

**BRAC-133 Advisory Group Meeting
September 7, 2011 Summary Minutes**

1. Chairman Geoff Goodale called roll. The following members were present: Jim Turkel, Paul McMahon, Jerry Dawson, Geoffrey Goodale, Julie Edelson, Ron Sturman, Dick Somers, Peter Carson, Owen Curtis, Nancy Jennings, Kathy Burns, Rick Tedesco, Judy Cooper, Gerry Chiaruttini, Margaret Byess and Don Buch.

Elected officials in attendance included: mayor Euille, Vice-Mayor Donley, Councilwoman Alicia Hughes, and Councilwoman Del Pepper. Staff present included: Acting City Manager Bruce Johnson, Rich Baier, Blaine Corle, Sharon Annear (Aide to Councilwoman Hughes), David Grover, Chris Gasper (Legislative Aide to Congressman Moran), VDOT officials Tom Fahrney & Robert Iosco, and Consultant Brennan Collier.

Citizens in attendance (who signed in) were: Barry Wilson, Tim Brown, Peggy Tadej, Shirley Downs, Debra Goldstein, Annabelle Fisher, Connie West, Robert Reeves, Dick Hobson, Ellie Ashford, Laura Miller, Barry Wilson, Ronald Holder, Carolyn Griglione, Barry C. Francis, and Elizabeth McKeely.

2. Tom Fahrney provided a recap of transportation studies to date in and around the Mark Center. A study requested by the City to determine whether direct access to the Mark Center was feasible was completed in 2009 and determined only one out of 7 overall entries provided a feasible option and solved operational problems associated with Mark Center development. Due to negative comments generated because the only feasible option went through the northern border of the Winkler Nature Preserve, that option, as well as the other 6, was eliminated by Secretary Sean Connaughton. At this time Alternative F came into play as part of further analysis. The State set aside \$80 million EXCLUSIVELY for funding the construction of an HOV/Transit Ramp from the I-395 HOV lane to the 3rd level of the Seminary Overpass. Tom Fahrney noted that, if that ramp is NOT constructed, the funds will be withdrawn and applied to another project in the Commonwealth.
3. Robert Iosco provided an overview of the VDOT environmental process. The essence of the project is to determine the range of issues needed to address in an Environmental Assessment (EA). The EA will be subject to extensive review and approval by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) before it is made available for public viewing. Based on the current schedule, the scoping comments from public agencies will be available around mid-November; the public hearing is currently scheduled for December 15th and the EA must be available to public for a minimum of 15 days prior to the hearing to give ample opportunity for review of the EA, and to provide information and responses. The public hearing begins the 30 day public comment period. EA will be revised based on information collected and re-submitted to FHWA for approval perhaps around late winter or early spring 2012.

4. **Advisory group Comments –**

Don Buch: I would assume the Advisory Group would have an opportunity to assess the scoping letters and act as a group on it. **Rich Baier responded:** The BRAC Advisory Group will be acting as a sounding board for your comments and that will be attached to the City's response. Additional Comments and responses can be compiled and attached to Hot Lines verbatim.

Don Buch: Isn't the comment period up tomorrow? **Rich Baier responded:** Comments are due September 15th. Tonight's meeting will determine how you want to present your comments.

Unidentified member: Is there an effective way for the community to be involved in the scoping process? **Brennan Collier responded:** It's best to submit comments after VDOT has completed the environmental study rather than submitting them now because it's so early in the process they wouldn't have answers for you until after they've completed their study.

Dick Somers: Did all members of the Advisory Group receive the scoping letter for comments?

Rich Baier responded: They were not sent out to the Advisory Group. Public agencies should have each received a letter requesting comments.

Don Buch: Do we send our comments to Geoff Goodale or to the City? **Rich Baier responded:** Whichever would be best for you...

Don Buch: I would suggest that, hopefully, the City will have better resources to go through all the comments...it's a great deal of work for Geoff.

