



GO ALEX
ANNUAL
REPORT
FY 2020

City of Alexandria
Alexandria, VA



I. OVERVIEW

This report summarizes the activities for GO Alex, the City's dedicated Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program. TDM is the application of policies and strategies to increase the percentage of commuters using alternative transportation options (a key indicator in the FY 2017 to FY 2022 Alexandria Strategic Plan), while still ensuring residents, workers, and visitors can reach destinations within Alexandria. Through the use of incentives, education, and marketing, TDM promotes more efficient use of the existing transportation system by influencing the time, route, or mode selected for a given trip. TDM also increases travel choices, offering the opportunity to choose how, when, and by what mode people travel. Recent concerns about climate change have also highlighted the environmental benefits of TDM programs in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, as outlined in the City's Environmental Action Plan. In FY 2020, GO Alex continued to address major challenges while refining how it delivers its services. In FY 2021, GO Alex will continue to deliver value to the City by continuing current TDM programs and developing new programs to support pandemic/post-pandemic travel. With a dedicated staff of two full time employees and one part-time employee dedicated to employer outreach, the GO Alex team provides TDM assistance throughout the City and supports an established retail outlet in the GO Alex Mobile Store. By continuing to develop and expand this program, GO Alex will build on its success seen during the Metrorail shutdown.



Highlights from FY 2020 include:

- Build-out of an employer outreach program to reach out to work places and workers in Alexandria
- Support of a direct commuter assistance program, which assisted transit users through both Metrorail shutdown and the COVID-19 pandemic
- Management of over \$1.5 million in state and federal grants. This figure does not include \$2.7 million of state aid to manage the impacts of the Platform Improvement Project, where all four Metrorail stations closed between May 25 and September 8 of 2019.

II. ABOUT GO ALEX

GO Alex is the City's Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program. The program's mission statement is to promote, plan and support mobility options to benefit quality of life, economic development, and the experience of people travelling in Alexandria. City Council, through the FY2017-2022 Strategic Plan (Multimodal Transportation Chapter) and the upcoming Alexandria Mobility Plan, directs the City to enhance and promote multimodal transportation options for residents, visitors and workers. GO Alex promotes alternative transportation options such as transit, biking, walking, and teleworking through a robust outreach program, and with strong partnerships with DASH, WMATA (Metrorail and Metrobus), VRE, and many others. GO Alex is also working with other parts of Transportation and Environmental Services on redefining its role in the ongoing Alexandria Mobility Plan.

Specifically, GO Alex includes the following program areas:

- **Employer Outreach** - GO Alex works with employers in Alexandria to help their employees commute efficiently. Projects include workshops for employers and individual consultations
- **Residential Outreach** - This includes outreach to residents of Alexandria, letting them know about transportation options. Examples include events, outreach and coordination with apartment buildings, and direct ridematching services
- **Mobile Store**- This store provides direct commuter assistance wherever the commuters are. Projects include selling fare media and helping commuters plan trips



III. HIGHLIGHTS FOR FY 2020

PLATFORM IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Platform Improvement Project was a WMATA-led repair project on all four Metrorail stations in Alexandria between May 31 and September 8, 2019. During this time, which partially occurred in Fiscal Year 2020, Metrorail riders had to adjust both their schedules and habits to accommodate other modes. WMATA estimated that up to 17,000 commuters would be affected by the slowdown.

GO Alex responded in two ways. First, GO Alex coordinated overall mitigation efforts. Beginning in the prior autumn, GO Alex worked with affected resident and business groups and commuters, WMATA, and other stakeholders to collect ideas for mitigation strategies and develop plans to implement them. GO Alex secured a \$2.7 million grant from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation to pay for the mitigation effort.

