today, making it the most heavily used bus corridor in Northern Virginia. Ridership has risen 45 percent since 2004, driven in part by operational improvements as well as population growth. The project team is developing ridership projections for the alternatives.

Project Cost: A member of the public asked what the projected cost estimate was for the project.

Response: As part of the AA/EA, the project team is developing detailed capital and operating cost estimates. These cost estimates are not yet available, as several project components are still to be determined during this phase of planning.

Parking: It was noted that a park-and-ride has been planned in Fairfax, but not in Arlington. Are there any plans for parking in Arlington?

Response: The only park-and-ride facility planned as part of the project is the one at Jefferson Street in Baileys Crossroads. It is expected that most Arlington users will walk to transit stops.

Environmental Process: A member of the public asked why an Environmental Assessment (EA) was being conducted, rather than an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Response: The decision to conduct an EA rather than an EIS was made in coordination with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). An EA was determined to be appropriate because of the characteristics of the project and the anticipated level of impacts due to the project.

Relationship to Other Projects: Members of the public asked about the relationship of the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative to other projects, and whether extensions were being considered. Of specific interest were a possible extension to the Mark Center and the status of the Washington Boulevard Interchange project.

Response: There are a number of other ongoing project studies in the study area. The project team is coordinating with these studies, to ensure plans are complementary. Alexandria is currently conducting a transit study in the Beauregard Corridor. Plans could eventually include a connection to the Pike Transit Initiative alignment, but planning is still at an early stage. The Washington Boulevard Interchange project is currently in the process of selecting a design-build firm.

Ability to Operate in Inclement Weather: A member of the public asked how streetcars perform in snowy and icy conditions compared to bus performance.

Response: Streetcars typically have fewer operating issues than buses. In times of severe weather, both streetcars and buses would likely face operating obstacles and temporary closures. There would be specific emergency plans in place to manage severe weather conditions along the corridor (i.e. ice on the rails, power outages, and snow).

Public Involvement: A member of the public asked whether the public would have the opportunity to vote on the proposed streetcar line.

Response: A specific public vote regarding the proposed streetcar line is not anticipated. The project Technical Advisory Committee and

Community Coordination Committee are working in conjunction with the Policy Committee (which includes state and local elected officials). Elected County Boards will make decisions on whether and how to implement the project.

Project Information: A member of the public requested more detailed information on characteristics of the project alternatives.

Response: Additional detail is available on the project website, www.piketranst.com. In addition, the Environmental Assessment will be made available to the public after it has been reviewed by the FTA.

Honor System: A member of the public expressed concern over whether the use of an honor system for fare payment would work.

Response: The current proposed honor system would require passengers to pay their fare before boarding the streetcar. Inspectors would issue civil citations to violators. This system is in use in cities around the world, including the U.S., and works well.

3.1 Comments Received from the Break-out Sessions at the November 18, 2010 Meeting by Category

During the break-out sessions, the project team staffed four exhibit areas: Planning/Process Issues, Stops, Alignment, and Maintenance Facilities. At each exhibit, attendees discussed topics with the project representatives and the project team recorded the public's comments on easel pads and aerial corridor maps. Shown below are the comments received.

Planning/Process Issues

The comments expressed concerns related to increased density in the corridor; redevelopment opportunities; the style of the redeveloped properties; and the need to maintain and increase affordable housing.

Traffic congestion was a recurring theme as well as concerns related to speeding. There were comments stressing the need for improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities. There were also concerns about impacts to bicycles and motorbikes arising from streetcar tracks.

Several participants expressed concerns related to potential loss of parking; need for structured parking and relationship between form-based code and parking.

Some participants felt the need for increased police presence to address traffic concerns due to the

increased numbers of people that the streetcar would attract to the corridor.

Environmental concerns included possible wildlife impacts and hazardous materials near the North Tract site and impacts to streams and last stand of trees related to Washington Boulevard project. Participants also expressed concern about the visual impact of overhead wires, as well as energy usage and power source for streetcars.

Participants also stressed the need for coordination in both planning and funding with other jurisdictions including the City of Alexandria for NOVA campus expansion; the City of Fairfax for possible future extension; and taking cues from other streetcar systems in the nation. Participants expressed the need for a regional system and better understanding of such a system, including improved mapping to show streetcar alignments on Metrorail maps. Participants also expressed the need for better education and outreach to encourage transit use.

