

# Frequently Asked Questions

## What is the current status of the project?

In July 2012, in separate actions, the Arlington County Board and the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors accepted the AA/EA and preliminary plans for the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative and adopted the streetcar alternative and alignment as the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). The project team is developing an application to enter Project Development as part of FTA's New Starts/Small Starts program.

For more information go to: [www.piketranst.com](http://www.piketranst.com)

## What is the Streetcar Build Alternative?

The Streetcar Build Alternative includes existing highway and transit networks, plus committed transportation improvements within the corridor; transit operations changes; and high capacity modern streetcars operating between Skyline and Pentagon City in place of the 16G and 16H bus routes. Standard buses would continue on other routes.

## Why did the County Boards adopt the Streetcar Build Alternative as the LPA?

In separate July 2012 Board actions, Arlington County and Fairfax County selected the Streetcar Build Alternative as the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) because of its ability to accomplish the goals of improving transit on Columbia Pike, increasing the Pike's transit capacity, encouraging high-quality, mixed use development, and supporting the vision of revitalizing the Pike as a more walkable, bikeable, transit-oriented Main Street.

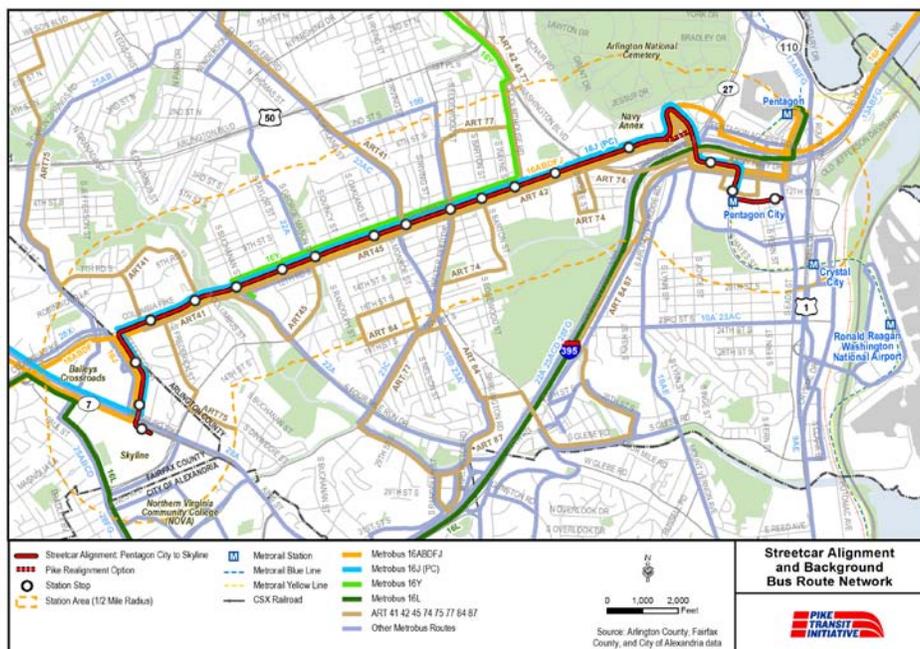
The 4.9 mile Columbia Pike streetcar system will run from Pentagon City in Arlington County to the Skyline area in Fairfax County. The figure below shows the alignment.

## What are the benefits of Columbia Pike Streetcar?

The streetcar has the mobility benefits and capacity to promote and serve planned growth along the corridor. The permanence of the streetcar investment will promote economic and community development. Streetcar can achieve the vision for the Columbia Pike corridor as a vibrant, diverse, pedestrian, and transit oriented community.

### Columbia Pike Streetcar:

- Provides an affordable and high-quality transit option
- Increases transit ridership
- Reduces reliance on private automobile travel
- Decreases vehicle miles traveled and emissions
- Serves local trips
- Improves access to regional transit, employment, and business centers
- Provides the greatest transit capacity and the greatest capacity for future expansion
- Improves walkability and livability
- Sustains the economic vitality of the corridor and promotes community development
- Supports additional housing as indicated in Arlington County's Columbia Pike Neighborhoods Area Plan



## Would streetcars replace buses?

It is anticipated that the streetcar would only replace standard buses on the I6G and I6H bus routes. Standard 40-foot CNG buses would be deployed on all other WMATA routes, and 31- or 35-foot CNG buses would be deployed on the ART routes.

## How many passengers does a streetcar hold?

Streetcars can accommodate 44 seated passengers and 71 standees for a total of 115 passengers per vehicle.