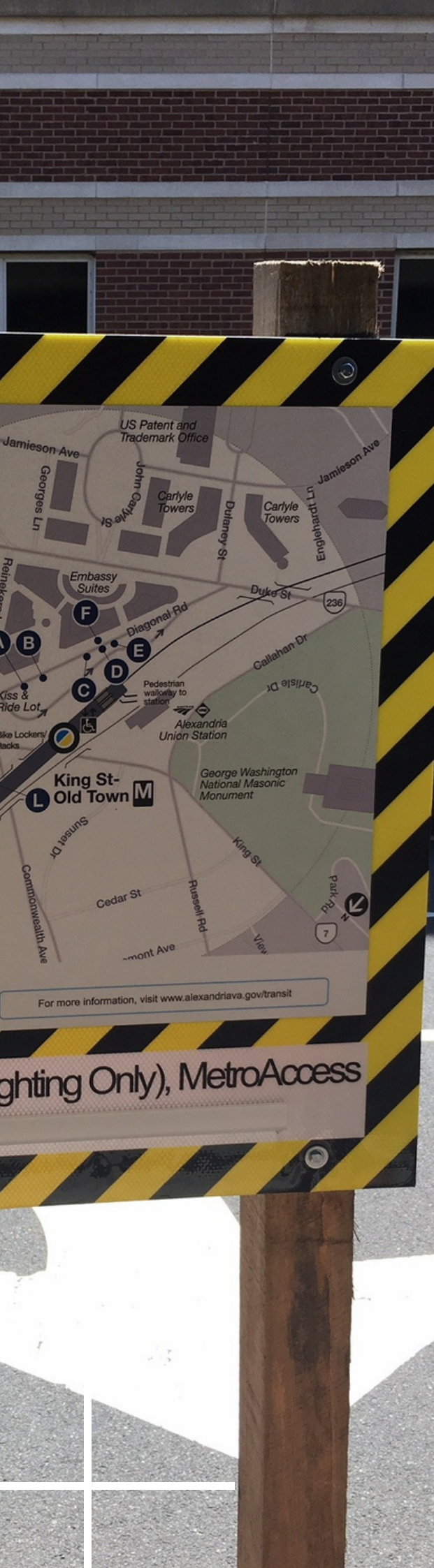
Second, GO Alex ramped up its TDM program. As discussed in more detail later in this report, the Mobile Store scaled up its operations for the Platform Improvement Program. Other programs were expanded and created as well, including enhanced outreach using a street team, and cash incentives to try new modes of commuting.





Highlights include the following:

- Close coordination with neighboring jurisdictions through the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, WMATA, the Metropolitan Washington Airport Authority, and other affected entities
- Worked with WMATA on replacement bus service, including an added express bus from Landmark Mall to Pentagon Metrorail station.
- Leveraged opportunity to allow and promote water transportation in the City. Assuaged resident concerns related to congestion from Water Taxi related traffic, and modified lease of the main water transportation provider, Potomac Riverboat Company, to begin service earlier than 9:30 a.m. Reimbursed seasonal passes for 422 commuters
- A massive bicycle and pedestrian promotion effort that included 144 wayfinding signs, minor trail improvements, and safe riding classes. This led to an increase in bicycling, with as high as a 93 percent increase in bike traffic on the Potomac Yard Trail compared with the same time the year prior
- Enhanced commuter assistance through the Mobile Store, including a temporary doubling of its staff and locations to help commuters assess their options



144

WAYFINDING SIGNS

installed for pedestrians and bicyclists during the WMATA shutdown in 2019

93%

INCREASE

in bike traffic on the Potomac Yard Trail compared to the same time the year prior

EMPLOYER OUTREACH

A key element of GO Alex is the Employer Outreach program. Industry best practice for TDM is to have a program to work with employers, as employers are an influential part of any work trip. Outreach efforts to City employers have been much more successful in FY20 over FY19, despite the onset of COVID, largely due to a change in service delivery. Prior to June 30, 2019, a contractor ran the City's employer outreach team. Despite managing the program since 2015, the contractor failed to produce results, introducing just 16 employers to GO Alex in FY19. This was not a cost-effective contract and fell short of City expectations and those of the Virginia Department of Transportation, which partially funded this effort. The City discontinued the contract in FY 2020 and transitioned the employer outreach program to a part time staff member. This has been a positive change both financially and in terms of overall effectiveness for the program.

Of the major highlights:

- GO Alex began regular communication and service to 133 employers in FY20, compared with just 16 employers in FY19
- Several new programs, including +50 and Water Taxi Reimbursement were created. These have limited advertising due to COVID, but are ready to go once the pandemic is over. Far more active engagement of employers, as shown with lunch and learns and increased open rate for newsletters. One employer established a TDM program in FY2020, with more imminent in 2020
- Socialization of new programs, such as +50 and Water Taxi reimbursement. Continued communication, including a monthly newsletter, where the open rate improved 8.2 percent
- Developed partnerships with several local and regional entities, including Visit Alexandria, the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, Alexandria Economic Development Partnership, and the Greater Washington Partnership. This resulted in such programs as workshops working directly with employers

RESIDENTIAL OUTREACH

As part of its mission, GO Alex engages with the community to generate interest in alternative forms of transportation. GO Alex conducts outreach to residents through events and direct communication.