Unidentified member: Should we send individual comments to David and aggregated comments to you? **Rich Baier responded:** Any comments received would be grouped and then attached as the BRAC Advisory comments.

Dick Somers: I would like to get the letter to react to... **David Grover responded:** I've made a note to send it to you tomorrow. Staff will send it to all members.

Don Buch: When do you want the comments by? **Rich Baier responded:** By Monday close of business, Sept 3rd.

Peter Carson: This feels unnecessarily confusing. Why isn't there just a one or two page schedule for the Advisory Group? **Rich Baier responded:** Normally the public is involved much later in this process. What you're being asked to do is to comment earlier in the process than is typical, while all 3 of those alternatives are under analysis, what your responses are to them based on your level of expertise or your experiences that could affect the results of the Environmental Assessment.

Owen Curtis: It is still not clear what we (the public) are supposed to be doing or commenting on. Can we still comment on alternatives that are being studied? Can we comment on geographic scope? I presume you're also looking for our comments as to whether all the technical issues are covered that should be so that all the things relevant to the EA will be produced. **Robert Iosco responded:** We are looking for your input as to what range of issues we should look at in the EA. We also look to your input as to geographic scope and location. Alternatives are also still relevant to comment on.

Owen Curtis: It would be helpful if VDOT could send a list of categories of possible environmental impacts on the human and the natural environment. **Rich Baier responded:** We

have posted The Citizens Guide to the NEPA Process on the BRAC web site and it goes step by step through exactly what the NEPA process is and explains the different types of studies we are doing.

Unidentified member: It still seems very vague about what it is we can comment on and what we can't. No one wants to waste time on irrelevant comments. **Brennan Collier responded:** People who live in this area can provide comments and insights on what your community and personal uses of this facility are now and what they might be in future. Is this plan something that you could see as part of your future plans for this community? What pieces of information and insights do you or your organizations have pertaining to uses for this facility or possible impacts on the environment? Do you know of a particular species that lives there that may be impacted no one else might think of special resources?

Unidentified member: There were 3 alternatives presented but it was indicated that VDOT would entertain other alternatives as a comment. **Robert Iosco responded:** Yes, that would be appropriate and hopefully you'll provide reason basis for making that comment. Reference Citizen's Guide, pg. 17 and pg. 27 for guidelines in drafting comments and reasons.

Unidentified member: Did VDOT send the City something that we might also see? **David Grover responded:** No letter was sent with observations, but the City archeologist is aware of cultural resources along that stream valley in the form of several Native American archeological sites.

Unidentified member: What evaluation tools does VDOT use. How do you evaluate what we bring to the table? **Rich Baier responded:** The purpose of submitting comments now is that we want to lay everything out so that VDOT, at this early stage, is not aware of all of the potential issues. We were concerned, when we heard from the BRAC Advisory Group, that the December timeframe for reviewing the EA will be too late to make changes so we want to get these broad comments out there so they can be considered now. **Robert Iosco also responded:** To follow up on tools we use, for example, for protecting water resources, we have professional wet delineators that delineate wetlands in project areas. Additional evaluation tools as we go along will be various technical studies which you can do reality Checks on.

Kathy Burns: I have questions regarding Mr. Iosco's presentation. First, your timetable talks about the Public Hearing after there's an approval but normally you would have the Public Hearing and then you would approve it. Second, you referred to public availability...please clarify. Availability of what?

Brennan Collier responded: In terms of availability, once EA is prepared, it is submitted to the FHWA and they approve (or not) it to be posted on the web site for the public to read.

Kathy Burns: Regarding your comment on how early this is in process this is reparation; we are trying to correct some problems that wouldn't have been here if there had been community input in the very beginning. **Brennan Collier responded:** I agree. Getting all the comments on the table now will prevent surprises from coming up in the end. We're trying to capture all comments now and VDOT can sort through those and determine which ones are relevant and

applicable and can be solved by this project. **Unidentified Member:** Are you a scientist?

