

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 21, 2018

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER *MJ*

SUBJECT: HISTORY OF TRANSITWAY CORRIDORS B AND C (WEST END TRANSITWAY)

During the November 28, 2017 legislative meeting and consideration of grant applications to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, Council discussed the City's proposed transitways. At its June 26 legislative meeting, Council will again consider transportation funding applications for programs including the state's SMART SCALE and federal BUILD (formerly TIGER).

The purpose of this memo is to provide historical background on previous Council decisions relative to Transitway Corridors B/C and transit plans for Eisenhower Avenue. In summary, the City has made planning and funding decisions tracing back to 2008 that provide a strong, clear policy basis in support of implementation for the Transitway C (West End Transitway), Transitway B (Duke Street) and enhanced transit (though not bus rapid transit) for Eisenhower Avenue. This is reflected in small area plans and development approvals. It is also echoed in community input to efforts such as the Central Alexandria Traffic Study, in which the civic associations collectively requested the City *accelerate* design on Transitway Corridor B. The courses of action described here do not preclude future policy discussions on street connectivity which will be part of the Transportation Master Plan updates in FY2019-21.

BACKGROUND: Several plans and studies conducted over the past decade have included recommendations for transit corridors in the City and are highlighted by the City Council Actions below:

- 2008 – Transportation Master Plan – Identified three Transitway Corridors
- 2012 – Transitway Corridors Feasibility Study – Confirmed Viability of three Corridors
- 2015 – Eisenhower West Small Area Plan – Recommended Enhanced Transit for Eisenhower Avenue Corridor
- 2016 – Council adopts resolution for re-concurrence of the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the West End Transitway

Transportation Master Plan (2008)

The Transportation Master Plan, adopted by Council in 2008, establishes a multimodal vision to guide the City forward in its transportation decision-making process. The Transit chapter outlines a system of three primary transit corridors that would encourage transit-supportive land use, connect major activity centers and transit stations, and include innovative transit vehicles and smart stations / shelters.

The Transportation Master Plan identified Corridor B as a critical link between Alexandria and Fairfax County, serving major activity centers including a redeveloped Landmark Mall, residential neighborhoods along Duke Street, King Street-Old Town Metrorail station, and Alexandria Union Station which is served by Virginia Railway Express (VRE) and Amtrak. While the Master Plan recommended that Duke Street serve as the high capacity transit corridor, it also identified Eisenhower Avenue as another potential transit corridor.

Transitway Corridors Feasibility Study (2012)

The purpose of the Transitway Corridors Feasibility Study was to evaluate each of the three identified transitway corridors to determine the feasibility for high capacity transit, define the corridor alignment, define the transit mode and technology, and identify costs and implementation implications.

A High Capacity Transit Corridor Work Group (CWG) was appointed by City Council to provide technical guidance for this study. Early in the planning process, the CWG suggested that Eisenhower Avenue and Duke Street both be examined as potential options for Corridor B. Both corridors were evaluated on a variety of criteria, including service connectivity to the local and regional population, employment and activity centers; connectivity to other transit services; operational quality of transit service; and quality of the roadway conditions.

The analysis determined that Duke Street was a more optimal high capacity transit route because it currently has some of the highest transit ridership in the City, served by DASH Route AT8 and Metrobus routes 29 K/N. In addition, there is a higher population demand along the Duke Street corridor, and the high traffic volumes and lower travel speeds present an opportunity to improve mobility with dedicated transit lanes. A transitway along Duke Street presents an opportunity to address existing pedestrian and bicycle safety needs, improve the streetscape, and mitigate corridor congestion.

The Eisenhower Avenue corridor was identified as a less optimal location for the transitway because the corridor currently has low transit ridership, the higher density areas at the east and west hubs of the corridor are already served by Metrorail, the land uses between the east and west hubs is not conducive to bus-based high-capacity transit, the corridor ridership capture area is restricted to the north by the railroad and to the south by Cameron Run and I-495, and it is highly unlikely that the corridor would be a successful candidate for highly competitive transit funds. As a result, the CWG recommended Duke Street as the preferred alignment for Corridor B and that local transit service on Eisenhower Avenue be expanded with improved transit amenities.

Overall, the City has made significant headway implementing the vision for high-capacity corridors:

- Corridor A (Route 1): Has been in operation since 2014 and Metroway ridership continues to grow as adjacent development occurs;
- Corridor B (Duke Street): The City expects to receive NVTA 70% funds for 100% Design and NEPA documentation; and
- Corridor C (West End Transitway): Staff is advancing the design using existing NVTA funds and is seeking state SMART SCALE and federal BUILD funding to complete design and construct.

Eisenhower West Small Area Plan

The City began the Eisenhower West Small Area Plan and associated transportation study in 2014. One of the recommendations of the plan was that Eisenhower Avenue serve as an inviting multimodal complete street that safely accommodates pedestrians, cars, bicycles, and transit. The plan recommends enhanced transit service along Eisenhower Avenue, which could include more frequent transit service, improved shelters, real time transit information, and on-time service through signal priority and off-board fare collection. The plan recommended that the outside (curb) lanes on Eisenhower Avenue be dedicated for transit during the peak periods, and on-street parking during off-peak periods and that a future transit circulator service connect the Van Dorn Metrorail station to nearby areas and Landmark Mall. This recommendation was consistent with recommendations in the DASH Comprehensive Operations Analysis, completed in 2014.

The City, in partnership with DASH, has recently begun the Alexandria Transit Vision Study. The goal of this study is to re-envision the DASH bus network to better serve existing and future population, job, and activity centers. It will also include a robust civic engagement process to determine community needs and values to develop the proposed transit network. The study presents the opportunity to better determine transit needs along Eisenhower Avenue.

NEXT STEPS: The City will continue its current course of implementing Corridor B and high capacity transit on Duke Street, including an alternatives analysis and environmental review, and project design. The City has received \$12 million in NVTA 70% funds as part of the FY 2018-23 Six Year Program to complete the environmental review and design for Corridor B – Duke Street. Advancing Corridor B along Duke Street not only provides the opportunities to improve transit connectivity and reduce traffic congestion, but also redesign this high crash corridor, as identified in the City's Vision Zero program, to enhance safety for people who walk, bike and drive cars along this roadway.

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