At the core of this program is the Commuter Connections Ridematching system. Funded and maintained by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's Commuter Connection program, this program matches residents who are interested in carpools. In FY 2020, there were 45 residents who applied for rideshares, compared with 80 residents in FY 2019. Excluding the fourth quarter, where COVID made rideshares unsafe, there were 44 rideshare applications, compared with 27 for the same period prior.

Events

GO Alex has hosted or participated in several events to support its mission. Events hosted include the following:

Park(ing) Day - A day to temporarily convert an on-street parking space to a parklet on September 19. GO Alex coordinated with multiple city departments and private entities to create parklets, and created one of its own. GO Alex's parklet was focused on multimodal transportation

Operation Illumination - An annual giveaway of bike lights and reflective gear held in early November, just after the change from daylight savings time to standard time. GO Alex organized giveaways at places like the Holmes Run Trail, Four Mile Run Park, and the transit hub at Duke Street and Jordan Street, the busiest bus stop that is not a Metrorail station

A Commuter Fair to assist during the Platform Improvement Project - This fair was staged at the temporary park and ride at Landmark Mall, and let commuters know about their other alternatives. Similar commuter fairs were held with employers, though these were not necessarily focused on the Platform Improvement Project

Two pop-up events with GO Alex staff at the Bradlee Shopping Center and at the James M Duncan Branch library and several commuter fairs, helping to inform residents in a casual setting GO Alex planned several springtime events that were canceled due to the pandemic and associated public health emergency. Among those events included participation in the City's Earth Day event and the annual Bike to Work Day event in front of City Hall.

The Mobile Store

The Mobile Store stepped up to several extraordinary challenges this year. One was the Platform Improvement Project, which is discussed in greater detail in section III The other is their response to COVID. Despite drastically reduced volumes, the Mobile Store reoriented itself to assist essential workers. Beginning in the second week of March, when workplaces began closing down, the Mobile Store began its shift. Anecdotal reports suggested that the Mobile Store was so effective, Metrorail station managers directed their customers to store staff to answer questions. Among the actions that the Mobile Store took include the following:

- New signage that invites people to use Mobile Store services, including trip planning and sales assistance, from a social distance
- Proactively letting customers know about schedule changes, particularly as transit schedules rapidly evolved in the late third quarter and fourth quarter

Again, COVID impacted sales and interactions, with only 9 percent of FY20 interactions coming in Q4. Nevertheless, GO Alex assumed those interactions were more likely to be transit-dependent essential workers.





New Programs

GO Alex developed and began implementing two new programs in FY2020:

+50 Commuter Incentives

+50 is an incentive program that is designed to help commuters take transit options. The program gives a \$50 incentive for transit if a worker inside the City decides to enroll in SmartBenefits, a regional provider of commuter benefits that is part of WMATA.

Commuter benefits are an employee benefit that employers can provide and deduct the benefit from their corporate taxes. Employees can also contribute to their benefits on a pretax basis. Currently, the IRS allows contributions up to \$270 per person per month.

A barrier to the success of the SmartBenefits program is the lag between signing up for this benefit and actually receiving the benefit. SmartBenefits requires employees to choose by the 15th of the month whether to receive benefits for the following month. The \$50 incentive from +50 covers at least some of the cost of commuting while workers wait for their commuter benefits to take effect.

The program is cobranded with an identical program offered by Fairfax County Commuter Services and is funded and approved by a CMAQ/STBG grant provided through DRPT. However, DRPT has asked the City to suspend promotion of the program during COVID. Promotion is expected to resume once the state lifts its public health emergency.



Water Taxi Reimbursement

The Water Taxi reimbursement was a planned marketing campaign to encourage Alexandria workers and residents to buy an annual pass on the Potomac Riverboat Company's Water Taxi, priced at \$225. In turn, the City would reimburse pass holders \$100.

GO Alex designed a major marketing campaign and received approval from DRPT in February to implement this campaign. Go Alex planned to launch it at the same time as the Water Taxi's season, which begins in March (the Water Taxis are aluminum hulled and do not sail in winter because of potential ice damage). With COVID, DRPT asked the City to suspend marketing of the Water Taxi reimbursement, and the Water Taxi did suspend service in late March. Service resumed over Memorial Day weekend, but was ultimately canceled in September for the remainder of the year due to low ridership. As of writing, two persons received reimbursement, both of whom purchased passes before the pandemic. The Water Taxi does not plan to resume until March 2021.

