

# *City of Alexandria, Virginia*

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 27, 2008

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 46: THE GRIDLOCK REDUCTION INTERVENTION PROGRAM (GRIP)

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In FY 2001, City Council established a Gridlock Reduction Intervention Program (GRIP). The purpose of GRIP is to ease evening rush hour traffic and reduce congestion at up to 10 heavily traveled intersections in Alexandria. The GRIP program has had a positive, yet limited, impact on traffic flow. The GRIP program helps keep key intersections open during the evening rush hour, and in particular clearly keeps east-west traffic flows in the City (which are of high value in particular to City residents as well as those who work in the City) working better than if the GRIP program did not exist. Alexandria is subject to major traffic backups caused by inclement weather, incidents, or accidents on or near the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, Route 1, and the Capital Beltway. Such incidents frequently cause gridlock on City streets during the evening rush hour. The GRIP program provides a unique level of service in this region.

Some area jurisdictions including Washington, DC and Fairfax City address traffic gridlock in intersections with clear signage and painted outlines that visually remind drivers not to encroach into an intersection or “block the box.” This approach was considered for Alexandria when gridlock programs were considered six years ago. Instead the City chose to try the GRIP program to address evening gridlock.

GRIP originally was staffed with a combination of police officers who worked on an overtime basis for 3.5 hours each day, and senior parking enforcement officers who were required to handle GRIP posts as part of their normal duties. The program cost at that time was approximately \$100,000 in overtime, plus \$230,000 for five Parking Enforcement Officer III positions and two sedans.

By FY 2004, the Police Department had lost four of its five senior parking enforcement officers, who either resigned or took voluntary demotions so they did not have to work the GRIP details on duty. The parking enforcement officers expressed their view that GRIP was unpleasant, hazardous duty, and they objected to working GRIP on duty while police officers were being paid overtime. Because they lack full enforcement powers, the parking enforcement officers were ignored or disobeyed by many drivers.

After attempting to fill the vacant parking enforcement positions for nearly two years, the Police Department requested and the former City Manager agreed to eliminate 4 senior parking enforcement officer positions at a savings of \$200,000. The Police Department applied \$150,000 to its FY 2006 budgetary reduction plan, and added \$50,000 of the savings to its overtime budget to continue the GRIP program on an overtime basis.

There is a core group of police officers and a few parking enforcement officers who regularly work GRIP traffic posts on overtime. The 10 GRIP posts are rarely all staffed, because the detail is voluntary. Employees sign up each week to work at a specified location for overtime pay. Through FY 2006, the Police Department was able to operate the GRIP program with \$150,000 in budgeted overtime funds.

The recommendation not to fund the GRIP program in the base budget but to place the GRIP program in the alternative budget is based on several considerations. To achieve the substantial budget reductions required for FY 2009, staff examined all aspects of the Police Department and selected reductions that, while undoubtedly unpopular, preserve the core missions of public safety – to respond to citizen calls, protect persons and property, and investigate crimes. The GRIP program is not a core service of the Police Department, but does have value to the community, hence its placement in the Alternative Budget.

The cost of the GRIP program is nearly \$1,000 per day if five police officers work, and \$1,300 per day if seven positions are staffed. Each hour of an experienced police officer's overtime costs \$53.00 in FY 2008. To continue the full GRIP program would require an annual overtime budget of \$200,000, assuming that 7 GRIP posts are staffed each weekday with 5 police officers and 2 parking enforcement officers. During FY 2008, Chief Baker has reduced the number of GRIP posts staffed on a rotating basis, to remain within his \$150,000 budget.

If City Council decides to continue the GRIP program, the amount of \$150,000 in Police overtime costs included in the FY 2009 Alternative budget would need to be funded.

Staff:

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