Response: I'm an environmental scientist by degree, yes.

Don Buch: This process is addressing the result; this isn't addressing the cause. When these guys get there now on 395, you can't get off because there's no place to go due to gridlock. So the solution is to add another lane of traffic and pour more people into the gridlock? I don't understand that. **Tom Fahrney responded:** We conducted a short term study/traffic analysis and we determined that short term improvements would mitigate most of the issues surrounding the intersection at Mark Center. None of the improvements that were identified would have an impact on bad level of service and delays found through the studies on southbound 395 but all of this will be included in the form of another traffic study as part of this EA. So let's wait and see what the results are before assuming it'll make things worse.

Owen Curtis: The theory behind this ramp is that people who are bound for employment will have an opportunity to get out of their single occupant vehicles and to other connections that allow them to use transit services including HOV's and public transit. In my opinion the ramp WILL reduce the amount of traffic, the question is will the rest of the congestion be alleviated? But Tom is correct...we have to analyze it to see. **Tom Fahrney responded:** BRTC is not providing bus services to Marc Center from Prince William County because they don't have an easy on and off ramp at Seminary road.

Don Buch: If you look at the TMP, if 40% of the 1,280 BRAC employees living south of the beltway take transit you're still left with about 800 people....this would be several hundred cars a day.

Dick Somers: As long as you have 3,700 parking spots, people will park there.

5.) Public Comments –

Lynn Bostain of Seminary West asked whether the ramp could change such as termination in a different place or be higher or lower, or could the \$80 million be used for a different project?

Tom Fahrney responded: There are 3 alternatives identified, all terminating at Seminary Road. The \$80,000,000 will only be applied to one of those alternatives.

David Cavanaugh of Seminary Ridge asks: 1.) Does VDOT plan to conduct traffic analysis on nearby intersections that might be impacted by potential cut through traffic? 2.) Considering the steep grade the ramp would have of the 3rd level, will the environmental assessment include mitigation of storm water into existing, ponds, basins etc. 3.) What traffic management techniques will be evaluated in the EA to deter East bound traffic during a.m. hours on the ramp onto Seminary or west bound traffic onto Seminar using the ramp during p.m. hours. 4.) If anticipated noise levels exceed acceptable levels, will the EA explore various measures to mitigate those noise levels?

Tom Fahrney responded: Yes. Those intersections are included. As part of this effort we are also doing the preliminary design of the ramp. Preliminary plans should be available by

December; however it's doubtful we'll have the level of detail in terms of drainage. We know where the water is going but don't fully know how much water will impact the area.

Determining that will be part of the design process. In this EA we're looking at the impact of the traffic that the ramp will handle. We are not analyzing traffic to land management techniques. It's a very good comment and if you have ideas how or what techniques we could use it's very important for us to understand what you have in mind.

Robert Iosco responds: Yes, the noise study will address if there's an impact identified, what the possibilities are for mitigation for the impact.

Barry Wilson of Fairfax County had 3 major points/concerns: 1.) By predefining the 3 options you limit and almost pre-determine the solution. 2) We think that there has not been enough emphasis on the lack of public involvement and lack of consideration of the broader impacts of this approach. 3) At minimum, include also the 295/236 interchange for consideration. Make sure public is aware of pros and cons. We think it should be looked at more deeply and that includes the southbound exit off of 395 off of Quantrell.

Annabelle Fischer of Southern Towers: When talking about the 3 options please clarify the left and right turns onto Seminary.

Tom Fahrney responded: City requested to consider Alternative F. The City asked VDOT to look at prohibiting right turns from the ramp to eastbound Seminary in the morning.

Debra Goldstein of KMS Townhomes: Have they considered or discussed eliminating the call center in order to eliminate some of the cut through traffic?

Tom Fahrney responded: It's not part of this assessment.

Carolyn Grigione: How much traffic do you think this ramp will take off the road?

Tom Fahrney responded: We won't know yet because we haven't done the traffic studies. Once the EA comes out and is reviewed we'll be able to determine if it takes traffic off the road.

