

## Memorandum

To: Members of Alexandria Ad Hoc Transportation Policy and Planning Task Force  
Larry Robinson, Joe Bennet, Eric Wagner, Lois Walker, Maria Wasowski

Copies to: Rich Baier, Director of Transportation & Environmental Services  
Eileen Fogarty, Director of Planning and Zoning

From: Task Force members Poul Hertel and George Foote

Date: March 1, 2005

Re: A New Transportation System for Alexandria

Our Alexandria Ad Hoc Transportation Policy and Planning Task Force task force has met for several months, with extensive briefings from City staff as well as the City's consultants. We have received books of data on Alexandria's infrastructure, budget and revenue base. We have studied trends in development, transit use, population and employment. Our studies have given us a broad picture of major transportation challenges for the City of Alexandria.

We know now that the City simply cannot meet those challenges with small steps or modest policies. Doing nothing is not an option. At a recent task force meeting, our task force reached consensus that bold action on the transportation front is better than traditional or incremental steps. Based on that consensus, this letter proposes that our task force formally recommend construction of a major transportation network for Alexandria.

*We propose that the task force recommend to Council two specific programs: first, a long range transit system construction project; and, second, a more immediate upgrade of our existing transit system with wireless technologies. Both proposals are briefly explained in this letter. Note that our task force charter is broad; we believe these proposals are squarely within Council's charge to us. We do not suggest that we ignore the formal requirement to help develop the transportation element of the City master plan, and we continue to believe that land use planning must reflect transportation realities and planning, but we think our task force will best serve Council and the City by laying out an ambitious new approach to transportation in Alexandria.*

A New Transit System for Alexandria. For the long range, we propose that the City design and build a comprehensive transportation system to move people among the population, commercial and employment centers of Alexandria and nearby Arlington County and to provide convenient access from neighborhoods to the Metrorail system. We believe this system should incorporate modern urban rail transit, such as streetcar lines with dedicated rights of way where feasible. It could some day include a system of personal transportation devices to carry residents to work. It could include new routing of traffic and different uses of streets. We may need to build new

parking structures as part of the system. In any event, we will need to incorporate much of our existing infrastructure in the system, and we will need to improve sidewalks, trails and other facilities as well.

The system will be capital intensive, and we therefore propose that the City commit to study all costs of construction and operation, as well as sources of funding that could include reallocation of current planned spending, new borrowing, federal and state grants, operating subsidies, fare box revenues, special tax districts, business community support and advertising. We will continue to urge the City to seek federal support for necessary studies and planning.

Like all transportation systems, the system location will influence commercial and residential development and value. The changes in property values should be considered in building and funding the system.

The system will be built over a number of years during which technology will advance, and it should be flexible enough to incorporate new developments in materials, techniques, devices, and information and electronic systems.

Our proposal does not contemplate major new roadways. As the attached memorandum explains, more or wider roads would not solve Alexandria's transportation problems because such roads would induce still more commuter traffic through the city. Alexandria's location between the residential and commercial districts of other jurisdictions means that our roads are now heavily occupied by transient users, and the growth of our neighbors will only raise the demand for their citizens' use of Alexandria's streets. It is therefore obvious that our roads will remain congested with commuter traffic no matter what we reasonably do to increase their capacity. This commuter use of City streets not only makes no contribution to the welfare of the city, it blocks productive use of the streets by citizens and workers in the City. While we will always meet our obligations to our neighbors in the region, it is not reasonable for the City to allocate significant amounts of its money and street space to non-productive and detrimental transient commuter uses.

It is far preferable to allocate our street space and financial resources to the transportation needs of Alexandria citizens, businesses and workers. Those needs include commuting within, to and from the City. We must also provide for convenient tourist movement to and within the City and travel among the neighborhoods of Alexandria and the region. Alexandria's growing density of business and population requires that we rely on rational design of our community transit system rather than more road construction. Our City's character is increasingly urban, and automobiles, useful and important as they are, often displace and interfere with better uses of our limited resources. Our proposed recommendation to Council recognizes the changing character of Alexandria and the threat to the City from continued reliance on automobiles. Its purpose, therefore, is to help align application of public resources with the public's present and future needs.

Immediate Adoption of Information Technology. We also propose that the task force recommend construction of a high capacity, multi-use city-wide wireless broadband network to improve the efficiency of existing transportation information systems and to encourage more telework, thereby reducing congestion. The system also would provide greater access to information resources for citizens, visitors and businesses in Alexandria.

Digital technology and global positioning satellites make it possible for bus location and specific arrival information to be always available at bus stops and in offices and residences. It is even possible for buses to e-mail or call riders as the buses approach a stop. The technology can make transit more reliable and predictable, thereby improving the commuting experience of existing transit users and encouraging more transit use by commuters who drive today. In addition to the location and communication features, information technology could provide immediate benefits to transit users in the city through different and dynamic scheduling of buses. Such technologies might lead to use of a different mix of vehicles within the City.

Wireless technology is far less expensive and more reliable than even in the recent past, and it should be deployed as soon as possible. The technology will have tremendous ancillary benefits to businesses, schools and homes.

Legal, financial and regulatory issues will face any city-sponsored telecommunications system for public use, but there are ways to address the issues. Many other cities have built, sponsored or are building broadband wireless networks for their citizens, businesses, visitors and city employees.

Conclusion. These proposals for recommendations to Council are intended to be a starting point for addressing ways to direct and draw benefit from the enormous growth that Alexandria will experience over the next 25 years and beyond. That timeframe of thinking is important for us today if our transportation policy is going to serve the community that we live in and that we want to leave to future generations.

We will offer these proposals at a forthcoming meeting of the task force. We hope the consideration of the proposals will also open the way to include in our transportation planning such important concerns as air and water quality protection, promotion of a healthy economy for Alexandria, and preservation of our community and its vital and diverse neighborhoods. All of these interests are at great risk if the City does not commit now to meet our transportation challenges.

Poul Hertel

George Foote