

# City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 11, 2012

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #33: BUS STOP ANNUNCIATORS FOR DASH BUSES

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This memorandum responds to a request by City Council for information regarding the costs associated with the purchase and installation of automated annunciators on DASH buses.

Currently, Alexandria Transit Company (ATC) operates 67 buses in fixed route service in the City of Alexandria. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires public transit providers to announce transfer points, major intersections and destination points at intervals along a bus route such that individuals with visual impairments or other disabilities can be oriented to their location. Transit systems across the country have met this requirement by either providing manual driver announcements, as is the case with DASH and the Fairfax Connector, or through automated announcement systems (annunciators), such as those deployed on regional Metrobuses. Although manual driver announcements meet ADA guidelines, they are subject to human error and are not as consistent as automated announcement systems. There are times when the operator is occupied with fare collection, boarding assistance, passenger questions, and other responsibilities. At major transfer locations, which are generally high-traffic areas, the external announcements may not be heard due to traffic or crowd noises. Although it meets the ADA requirements, making timely stop announcements when preoccupied with other responsibilities can be challenging for the operator.

An automated announcement system provides the most consistent solution, requiring minimal operator intervention and allowing the bus operator to focus attention on the safe progress of the bus, fare collection and customer service.

The ATC Board of Directors approved adding the automated stop annunciator system on all future new bus purchases at their March 29, 2012 Board meeting. For the current planned ten-bus order, the total cost for annunciators would be approximately \$80,000 or \$8,000 per bus. Additionally, there would be a one-time cost of \$10,000 for location mapping, set-up, and training. It is also recommended that a three-year extended warranty on the hardware equipment be purchased at a cost of \$340 per bus. This cost of \$93,400 for the stop annunciators has now been added to the ten-bus order to be made this spring. This order totals \$6.438 million and is planned for consideration by City Council as part of the at the April 24, 2012 monthly capital

allocation report with funding from transportation related funding sources. Should the automated stop annunciator system be desired as standard equipment on new bus purchases, costs of adding the new system will be part of the base cost of each new bus order.

The ATC Board is only considering the purchase of the annunciator system on new bus orders and not as a retrofit on older buses. ATC did a test with the installation of the annunciators on four older buses several years ago which concluded that an aftermarket installation on older equipment had both operational reliability issues and equipment location problems for the mounting of the digital display board.

ATTACHMENT #1: Letter from Chet Avery

STAFF:        Laura Triggs, Acting Chief Financial Officer  
                  Sandy Modell, CEO/General Manager, Alexandria Transit (DASH)  
                  Morgan Routt, Acting Budget Director  
                  Kendel Taylor, Assistant Budget Director

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Friday, March 23, 2012

Paul Abramson, Chair  
Alexandria Transit Company Board  
3000 Business Drive  
William Hurd Transit Facility  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Mr. Abramson:

In cooperation with the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities (ACPD) and its Transportation Committee, I am writing to request that the Alexandria Transit Company Board (ATCB) require that the purchase of all future buses, beginning with the six to twelve new buses considered for procurement, be equipped with enunciators that will enable these buses in the DASH fleet to be accessible to passengers with vision, learning, and other disabilities while reducing the routine information demands on already overtaxed drivers.

It is time that the DASH fleet, which is accessible for persons with mobility disabilities, catches up with MetroBus and other bus and transit systems in this area and throughout the nation by installing enunciators that can routinely audibly announce stops, highlight points of interest to the public, and be used to inform passengers of DASH route changes and priority announcements.

DASH should be commended for its previous efforts to pilot earlier problem prone enunciator systems at a time when enunciator devices were not fully developed and the support and technical assistance system and appropriate wiring was not developed to help install these enunciators in the bus fleet our transit system had at that time. This noble trial effort posed major problems for an already overstretched small bus system which tried to install the equipment without the expertise to deal with the many adjustments required by these add-on audible systems built without supportive electronic wiring in older DASH buses.

Now new enunciators are available at a small cost in terms of the overall cost of buses that are marketed and routinely purchased by transit companies. These enunciators are time tested and reliable offering a wide range of features and are marketed and purchased for bus transit systems for use to enhance the accessibility goals, needs, convenience, and safety performance of fleets like the DASH system.

The benefits of enunciators that are installed as a part of the overall system in new buses will not only improve the consistency and reliability of stops and other announcements, but will also enable drivers to redirect their professional responsibilities to carry out other critical driving safety and customer service functions. The enunciators will:

- Reduce the anxiety and uncertainty of visually impaired travelers, a population which includes 40% of the passenger population over 65 years of age, by clearly and uniformly announcing destinations and stops;

- Inform passengers with limited English speaking ability, residents unfamiliar with routes, and visitors with names of stops, as well as provide persons with attention or mental distractibility problems of approaching stops and changing points;
- Inform all passengers at times of limited visibility due to rain, snow, fog, or darkness audibly signify and verify the approach of stops and transfer points;
- Allow people to focus on reading, working on devices, and resting a chance to stay focused without having to use their vision to constantly check the route's progress to their stop; and
- Establish a climate of convenience, safety, and reliability of the trips taken by all DASH passengers while enhancing the accessibility and remove many uncertainties of passengers with visual, mental, and other disabilities.

If the DASH manager and staff would like to call on us for further information or support, the Transportation Committee of the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities and I will be pleased to provide any needed assistance.

In closing, those of us in Alexandria interested in advancing the accessibility of the City's transit services commend you for your past efforts for making DASH vehicles accessible and for taking positive action to add enunciator devices to the systemic accessibility features on the new buses you plan to purchase.

Sincerely,

Chet Avery

cc: Sandy Modell, CEO / General Manager, Alexandria Transit Company (DASH)  
Chuck Benagh, Chair, ACPD  
Doug Goist, Chair, ACPD Transportation Committee  
Richard J. Baier P.E., LEED AP, Director, T&ES  
Jim Maslanka, Special Projects Manager, T&ES  
Robert Fulk, Paratransit Coordinator, T&ES  
Mike Hatfield, ADA Program Manager, Office of Human Rights  
Jean Niebauer, Director, Office of Human Rights