Stops

Participants expressed support for raised platforms at station areas, but also expressed concerns related to grade separation, slopes etc. between raised platforms and sidewalks. Participants expressed the need for ADA compliant and improved facilities at stops including climate controlled waiting areas, seating, and real-time passenger information preferably in multiple languages; and improved pedestrian connection between Army Navy Drive and the Pentagon. There were comments suggesting relocating certain stops; other stop locations were brought into question for lack of convenient destinations and/or serving areas. The comments also expressed the need for more parking facilities.

Alignment

Participants expressed support for both the blue line and orange line options at NOVA. Connecting to the NOVA campus was favored due to improved mobility for students and the availability of the training program. Some participants questioned the lack of alignments' connection to the Long Bridge Aquatic Center. There were also concerns about weather disruptions; the need to preserve left-turning movements; and transition of vehicles between median/left turns/curbside. Concerns over bicycle and pedestrian safety were also raised.

Maintenance & Facilities

The comments suggested a preference for the maintenance facility at NOVA over North Tract due to easier access for operators and mechanics; and access and education opportunities for students. The

North Tract was perceived as hard to access and with visual impacts to the park. One of the North Tract property owners expressed its desire to retain its business operations. There were concerns regarding power outages and its impact on streetcar service.

Other

Participants raised questions about streetcar vehicles regarding seating and capacity as well as provision for bicycles. The comments also included questions related to fare collection and payment methods. Other comments related to existing bus services in the corridor.

4.0 Comments Received during the Public Comment Period

A total of 52 comments were received between November 15 and December 3, 2010. Of these comments, 26 comments were received via comment sheets, 22 comments were submitted via e-mail, and four comments were received via mailed letters.

Comments received related to the following categories and themes:

Cost and Funding

- The cost of the project is too great. Full disclosure of what the project will cost and what has already been spent should be available to the public.
- If the streetcar plan costs more than achieving the same outcome with buses, then it should be dropped.
- Who will pay for the streetcar?
- Even with federal infrastructure funding, the operating costs will be high.
- Consider having the City of Alexandria contribute funds.
- NOVA should be a cooperative agency in the EA used for federal funding.
- To better support the funding application, the City of Alexandria should support the extension to Mark Center.
- Contingency for more vehicles should be set aside for when demand increases and service is expanded.

Buses

- How will the streetcar better serve the corridor than a good bus system?
- The streetcar will eliminate bus lines.
- Consolidated bus stops are inconvenient.

- If the streetcar breaks down, it is more difficult to move than a bus.
- The buses on Columbia Pike run empty, except during peak hours.
- Buses can be sold or moved if transit is eliminated in the future.
- Columbia Pike already receives excellent Metrobus and ART bus service.
- Make sure the route is seamless and minimize transfers.

Substations/Power Stations

- Build fewer or better substations.
- Power stations provide dirty energy.
- Power stations are not esthetically pleasing and require deforestation.
- How many substations will there be? Where will the substations be located?
- Do not build substations near neighborhoods or schools due to potential health and safety concerns.
- Emergency power should be supplied by clean, sustainable sources.
- The power substation on Army-Navy Drive on federal property is unrealistic.

Streetcar

- What is the purpose of the streetcar?
- The streetcar only serves apartment and condominium residents.
- The streetcar technology is outdated.
- Columbia Pike is too small to accommodate a streetcar.
- The streetcar will increase property taxes.
- The streetcar should use either solar power or a buried wire.
- The streetcar could increase property values.

Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria Campus (NOVA)

- The streetcar should go to NOVA.
- The connection to NOVA is important to grow the community college.
- The connection to NOVA and the potential training program will provide a potential ridership for the project.
- The connection to NOVA has positive economic development implications, which are worth the cost to build to that location.
- What options have been considered for reducing the footprint of the potential maintenance facility at NOVA?

- There are many disadvantages to extending the line beyond Skyline and locating a maintenance/operations center at NOVA, including:
 - Loss of parking spaces along S. George Mason Drive – a necessity for residents and guests of Skyline.
 - Create pedestrian traffic hazards at the Route 7 intersection.
 - Compromise the right hand turn lane for traffic on George Mason Drive and east bound to Route 7.
 - Detract from a residential setting along South George Mason Drive by removing mature landscaping and green space.
 - Reduce the value and marketability of units.

