

13 July 2016

Arlington County Board
The Honorable Libby Garvey, Chair
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: 2017-2016 Transit Development Plan (TDP) and the Columbia Pike Corridor

Chair Garvey and Members of the County Board:

On 18 November 2014, the Arlington County Board abruptly cancelled the long-planned streetcar projects for the Columbia Pike and Crystal City/Route 1 corridors. At that time—and indeed during the vigorous debate ahead of the 2014 elections—advocates of the streetcar cancellation assured the Pike communities that an alternative to the streetcar could be rapidly implemented that would provide the same level and quality of service. While we applaud the intent and effort of County staff on the draft Transit Development Plan, the Plan clearly does not provide services that are equivalent of the abandoned streetcar plan. In fact, it does not even come close.

We have specific concerns about a number of the proposed recommendations.

- 1) The proposed realignment of MetroBus line 10B to eliminate service along Walter Reed Drive and South 2nd Street is unacceptable to the community. This is an essential link to Ballston and the Orange/Silver Line corridor. The eliminated segment must be reinstated.
- 2) Non-rush hour headways of 12-15 minutes are proposed for the premium service. Under the defunct streetcar plan, headways were to be every 6 minutes *at all times*. This level of service is only half or less as frequent, *even in prime transit hours*.
- 3) There are glaringly few mentions of full weekday and weekend service commitments in the draft Plan. The streetcar plan promised 18+/7 availability which is essential to providing Pike residents with reliable options to conduct their everyday business without reliance on automobiles.
- 4) There is no mention in the Plan of either the higher-quality vehicles or the larger-capacity articulated vehicles that were promised during the streetcar debate. The PPG does not understand how the existing smaller, lower-quality vehicles will be able to provide the capacity needed to adequately serve planned growth along the Pike or deliver the better, more comfortable ride that helps increase ridership and meet County goals for public transit utilization.
- 5) MetroBus line 16Y is the most heavily used route on the Pike on a per-bus basis with many buses at full capacity in the morning and evening. Many riders are expected to stand for the majority of the ride while others are unable to board due to the lack of room and must wait for follow on buses. Yet there are no plans to add capacity to this route by adding more buses or larger buses.

- 6) Procurement of articulated buses cannot occur until a maintenance and storage facility can be built to accommodate such buses. Because of the lead time involved to put such a facility in place, we are puzzled why the TDP does not immediately prioritize plans to put such a facility in place.
- 7) While not specifically addressed by the TDP, a key part of the enhanced transportation system promised for the Pike Corridor was greatly upgraded transit stations, incorporating level-boarding, offboard fare collection and multiple alighting/disembarking points and other features to speed and promote ridership. We understand these enhancements are separately under consideration as part of the CIP process; but we are deeply troubled by reports that the Board may be backing away from its commitment to these enhanced transit stations even though they are far more durable than current stops and will reduce County expenditures over their anticipated lifespan while providing a better transit experience to riders and improving the aesthetics of the Pike.

In summary, the 2017-2026 TDP Draft falls far short of fulfilling the transit needs of Columbia Pike and its residents today, let alone providing a framework for future growth and consequent increased transit demand. Overall, the plan is geared towards moving people through the Pike corridor and ignores the needs of the burgeoning Pike community for everyday needs. The Plan as written is inadequate for the Pike today; it falls far short of the needs of the Pike of the future. Significant changes must be made if we are to receive the quantity and quality of service that is demanded by—*and indeed promised to*—the Pike community.

The County Board should make an unambiguous statement in the Transit Development Plan that the county is committed to implementing bus capacity and quality improvements as soon as possible through purchase and deployment of new larger premium vehicles of the type, size and quality described in the TSM-2 Articulated Bus build alternative already specified and studied by the county in the streetcar alternatives analysis. This effort must include obtaining sufficient maintenance and storage facilities inside or outside of Arlington County. The first priority of this effort should look to provide larger vehicles on the MetroBus 16Y route to address current overcrowding.

We ask that you uphold to your prior statements and instruct staff to honor the commitment to Pike transit by addressing the noted deficiencies and proposed changes to the Plan in order to achieve the Pike transit system we have all worked diligently to achieve.

Sincerely,

[signatories on p 3]

/s/

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