

# *The Old Town Crier*

**The Monthly Newsletter of the Old Town Civic Association, Inc.  
January Program and Notice of the Meeting**

**DATE:** Wednesday, January 14, 2009  
**TIME:** 7:00 p.m., Socializing with Neighbors; 7:30 p.m., Program  
**LOCATION:** The Lyceum, 201 South Washington Street

## *PROGRAM AGENDA*

- 1) ANNOUNCEMENTS
- 2) POLICE REPORT
- 3) MOTOR COACH TASK FORCE RECCOMENDATIONS
  1. *Presentation by City Staff*
  2. *Question and answer session*
  3. *Membership Discussion*

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Alas, it is time to put on our thinking caps again after what we hope was a joyous holiday season. This meeting is your opportunity to have a say in the proposal that the Ad Hoc Motorcoach Committee is sending to the City Council. We have invited the Transportation Department City Staff to describe what the task force is proposing. A question and answer period with Staff will be followed by a general discussion with membership that will establish our position on this matter.

Before reviewing the salient points, we need to recap what the membership said at the October meeting (The write up that was handed to the task force is included in the Crier as is an analysis and the adopted “Statement of Constraint”).

### **OTCA Concerns**

“Idling and crawling on residential streets, General idling, too many buses, routes, pollution, pedestrian safety, noise and vibration from the buses, discharging in non designated areas, Buses too big or too tall, rude drivers, trash being dumped and signage.”

### **OTCA Solutions**

Education, Enforcement, Encourage walking, Limit bus sizes, Limit number of buses and require permits to drive in Old Town Alexandria.

The task force report has the underlying premise that the City of Alexandria does not have the authority to regulate the motorcoaches. In fact, if the City wishes to acquire this authority, they must go to the General Assembly in Richmond. The final proposal will be dependent on the details that are to be worked out by a 5-member permanent motorcoach committee that the City Council is urged to create.

The following are some of the Ad Hoc Motorcoach Committee proposals, with our comments:

- ***The Ad Hoc Motorcoach Committee suggests a voluntary permitting scheme run under the auspices of the City Government. Drop off buses would call in/use internet and get a permit to use a designated route to follow on a voluntary basis.***
  - How could the City get dedicated routes if they lack the regulatory authority? The City hopes to do this by relying on the voluntary cooperation of the motorcoach industry. As it turns out, many of the “dedicated drops off buses” prefer to have a complete route laid out for them. However, many of the drive-through buses do not have an incentive to comply; they have quite the opposite.
  - Ideally, this would ensure a limitation on buses for any given street at any given time. Off course, this only works if there are numerous streets from which to choose. The drive-through would be encouraged to stay on either Washington Street or Route 1, but the City would not have any regulatory authority to prevent would- be stragglers. However, assuming that getting the authority without the support of the Motorcoach industry would be difficult; this proposal does set in motion a framework that would be acceptable to Richmond.
- ***The Ad Hoc Motorcoach Committee suggests dedicated routes for buses:.*** “*The City would also designate five (5) primary east-west routes for motorcoaches seeking to access unloading/loading and/or short-term parking east of Washington Street.*”
  - Madison Street
  - Pendleton Street
  - King Street
  - Duke Street
  - Franklin Street
  - Although the membership did talk about dedicated routes, they did so in most careful terms to insure it was, as a last resort, and that it did follow a very strict methodology, particularly since the streets of Old Town are quite similar. We urge residents to make their sentiments about these choices known at the meeting.

- “Designated routes and parking areas were brought up as a way to protect sensitive areas of Old Town, but the membership emphasized the need for criteria based choices and expressed concern about concentrating the problems in designated areas.”
- Furthermore, the voluntary permitting scheme would diminish the pain only if there is wider disbursement, not less. A more detailed analysis is found in the article “Rational choice for motorcoaches” in this Crier.
- ***The Ad Hoc Motorcoach Committee report argues that smaller buses are in fact undesirable and unhealthy.***
  - The dismissal in the task force report of the desirability of using smaller buses does directly contradict a core membership position. First, towns like Norfolk have actually implemented the widespread use of small-scale electric buses in their Downtown area. They are quiet and nonpolluting as well. Hence, the argument that big buses are a prerequisite for “green” is a bit silly.
  - Secondly, OTCA has adopted a “statement of Constraints” (also included in this Crier) that very eloquently describes the encumbrances of the small scale encountered in Old Town. To a tee, every one talks about the size of buses, because they loom large as they move slowly down the small Old Town Streets. A more formalized consequence of this point can be found in the paper “Rational Choice for Motorcoaches”.

These recommendations are by no means the end solution advocated by OTCA membership, but it can be an interim step to getting there, depending off course on the preciseness of the final language. It does not regulate the size and total numbers of buses, but it does open a door. Is it wide enough? It is your time to speak. So do plan to attend this meeting. Remember, the only wasted voice is the silent one.