Commuter Program Design

Employer outreach has also been active helping businesses plan commute strategies. In FY20, this centered on education, primarily in the form of “Lunch and Learns.” These lunch and learns, held quarterly, helped businesses do everything from learn about commuter benefits to actually designing an employer commute strategy. Among the topics covered included the following

- Educating employers on alternative commute options
- Hosting a workshop on employer commute strategy in January, in partnership with the Greater Washington Partnership. This workshop had 23 attendees who learned how to develop a commute strategy for their employees
- Educate about telework resources for employers in April, in partnership with the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce and Telework!VA, a state-run telework resources program. Attracted 19 attendees to the event.

LONG-RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

The City is updating the 2008 Transportation Master Plan, which will be called the Alexandria Mobility Plan (AMP) to emphasize the importance of moving people and goods throughout the City. This update will ensure that transportation planning in the City continues to serve the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors throughout the City as the region grows and as new technology changes the way we think about transportation and mobility.

GO Alex has assisted with the update, which will include a new chapter called Mobility Options centered around Transportation Demand Management solutions, by providing:

- Assistance with outreach, including focus groups on GO Alex held in February 2020. These led to the basis of recommendations for the Mobility Options chapter
- Technical support for the forthcoming Mobility Options chapter, including policies and recommendations

IV. FY21 GOALS AND PRIORITIES

GO Alex has several goals and priorities in FY21 to continue to support the City's goals for providing multimodal travel options, as briefly summarized below. (Note: This assumes an easing of any public health emergency by Spring 2021, which includes measures that increase health and safety (e.g, increased therapeutics or vaccine) and support from DRPT to restarts programming and events).

Resumption of Core Outreach Activities

For a health and safety reasons and budget constraints related to COVID-19, GO Alex was asked to stop various programs, including +50, Water Taxi Reimbursements, and several others. GO Alex also had to cancel several events due to stay at home orders or social distancing guidelines, including Bike to Work Day and Park(ing) Day. GO Alex will continue to freeze events and certain transportation programs at the direction of either the City or the DRPT. However, GO Alex is looking forward to a resumption of events and programs by Spring 2021 and is developing modifications where appropriate to address safety concerns.

Additionally, GO Alex will restart several programs slated for expansion in FY 2020, but were ultimately postponed. Such projects include +50, reimbursement of the Water Taxi, and enhanced partnership with employers.

GO Alex has plans for enhanced operations in FY21. Among those plans include the following:

- Developing and piloting a parking cash out program with one or more employers. This program, used in other areas to promote multimodal transportation, pays workers for using a multimodal option to get to work
- Restarting marketing efforts on Water Taxi reimbursement, +50, and other suspended programs
- Continuing to develop new content for employers, including new webinars, lunch and learns, and other forums for employers to interact
- Restore Capital Bikeshare annual membership to pre-pandemic levels, and create a stable glidepath for the return of trips
- Support new Capital Bikeshare stations that open within the system, including in the West End and Potomac Yard



Capital Bikeshare

A growth opportunity GO Alex has identified is Capital Bikeshare promotion. Alexandria is one of seven jurisdictions that co-own the Capital Bikeshare system. GO Alex sees a number of growth opportunities, including the following:

- Grow monthly purchases of annual memberships in Alexandria to pre-COVID baseline
- Expand growth with targeted outreach to key ridership groups. Such groups may include residents of multifamily housing developments, members returning to work, and other communities
- Support for planned expansion, particularly in the West End which is a new market for bikeshare
- Promote the Capital Bikeshare for All program, which is a program that offers \$5 annual memberships to recipients of certain federal benefits, including Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Support Transit

At the present time, transit systems across Virginia are losing revenue due to a lack of riders. GO Alex is working with transit systems and DRPT to support transit. At the moment, the program's messaging is to reinforce safety. GO Alex is currently participating with several transit agencies, including the DRPT, to reassure the public that transit is safe.

GO Alex will also support transit agencies once they are ready to attract riders. Currently, this is not projected to be until at least Spring 2021, when either further therapeutics or a vaccine can eliminate the public health threat.

Finally, GO Alex will be helping DASH with the service changes that will be made in July 2021 as a result of the Alexandria Transit Vision Plan. The Alexandria Transit Vision Plan will redesign the bus network, creating both opportunities and challenges for existing and future riders. GO Alex will support DASH with outreach related to these changes by helping DASH devise an outreach strategy, working with employer partners on education for their workforce, and assisting with opening day activations.

