

**CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION**

**c/o Department of Environmental Services  
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705  
Arlington, VA 22201**

July 27 2023

Paul Mounier  
Project Manager  
Department of Environmental Services, Transit Bureau  
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300  
Arlington, Virginia 22201

Re: Comments on the Arlington Transit Strategic Plan

Dear Mr. Mounier:

The Climate Change, Energy, and Environment Commission has reviewed the Arlington Transit Strategic Plan (ATSP) documents – Service Recommendations (Technical Memorandum 5) and associated Meeting Slides, proposed Route Changes, and a Gaps and Needs Assessment (Technical Memorandum 4) – and found them inadequate in addressing the climate crisis. While the ATSP is one of multiple planning elements incorporated in the Master Transportation Plan (MTP), it plays an important role in the planning of the future of Arlington transit for the next decade. A more creative and ambitious strategic plan is needed as a building block to align other elements of the outdated MTP with the County's climate goals.

C2E2 is dismayed that County staff are using the ATSP public engagement opportunities to press the argument that transitioning the ART fleet to battery-electric buses is inadvisable, requiring a 1.5 to 1 replacement rate even though the ART Zero Emission Feasibility study has not yet been published. Shifting the ART fleet to zero-emission buses is essential and should begin at the earliest opportunity. C2E2 considers current plans to delay purchasing battery electric buses to be unjustified, counter to our climate goals, and out of sync with other local transit agencies.

Although the proposed route adjustments, consolidations, and expanded hours may well offer better service for current ART riders, they do not offer a strategy in line with the goals for carbon neutrality that are set forth in the Arlington Community Energy Plan, adopted by the County Board in September, 2019. The best path to achieving

carbon neutrality for transportation, which accounts for approximately 40 percent of the County's greenhouse gas emissions, requires both transitioning automobile users to public transportation and electrification of all vehicles. The ATSP does not even include any estimates of increased ridership and associated reductions in single-occupancy vehicles.

Information in the Gaps and Needs Assessment highlights the underutilization of the ART bus system, with all routes below ridership targets and some with less than five riders per hour. To expand ridership and better meet the needs of Arlington commuters, C2E2 recommends that Arlington County:

- Integrate the transportation needs of Arlington's middle and high school students with ART operations, by adjusting routes to better meet student needs. Such an integrated approach could increase ART ridership, expand routes to serve more residents, and save money for APS by reducing the number of APS buses required.
- Expand the proposed microtransit pilot to replace the fixed bus routes north of Langston Boulevard. Ridership on those routes is very low and can best be served by microtransit, using smaller, electric buses that would provide transportation on demand instead of a fixed schedule. Microtransit programs are growing across the country, including two microtransit services in the region – Omniride Connect Microtransit and PGC Link. Their fares are equivalent to other bus services. Multiple companies are also available to set up and operate such programs. A pilot program could pave the way for a more flexible, convenient ART system that combines fixed routes along primary east-west and north-south arteries with on-demand service in less dense neighborhoods and off-peak hours.

C2E2 urges the County to adopt an ATSP that is more attuned to the transportation needs of all community members for convenient and affordable transit and can serve to reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles. By simultaneously providing convenient transit options and shifting to zero emission buses, Arlington will be better positioned to meet its climate goals.

Sincerely,



Joan McIntyre

Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission

CC: County Board members  
Mark Schwartz, County Manager  
Lynn Rivers, Transit Bureau Chief  
Clint Edwards, Manager Transit Services