



Minutes

PROJECT: Richmond Highway BRT Executive Committee Meeting #1

DATE & TIME: September 6, 2017; 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM

LOCATION: Fairfax County Government Center, Room #7

Sharon Bulova, Chairman, Board of Supervisors
Jeff McKay, Supervisor -- Lee
Daniel Storck, Supervisor – Mt. Vernon
Vanessa Aguayo, FCDOT
Tom Biesiadny, FCDOT
Thomas Burke, FCDOT
Barbara Byron, OCR
Helen Cuervo, VDOT
Paul Davis, BOS
Jennifer DeBruhl, DRPT
Noelle Dominguez, FCDOT
Tom Fahrney, FCDOT
Taylor Holland, BOS
Ray Johnson, FCDOT
Ron Kirkpatrick, DPW

Patti McCay, COA
Anna Nissinen, FCDOT
Robert Pikora, FCDOT
Brent Riddle, FCDOT
Fred Selden, FCDPZ
Beth Teare, COA
Eric Teitelman, FCDOT
Meghan Van Dam, FCDPZ
Jose Bustamante, Richmond Highway BRT Partners
Lara Hegler, Richmond Highway BRT Partners
Karen Kahl, Richmond Highway BRT Partners
Henry Kay, Richmond Highway BRT Partners

Chairman Bulova opened the meeting with introductions.

Tom Biesiadny provided an overview of the project and today's meeting agenda.

Vanessa Aguayo reviewed current and completed projects in the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project corridor that inform our current work, including DRPT's Multimodal Alternatives Analysis, the Embark Comprehensive Plan amendment, the FHWA project from Telegraph Road to Mt. Vernon Highway, and the VDOT improvements from Mt. Vernon Highway to Napper Road. Vanessa reviewed existing Metro and Connector bus service in the corridor.

Vanessa discussed the characteristics of BRT generally, including dedicated running ways, special buses, stations, performance-focused service design and operations, advanced rider information technology, and branding. BRT includes either dedicated running ways or mixed traffic operation. Vehicles can be larger than standard transit buses, and include low floor boarding, multiple doors on both sides, and advanced propulsion. Stations include platforms for level boarding, canopies to provide shelters for passengers, bus arrival information, and off board fare collection. Technology options include traffic signal priority, wi-fi, guidance systems, and GPS. BRT is different from local bus service in that it does not have frequent stops or circulate



in neighborhoods, and running ways, signal priority, and queue jumps reduce delays from congestion. Examples include Metroway in Alexandria, the Health Line in Cleveland, and the Silver Line in Boston.

Vanessa described the BRT project in more detail, including a phase from Huntington to Hybla Valley and a second phase to Ft. Belvoir. There are nine potential stations. 2017 activities include development of a conceptual horizontal alignment, station locations and layouts, traffic analysis, operations planning, and coordination with FTA. In spring 2018, environmental documentation and preliminary engineering will be underway. The schedule calls for construction of Phase I to be complete in late 2026 and Phase II to be complete in late 2028.

Vanessa described the project governance structure which includes the BRT Executive Committee, a Technical Committee, and a variety of technical working groups. FCDOT is hoping the Executive Committee can meet on a quarterly basis. A Commuter Advisory Group (CAG) will function as advisors to the BRT Technical Committee. The existing Embark Advisory Group will be broadened to meet FTA standards for open public involvement. The CAG will be formed and meet for the first time in spring 2018 prior to a public meeting.

Tom Biesiadny said that the project is starting with a cost estimate of \$524M prepared as part of the DRPT study. The cost includes the transitway, stations, a maintenance facility, signals, right of way, buses, professional services, and contingencies. Some additional costs are included in on-going VDOT projects. The project team will review and update the estimate. At a minimum, the 2015 dollars will be inflated to be consistent with the schedule.

Tom reviewed currently available funding. \$324M is need for Phase I. \$36M comprised of federal CMAQ funds, a DRPT grant, and county funds is “in the bank.” To close the gap, the project team will be evaluating funding from Smart Scale, NVTa, and the FTA New Starts Program. There is adequate funding to continue with planning and preliminary engineering.

Jose Bustamante reviewed FTA processes and requirements. The program has evolved over many years and many federal authorization bills, and is currently authorized. As a fixed guideway BRT project over \$300M, the project will qualify for New Starts funds. Jose noted all currently-funded BRT projects are have a lower cost estimate and are therefore funded through the Small Starts Program.