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## **MEMBERSHIP SPEAKS ON MOTORCOACHES** *(Recap from November Crier)*

At the October Old Town Civic Association (OTCA) meeting, the membership was asked to give their views on motor coaches in Old Town. OTCA gathered a diverse panel that briefly laid out their perspectives, and then were questioned by the membership. OTCA wanted this panel to first lay out the diverse interests that relate to motorcoaches. All the presentations were to the point, and the audience proceeded in a calm rational manner to clarify differences in their and the presenters viewpoints.

This was followed by an very productive session in which the members were asked to comment on their concerns and possible solutions. The concerns were presented in a respectful manner that underscored the understanding of other stakeholder groups concerns, yet the members conveyed in 1 hour what the task forces took years to accomplish. Many thanks are due Linda Couture, member of the OTCA Board, for the professional manner she went about facilitating the session.

**The concerns:**

“Idling and crawling on residential streets, General idling, too many buses, routes, pollution, pedestrian safety, noise and vibration from the buses, discharging in non designated areas, Buses too big or too tall, rude drivers, trash being dumped and signage.”

**Solutions proposed by membership:**

1. Educational efforts aimed at teaching bus drivers, businesses, and the business association about the rules and regulations in the City of Alexandria. This would help familiarize visiting motorcoaches with the laws, and give them a better understanding of the problems and constraints facing Old Town. The membership also pointed out the need to educate residents about the issues.
2. Enforcement of existing laws was thought to be lacking. Therefore, if the City put more effort to ensure that it is done in a more comprehensive manner, it would piggyback nicely on the proposed educational program above.
3. Designated routes and parking areas were brought up as a way to protect sensitive areas of Old Town, but the membership emphasized the need for criteria based choices and expressed concern about concentrating the problems in designated areas. A suggestion was also put forth to look into the viability of designating no drive streets instead.

The next set of solutions encompassed new and creative transportation solutions for the modal split.

4. Old Town is a very walkable city and the historic ambiance is best enjoyed as a pedestrian, not in a motorcoach! The City ought to take advantage by encouraging more “historic walking” in particular with the young through both education and promotion of Old Town as an historic walking City.
5. Limit the bus sizes to fewer than 20 feet, as the current busses are too large and cumbersome for the infrastructure of Old Town.
6. Require permits to drive in Old Town, and limit the number of busses.
7. Use trolleys in efforts to come up with creative transportation solutions modal split requiring that visitors change from bus to trolley in order to drive around Old Town. The members were enthusiastic about trolleys as the "neat" way to go-- meaning people like them because they think trolley rides are "fun."

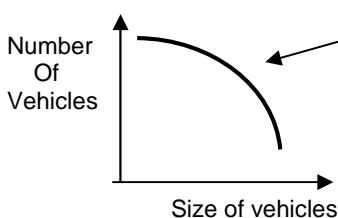
## RATIONAL CHOICE FOR MOTORCOACHES

The City has conducted long searches and yet failed to solve the riddle of motorcoaches in Old Town. The reasons are enumerating, but suffice it to remember the story of a passer by who sees a person searching for something under a light pole. Inquiring as to what the person is looking for. I lost my wallet over there somewhere the searcher replies. Then why are you looking here? The light is better.

This is not an easy article to read, but it does shed much needed light on the darker recesses of the problem. We start by looking at the residents, who have articulated clear reasons for why they feel affected. Obviously, the size of the street matters. Not only does the distance between the curbs affect how the residents feel about the buses but the actual setbacks between the buildings and the curb does so as well. Then there are the number of historic structures and the number of residents on the street.

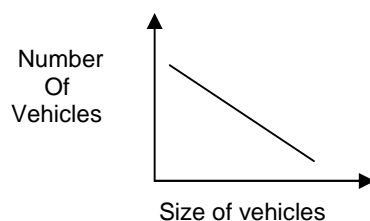
- *Curb to curb distance*
- *Setbacks from street*
- *Number of historic structures*
- *Number of residential units*

The next item is slightly more difficult to explain. Bus size and numbers of them are a problem. However, on close inspection we find that people are willing to tolerate more buses the smaller they are. In fact how many complaints do we get about cars ruining our houses?

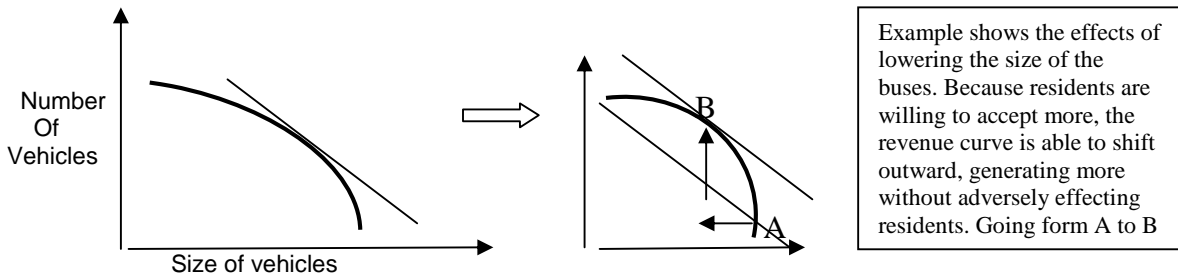


This is called the indifference curve and is a technical tool well used in economics. The curve is derived by mathematically combining two different causes of pain. One is the pain of bus size and the other is the pain of the number of motorbus coaches. As the name suggests, for a specific pain level this shows there is a trade off.