Alignment

- The streetcar should serve Bailey's Crossroads.
- The Coca-Cola alignment is not ideal.
- The alignment should be able to accommodate future extensions.
- The alignment scope should consider route services to Mark Center.
- The streetcar should go to the new aquatic center.
- Extensions of the rail line along Route 7 has many disadvantages, including:
 - Requiring Skyline Plaza to concede 25 feet of additional green space for the right-of-way along Route 7 for track-way and other improvements.
 - Constructing a retaining wall which will create a reverberating effect from the noise generated from rail traffic and other traffic noise.
 - Constructing a structure to fully enclose the track bed area between Skyline Plaza and surrounding areas.
 - Reducing the value and marketability of units.
 - Placing the rail line overhead of recreation and relaxation amenities, including grilling stations, picnic areas, and a tot lot.
 - Reducing and diminished green space.

Facilities

- Facility operations would be better at NOVA.

- Operations facilities should be close to the route.
- Streetcars require separate and dedicated maintenance facilities.
- There are under-utilized commercial and industrial properties that should be considered as locations for maintenance facilities.
- Construction and operations of a maintenance/operations Facility will:
 - Result in new and unwelcome noise.
 - Result in unique noises from operating activities as well as maintenance activities, including wheel turning and car washing.
- Including a maintenance/operations facility within a densely populated area will affect surrounding dwellings.
- One of the property owners of the North Tract site expressed its opposition to the project's acquisition of its property and the displacement of its business.

Alternatives

- A trolley bus should be considered as an alternative.
- It seems that the alternatives are obsolete because the streetcar will happen regardless.
- Additional alternatives with a more robust TSM plan are needed, which should include non-stop and skip-stop routes, bus trolleys, and a dedicated bus way across the Potomac to D.C.
- What are the other alternatives?
- Double-deck buses are a viable alternative to streetcars.

Safety

- The transitions between lanes should be signalized.
- Pedestrian safety should be heavily considered.
- What safety precautions will be taken with the streetcar?
- Safe street crossings should be provided at station stops.
- Streetcars are safer than buses.

Station Stops

- More stations will better serve the community.
- Stops should be spaced every ¼ mile not every ½ mile.

- The streetcar and the station stops should have a strong emphasis on local use, like serving grocery stores, restaurants, etc.
- Areas with denser populations should include more station stops.
- The number of stops should be kept to a minimum for faster travel.

Integrated/Dedicated Lanes

- Lack of dedicated right-of-way for the streetcar will not result in a decrease in travel time through the corridor.
- Streetcars integrated with existing traffic lanes do not perform well in inclement weather.
- The streetcar is an inflexible system.
- The streetcar should have its own dedicated lane.

Transit Issues

- The streetcar will not result in an increase in transit ridership.
- The streetcar does not get the most out of the transit dollar.
- The area is already robustly served by transit; there is no need for another transit system.
- The streetcar needs to integrate smoothly with current transit options.
- The project objective should be to maximize transit trips along the corridor.

Traffic/Congestion

- The streetcar will disrupt traffic and businesses.
- Traffic currently runs smoothly on Columbia Pike, the rail system will slow traffic down.
- The streetcar will not take cars off the road. It will increase congestion.

Development

- The Columbia Pike Transit Initiative is based on continued, but unwanted, development along Columbia Pike.
- The streetcar will encourage expensive development and eliminate affordable housing.

Environmental Assessment

- Concerns about rare and endangered species and wildlife.
- The project should require an Environmental Impact Statement, instead of an Environmental Assessment.

General

- Minimize noise.
- The public should be able to vote on the project.
- More parking is needed.
- Hours of operation should match Metro.
- How will bicyclists be accommodated?
- Problems with Metro should be addressed before beginning another transit initiative.
- Consult knowledgeable operations professionals who can advise on operating issues.
- Overhead wires are unsightly.

5.0 Next Steps

The project team is working to incorporate public suggestions and comments into the project alternatives and their evaluation as part of the AA/EA. As the current study progresses, the project website will be updated as new information is available.

The project team expects to hold public hearings later in 2011. If you would like to be added to the project mailing list, please submit your contact information via e-mail to info@piketranst.com.