Jose said the New Starts program is discretionary, and funds are awarded based on a competitive application process. Projects start in the “Project Development” phased which includes environmental documentation. Project Development must be completed within two years. If FTA is confident in the cost estimate, schedule, and project benefits then the project moves to the “Engineering” phase in which sufficient design is completed to prepare a high confidence cost estimate and commit the non-New Starts funding. With a rating above “Medium,” the federal funds can be locked in and the project moves to the Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) phase. The Trump Administration has said it will only fund projects under existing FFGAs. Tom Biesiadny said the Purple Line in Maryland was recently funded.



Jose reviewed the FTA project for rating a project. The rating is 50% project justification and 50% financial commitment. Chairman Bulova asked if it was necessary to have the funding on hand. Jose said no, but the project sponsor needs to be able to show an ability to get the funding in place when it is needed. With regard to the project justification, Fairfax County is doing the right thing to focus on project-supportive land uses right now. Higher intensity land uses support higher ridership. Supervisor Storck characterized the ridership as “potential.” Tom Biesiadny said that is why it is important to get new land use approved and transmitted to COG so it can be part of the next forecast.

Jose said that funding for the New Starts program has been steady, and projects in the pipeline have increased. Congress is supportive, and added funding even though the Trump Administration recommended eliminating the program, but the good news is the Administration is requiring agencies to commit to specific schedule for environmental reviews and facilitating public-private partnerships. The bottom line for Fairfax County is to submit a project with a strong justification. To be prudent, the county should also consider funding plans that do not rely on New Starts. Supervisor Storck asked if federal funds are available for operations and maintenance. Jose said no. Supervisor Storck asked if a strong bond rating helps. Jose said yes, FTA looks at your ability to deliver what you promise. Supervisor McKay asked if there is a geographic consideration in the award of funds. Jose said no. Supervisor McKay asked what share of the project cost can be federal funds. Jose said that will 60% of the cost can be New Starts funds, 50% a good target.

Jose introduced the topic of project delivery which will be covered in depth at the September 27 meeting. The project team will look at the project’s unique characteristics, develop a discussion of delivery options, conduct a workshop, and present the findings in a white paper.

Jose said that while P3s appear compelling, it takes a lot of time and investment to get through the process. We are seeing a dramatic increase in design-build projects, and there are questions about whether the engineering community has the ability to handle the risks. Supervisor Storck asked if the Maryland Purple Line P3 is a good model. Jose said the owner has the risk either way. Tom Biesiadny said that “P3” is a catch-all phrase that can apply to many types of project delivery. Eric Teitelman said we would discuss the differences in more detail at the next meeting.

Henry Kay introduced the topic of branding which will be discussed in detail at the next meeting. Eric Teitelman said we need to establish a new identity apart from Embark, and the new brand will be used during the project development process as well as when the service is in operation. Supervisor McKay said it is important early on to establish that BRT as different from typical bus service. This will make it easier to build community support. Supervisor Storck said that Metroway in Alexandria is not a good precedent because it is too limited and construction was disruptive. He suggested the project team development other examples of successful projects. Supervisor McKay said this will be the first corridor in the county, so it is important to continue the county tradition of doing it right.



Chairman Bulova asked if the team will come up with options for naming the service. Tom Biesiadny said that would be part of the process we will describe at the next meeting. Lara Hegler said the work program includes both focus groups and public input. Supervisor McKay said it is important to offer some options and take an informal vote.

Supervisor McKay said he is a frequent REX rider, and the community has a sense of ownership.

Helen Cuervo asked if naming the service would be part of a P3. Jose said no.

Jennifer DeBruhl said that there a project under construction in Richmond, and the community was very engaged in the branding process. There are many parallels to this projects, and Jennifer would be able to organize an information exchange. Supervisor Storck asked if the Richmond project received New Starts funding. Jennifer said no, it received a large TIGER grant.

Supervisor Storck noted that two segments of the corridor will soon be ready for BRT. He asked if additional right of way is needed. Eric Teitelman said minimal additional right of way is needed.

Supervisor Storck asked if additional funding now would expedite the project. Tom Biesiadny said this would be considered as part of the project delivery decision. The schedule developed by DRPT was neutral about the delivery method, so there may an opportunity to accelerate the schedule but this could have cost and risk implications.

Supervisor McKa asked if VDOT would assist with right of way acquisition. Tom Biesiadny said yes.

Supervisor McKay said it sounded like it was critical that the comprehensive plan amendment be adopted. Tom Biesiadny said the March 2018 timeframe was important.

Chairman Bulova said the project could be delayed by opposition, so the team should make sure the community is supportive. Supervisor McKay said opposition will not be due to lack of staff support. The project has been well studied.

Barbara Byron said there is an open house on Saturday, September 16, and she is hoping for broad participation.

Chairman Bulova adjourned the meeting at 1:55 PM.