*Example of a modern streetcar.*

## Do you anticipate more people will ride streetcar than buses? What is the anticipated ridership in 2016 and 2030?

Experience in other cities shows that a streetcar service would generate higher transit usage along the corridor.

- Anticipated ridership in 2016: 26,200
- Anticipated ridership in 2030: 30,500

## Will streetcars run in mixed traffic or dedicated lanes?

Streetcar vehicles would mostly operate in mixed traffic within the outside travel lanes along Columbia Pike and in the inner lanes along Jefferson Street and throughout Pentagon City. The only areas where streetcar vehicles would operate in exclusive right-of-way would be on short segments near the western and eastern termini.

## How will streetcars handle track disturbances such as accidents, broken down vehicles, and bad weather?

As with current rapid bus transit operations and priority bus corridors, should a road disturbance or blockage occur, there would be rapid response vehicles and incident management plans specifically designed to remove the streetcar to a storage track for continuity of operations.

Streetcars can operate in inclement weather (e.g., snow or ice) and low levels of snow. As with Metrorail and Metrobus, high levels of snow accumulation would prevent the operation of bus and streetcar services.

## What is the streetcar system's anticipated hours of operation?

Service hours for streetcar in the corridor would be similar to Metrorail hours of operation.

## Why won't adding more buses solve the transportation problem?

Columbia Pike is the most heavily utilized bus transit corridor in Virginia, carrying 16,000 daily passengers in 2011. During peak travel periods, existing transit service frequency is very high—along the Pike, buses arrive every two to three minutes. Because of the already high service frequency, adding more buses to the corridor would decrease operational efficiency, leading to more bus bunching and delays to passengers. Rather than adding more buses, increasing the capacity of the transit vehicle will contribute to increased service reliability and less bus bunching. The increase in transit vehicle capacity, coupled with off-board fare collection and multidoor boarding, leads to improved travel time and service reliability and provides adequate capacity to meet long-term travel demand along the corridor.

## Impacts

### General

## What are the environmental impacts of streetcar?

The Environmental Assessment finds that the streetcar would not cause adverse environmental impacts that could not be addressed through mitigation or minimization.

## Will any residences or businesses be displaced?

No displacements or relocations were identified in the AA/EA for the Streetcar.

## Are there any easements needed?

Construction of the streetcar system would require the purchase of some private land and/or structures for easements, rights-of-way, and facilities.

## Construction

## What are the construction impacts associated with building a streetcar system?

Construction of a streetcar system would require track in the roadway, an overhead contact system with power substations, and an operations and maintenance (O&M) facility. Temporary effects, such as traffic congestion, dust, light emissions, and noise, would likely occur during construction.

The noise analysis identified sensitive receptors near the O&M facility. However, the proposed streetcar would be very quiet running along the corridor. In general, streetcars have vibration characteristics similar to or less than buses and trucks that currently operate in the corridor.

## Traffic and Transportation

### **Will there be more traffic congestion with streetcar?**

Increasing transit capacity and the number of persons using transit will help address and serve the anticipated transit and roadway demand. Traffic congestion would not increase with the introduction of the streetcar.

### **How are bicyclists affected by streetcar?**

Embedded streetcar tracks present potential hazards to bicyclists crossing or riding along the transit lane. Arlington County has completed a study on streetcar and bicycle interactions, which includes case studies from other cities that confront the types of issues anticipated with implementation of a Columbia Pike streetcar system. In keeping with recommendations of the “Best Practices in Providing Bicycle Facilities in Streetcar Corridors” prepared by Arlington County, mitigation strategies include education programs for cyclists and motorists, physical separation between bicycle and streetcar facilities, and design treatments that facilitate bicycle turns over streetcar tracks at safe angles. Arlington County intends to build a bicycle boulevard along streets that parallel Columbia Pike.

## Travel Time

### **Will my commuting time improve with the streetcar?**

Yes, the project team found that the Streetcar would improve corridor travel times due to consolidation of bus stops. The Streetcar would further improve travel times with off-board fare payment and multi-door loading and exiting, features that would decrease vehicle dwell time. These factors will also lessen the potential opportunities for transit vehicles to lag behind schedule, thus reducing the potential for bunching and increasing service reliability.