Shirley Downs: Is there anything very obvious that would prevent approval of a right turn off an HOV ramp at this time or is it actually being considered?

Tom Fahrney responded: It's definitely being considered. We wouldn't be studying it if it wasn't being considered. Whether or not the Federal Highway will have concerns with us restricting the right....we can't discuss this until we have a draft of the EA.

Carol James asked for a little history of how the ramp concept design came into being and clarification on the limited right/left turns onto Seminary.

Lee Shodan or Jill of KMS TOWNHOUSES Provided a statement with 63 signatures which brought up the following concerns. 1.) The ramp would only address the south and east, west and north also would be impacted and ALL of this needs to be looked at. They feel mass transit could be an alternative and asked have you ever asked the Feds if they would give you the money for mass transit?

Tom Fahrney responded: Funding for all projects is programmed through VDOTS 6 year program which is updated every year. The public hearing for that 6 year program was back in May and that would have been the time to pursue money for transit alternative.

Lee Shodan or Jill2.) Affected communities are concerned that the current downtrend in property values its directly related to the BRAC project and, once trees are cut down and a huge sound barrier that looks like a prison is in place, property values will plunge further down permanently. The affected communities want to know EXACTLY what you are planning and what it would mean to communities from THEIR point of view. They want this information posted on multi-media sites...not just your web site and the cities web site...so the communities know EXACTLY what they'll have to deal with. 3.) And finally, they'd like BRAC to do an analysis on the impact this project will have on the value of our homes and property and on the value of the taxes going into the City.

Unidentified person: Federal Law in 2007 established setback requirements for a DOD installation. Does the ramp meet those setback requirements? Second, what type of safety analysis will be in place in the event of a bombing or something?

Response: It does meet the setback requirements where the ramp will be by a longshot. They have not looked at the effect of what a blast might have on the ramp as of yet.

Angeline Raffey: Is it a foregone conclusion that if the ramp goes up there's no option to save any of the green space?

Robert Iosco responded: We will determine that as part of the design. If northbound lanes will have to shift to accommodate the ramp that MAY have an impact on the trees. We don't have that information yet but will be able to provide it later.

Angeline Raffey: Are there any negative impacts on emergency vehicle access with the ramp?

Tom Fahrney responded: It could be an issue with restricting the right turn option. We expect to hear from the hospital providers and will take that into account if they feel it's an issue.

Diane Costello: I am concerned that the limited study area doesn't go far enough west. Also, where is the money going to come from that will be needed to widen streets to accommodate additional traffic due to the new change in traffic patterns... specifically westbound on Seminary past Beauregard.

Response: *Could not make out response*

Don Buch : Will the traffic generated by the HOT lanes that be dumping just south of Duke with the new pattern be taken into consideration in your model?

Tom Fahrney responded: Yes. HOT lanes are in the CLRP (Constrained Long Range Plan) and will be included in the model.

Anabelle Fischer: Are you looking at the regional aspect of traffic because it's my understanding, with regards to the transportation practice of Alexandria, Arlington has dropped out, Fairfax has dropped out.

Tom Fahrney responded: Any jurisdiction is allowed to participate in this environmental assessment and, in fact, Fairfax County is an active participant and Arlington is as well.

Anabelle Fischer: Will Arlington tax payers be helping with the cost of this project or will Alexandria tax payers have to shoulder the cost?

Rich Baier responded: Within the City, road projects are funded with City dollars; The ramp is a VDOT project funded with State dollars; and, the Short & Mid-term Improvements by \$20,000,000 in DOD funds.

- 6) Next steps: Scoping comments are due by Monday, Sept. 12th. Submit to David.Grover@alexandriava.gov
- 7) Next Meeting scheduled for Sept. 21, 2011 at Beatley Library and please note the Dash Express Inaugural Ceremony initially scheduled for Sept. 15th is being rescheduled.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:00 PM