Reform to TMP Process

A Transportation Management Plan (TMP) is a site-specific plan of TDM strategies to encourage residents and employees to take public transportation, walk, bike or share a ride, as opposed to driving alone. The TMP is required by ordinance through the City's development review process, depending on the size of the development.

In May 1987, City Council approved the Transportation Management Plan Ordinance, Section 11-700. The Ordinance was updated in March 2014. Evaluation of the program is done through survey data, which makes measurement difficult. Furthermore, penalties for non-compliance are capped at \$5,000, and are a civil penalty. GO Alex will begin outreach to rewrite the ordinance in a way that meets the needs of developers and the community, while implementing measures to address congestion mitigation goals.

Support Long Range Planning

GO Alex continues to support the development of the Alexandria Mobility Plan (AMP). Based on the recommendations and guidance of the AMP, GO Alex will also develop a six year Commuter Assistance Plan (CAP) for FY 2023. DRPT requires GO Alex and other grantees to develop a CAP for all state and federal aid received after 2023.

GO Alex also supports other TDM programs and transportation entities in their planning, especially if it may involve impact to Alexandria commuters. Among those efforts include the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Commuter Connection, the I-66 Outside the Beltway Transportation Management Program, and the I-495 American Legion Bridge Transit/TDM Study.

V. HOW GO ALEX IS FUNDED

GO Alex is funded through a combination of state and federal grant funding, with a relatively small local contribution, as well as contributions from the development community.

TDM Operating Assistance Grant

For state funding, GO Alex uses a DRPT TDM Operating Assistance grant. This TDM Operating Assistance grant funds baseline activities, including two full time employees to manage the GO Alex program, and related support functions. In FY 2020, the City provided a local match of \$66,260 toward this grant and received \$265,040.

Rideshare Enhancements (CMAQ/STBG Grant)

The Rideshare Enhancements grant is a grant designed to fund the bulk of the City's TDM programming. In years past, this grant has been used to fund a "street team" (marketing team at City events) and paid advertising. The City is currently using FY2019 funds, valued at \$526,000 before using FY 2020 and 2021 funding (a total of \$1.2 million). While this grant was slated to fund many projects mentioned in this report, including +50 and a parking cash out program, the DRPT has asked us to stop spending on these projects due to COVID. Staff hopes to begin spending again until after 2021.

Alexandria Transit Store (CMAQ/STBG Grant)

The Alexandria Transit Store grant funds the Mobile Store. This grant is awarded once every three years. In FY 2021, this grant was \$600,000. Staff will spend the grant until the City receives the next installment, which is no earlier than July 1, 2023 (FY 2024).

VDOT Employer Outreach Grant

The City receives an annual grant from the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) that is used toward employer outreach. In FY 2020, the City received \$55,840 from VDOT. This grant is used to fund the employer outreach coordinator as a part-time position, as previously described.

TMP Contributions

As of FY2020, \$78,614 had been submitted to the City by various TMPs, including Tier 1 TMPs. In FY2021, staff anticipate at least \$9,500 to be collected, with additional voluntary contributions possible. This funding is required to be used to promote and create transportation alternatives to SOVs that meet the goals of the TMP ordinance and the Transportation Master Plan.

This may include supporting TDM programs that need more data on efficacy before applying for grant funding. Such programs may include a potential parking cash out and incentive programs, as well as event support.

FUNDING SOURCES

Grant	Match Level	FY20	FY21	Uses
TDM Operating Assistance	20%	\$ 331,300	\$ 117,388	Staff compensation for two people and general program funding. This number was less in FY21 because it DRPT funded only two quarters.
VDOT Employer Outreach (CMAQ)	0%	\$ 53,950	\$ 55,840	Compensation for Employer Outreach Coordinator
Rideshare Enhancements (CMAQ/STBG)	0%	\$ 600,000	\$ 600,000	Programs including +50, Water Taxi reimbursement, Capital Bikeshare marketing. Figure shown for FY20 is FY19 funding rolled over
Alexandria Transit Store (CMAQ/STBG)	0%	\$ 600,000		Funds Mobile Store and commuter assistance program.
TMP Developer Contributions	0%	\$ 78,614	~\$9,500	Promote and create transportation alternatives to SOVs that meet the goals of the TMP ordinance and the Transportation Master Plan. Authorized under Zoning ordinance Article IX, section 11-703