The other side of the coin is of course the revenues generated by the buses. Here as well, we can derive a trade off between the number and size of buses needed to generate given revenue. Because larger buses can carry more people, fewer are required to generate specific revenue compared to smaller ones.

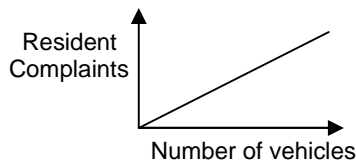


Then, from a resident’s perspective, the optimal solution is to set a limit on the size of buses such that the marginal pain is equal to the marginal revenue.

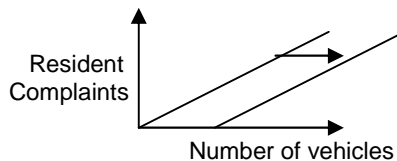


**The essence is not to demonstrate mathematical prowess, but to prove a point. What these curves demonstrate is that by switching to smaller buses, the City can generate more revenue without additional controversy. They also show that a reduction in size will actually decrease the controversy without reducing the revenues because people will be willing to accept more of them.**

The City, on the other hand, believes that the residents do not care about the size of the buses. From that perspective, the problem is vastly simplified to just how many.



The more buses the more complaints. Furthermore, by finding “the appropriate streets” streets the numbers can be increased without adverse effects if you will. By finding streets with greater curb-to-curb distance, greater building setbacks, fewer historic buildings, or fewer residents the line shifts outward as depicted below, allowing more buses to come in.



**Even if correct, increasing the numbers by putting all the motorcoaches on a few streets will undoubtedly overwhelm the “street effect” because most streets in Old Town are very similar. If however, they are incorrect and size of the motorcoaches matters, then this will significantly focus the pain and appreciably accentuate the complaints.**

## **Statement of Constraints: With regard to the operation of motor-coaches in Old Town Alexandria**

Properly addressing motor-coach issues as they have arisen in Old Town Alexandria requires the recognition of certain physical constraints in and near Old Town. Additionally, Old Town contains a substantial number of older, irreplaceable structures which give Old Town its unique historical character that attracts permanent residents to Old Town as well as businesses and visitors, including tourists. These constraints include:

- 1 – Old Town occupies a finite physical land area lying within the Old and Historic District.
- 2 – Within the Old Town area, there are a finite number of street lane miles over which motor-coaches and other vehicles can travel, there are a finite number of motor-coach and other parking places, and there is a finite amount of sidewalk space on which pedestrians can walk, window-shop, and dine.
- 3 – As a practical matter, it is impossible to increase the number street lane-miles, on-street parking places, and sidewalk square footage within Old Town.
- 4 – Due to the physical constraints cited in the preceding sentence, Old Town has a finite capacity at any one time of motor-coaches and other vehicles moving and parking and of people walking, window-shopping, or dining on Old Town sidewalks.
- 5 – The presence of an excess number of motor-coaches, other types of vehicles, and pedestrians in Old Town has a deleterious impact on the ambiance and quality-of-life, particularly for Old Town residents, and the physical integrity Old Town's historic structures.
- 6 – Large motor-coaches have difficulty traveling on Old Town streets, they add to and impede traffic, and they often experience difficulty in turning onto narrow streets, especially when automobiles are parked on the street close to a corner.
- 7 – Restricting parking near street intersections to make it easier for large motor-coaches to turn a corner reduces the number of parking spaces in Old Town, further trimming an already tight supply of on-street parking places in Old Town.
- 8 – There are few, if any, places in Old Town where additional off-street parking can be constructed.
- 9 – There are few places in or near Old Town which are suitable for building parking facilities for motor-coaches waiting to pick up tourists they previously dropped off in Old Town.



**Next Meeting will be on February 11 and will discuss the waterfront process.**

*Poul Hertel, OTCA Board of Directors President*

**OLD TOWN CIVIC ASSOCIATION, INC.**  
**2008/2009 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND RENEWAL FORM**

**To Join or Renew:** Please complete the information below. For membership, the dues period begins each September 1 and ends each August 31. Dues paid after July 1 are applied to the dues for the next period.

**Contact Information:**

Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

(For a Household Membership, please list up to two persons)

Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip+4: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

In an effort to keep dues low, we are trying to produce as few paper copies of our monthly newsletter as possible. Can we send you our monthly newsletter by email? [ ] Yes [ ] No

<b>Dues:</b> Single (\$12.00)	\$ _____
Household (\$20.00)	\$ _____
Additional Contribution	\$ _____
Total Dues Enclosed	\$ _____

**Remittance:** Please make checks payable to "OTCA." Mail the Completed Form and your check to:

**The Old Town Civic Association**  
**P. O. Box 1213**  
**Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1213**