### **What measures are being considered to preserve affordable housing along Columbia Pike?**

Both Fairfax County and Arlington County are actively studying and working to preserve affordable housing along Columbia Pike. Arlington County recently approved the Columbia Pike Neighborhoods Plan; the plan examines existing policy directives to encourage preservation of existing market-rate affordable housing units and presents new policy directives, financial tools, and strategies to provide affordable housing in new development. These tools and strategies will help shape the type and character of development in the corridor, and preserve and create opportunities for affordable housing. For more information regarding the *Columbia Pike Neighborhoods Plan* please visit [www.columbiapikeva.us/revitalization-story/columbia-pike-land-use-housing-study/](http://www.columbiapikeva.us/revitalization-story/columbia-pike-land-use-housing-study/)

### **What are the potential economic effects of having streetcars along the Columbia Pike corridor? Have these impacts been studied?**

Reliable studies and existing literature indicate that the combination of mobility gains and permanent investment associated with a streetcar system would lead to a one-time average increase of 4% in property values along the corridor.

The streetcar would contribute to the “livability” of the corridor, providing travel cost and travel time savings. For the Streetcar Build Alternative, annual (2030) travel cost savings generated by diverting travelers from automobiles to transit is about \$900,000, and the value of annual travel time savings (value of the travel time saved per trip) is about \$5.1 million.

Arlington County and Fairfax County recently conducted a Return on Investment (ROI) study for the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative. The study focused on how land values and uses would change with implementation of streetcar service.

### **What are the key findings from the Return on Investment (ROI) study that Arlington County and Fairfax County conducted with respect to streetcar?**

In the joint study, the counties looked at possible transportation and land use benefits for the streetcar. The two counties also surveyed developers and found:

- 60% said that higher quality transit, like a streetcar, was very important or important in choosing to develop along the corridor
- 64% said that a streetcar would cause them to add more residential units to their developments (32% indicated a 25% or greater increase in units while another 32% reported a 4-14% increase)
- 70% said that a streetcar would increase retail sales volume per square foot
- 40% reported that they were more likely to develop along the corridor as opposed to other places in Arlington County or Fairfax County without rail service.

The ROI study also projected a 4 to 10% increase in property values within a quarter mile of the streetcar line. This amounts to a \$126 to \$315 million increase in values along the study corridor. The streetcar could result in 10% net new development along the corridor. Over 30 years, this added development would generate \$82 million in new revenue from sales taxes, business licenses and other fees. This increased development would produce \$156 million in property tax revenues over the same period.

## Costs and Funding Sources

### **What are the costs and funding sources associated with the Streetcar Project?**

The preliminary estimate for the construction cost of the Columbia Pike streetcar is \$250 million. Assumed capital funding sources are as follows:

- 30% of the project's funding (up to \$75 million) is expected to come from the federal government, if the project qualifies for the Small Starts program.
- 14% of the project's funding (up to \$35 million) is expected to come from the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- 56% of the project's funding (up to \$140 million) is expected to come from Arlington County and Fairfax County.

The annual operating cost for the streetcar is approximately \$8.9 million. Assumed operating funding sources include fare revenue, state operating support, federal grant funds (after 7 years of operation), and local funding. Other potential operating revenue sources that could help offset the public subsidy include joint development revenues, parking revenues, advertising, and concessions. Subsequent financial analyses will examine these potential revenue streams.

### **Would local taxes be increased to pay for the streetcar?**

The local share of project funding would be from sources dedicated to transportation improvements, such as the commercial real estate tax that applies to commercial and industrial properties throughout Arlington and Fairfax counties. The tax does not apply to individual home owners. Proceeds from this tax are used exclusively to fund transportation investments, and may not be used for other public investments such as schools, police/fire, or other local programs.

## Next Steps

### **What are the next steps?**

Now that the Streetcar Build Alternative has been selected as the LPA, Arlington County and Fairfax County will submit a formal application to enter the next phase of FTA's New Starts/Small Starts program—preliminary engineering/project development. Arlington County and Fairfax County plan to jointly operate the Columbia Pike streetcar, which will connect two key job centers and significantly improve transit along one of Northern Virginia's most heavily traveled corridors.

## Public Involvement

### **How will the public stay involved in the next stages of the project?**

Upon entry into New Starts/Small Starts Preliminary Engineering/Project Development, the project team anticipates a federal NEPA Finding that will support continued project development and eligibility of the project for federal funding. The Finding document will include formal responses to comments received on the Alternatives Analysis/Environmental Assessment (AA/EA). A key project commitment, as documented in the AA/EA, is to continue public involvement and outreach with affected communities and stakeholders. This commitment will be addressed in subsequent planning and engineering phases.

### **What is the current status/timeline of the Columbia Pike Transit Initiative?**

Subject to the availability of funding, the current project timeline calls for:

- Preliminary engineering/project development from 2013 to 2014.
- Design and construction to begin in 2015.
- System testing and service to begin in 2017.