

Comments to the Motorcoach Draft Report

The report needs to be much clearer and more transparent in its recommendations.

This is more than likely due to the Committee itself not being clear on what has been proposed. For this reason, a strong executive summary is needed. Although the report covers many of the aspects discussed, it does not in a clear and precise way tie all the loose ends together. We tried, and found it extraordinarily difficult to understand the report and fear that the lack of clarity is really covering up a lack of agreement.

Suggestion : What OTCA would like to see is a statement that the City is embarking on a regulatory regime that ultimately will give the City the authority to control buses in Old Town. Moreover, that this is a firm goal. Furthermore, the report also needs to refine and explain the methodological approach that it is recommending the City use to get the regulatory regime, and describe the regime itself.

Assuming that the City does not have the regulatory authority (an assumption in dispute), the question is to how to best get it. The proposal in the report is to solicit the voluntary cooperation of the Motorcoach Industry. However, in doing so, there are some strings.

1. There will be dispensation for buses dropping people off in Old Town. How do you best do this? No consensus was reached on this point..
 - The Motorcoach industry suggests that there be a system that would determine the quickest way for the coaches to get to their destination.
 - The City suggests that limiting the number of routes makes it easier to control the tour buses.
 - OTCA strongly recommends that very specific criterion be implemented to rank all streets. That way, voluntary permitting would assure a limit on the number of buses on any one street in any one time. In essence, distribute the busses as much as possible.
2. After a 3-year study period, the City will seek legislative approval from Richmond to regulate the tour buses. However, nothing is spelled out in the Report as to what that regulation should be. We are left to presume what the regulation would be, meaning whatever the observer thinks will happen likely will not. Specifically, the following items were not brought up, which are at the core of the OTCA's long-term concern.

- Bus sizes should be limited to fewer than 20 feet (or reasonable alternative), as the current busses are too large and cumbersome for the infrastructure of Old Town.
- Permits should be required to drive in Old Town, and the number of busses should be limited.
- Old Town is a very walkable area in the city, and the historic ambiance is best enjoyed as a pedestrian, not in a motorcoach! The City should take advantage of that ambiance by encouraging more “historic walking” in particular with the young through both education and promotion of Old Town as an historic walking City.

The Report suggests that the busses would be routed to one of 6 defined streets.

This merely a designated route scheme in disguise. Although a discussion of criteria is provided, there is absolutely no discussion about tying the choices to these very criteria.

The Report strongly discourages limiting the size of buses, which is one of the central long-term tenets of the OTCA membership.

- The dismissal in the Task Force Report of the desirability of using smaller busses does directly contradicts a core OTCA membership position. First, towns like Norfolk have 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” appended to this statement 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.

No mention in the report of the OTCA desire to control of size and number of busses.

- There is no discussion about how to get there and no recommendation responsive to the needs of Old Town residents. Why should OTCA support this draft proposal if it is nothing more than a designated route scheme in disguise?
- No mention is made in the report about the natural limits of Old Town’s capacity to accommodate tourist as set forth in OTCA Statement of Constraints. Neither is Charlestown limits its buses to 25 feet in areas comparable to old Town mentioned.

Old Town Civic Association

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.

MEMBERSHIP SPEAKS ON MOTORCOACHES

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."
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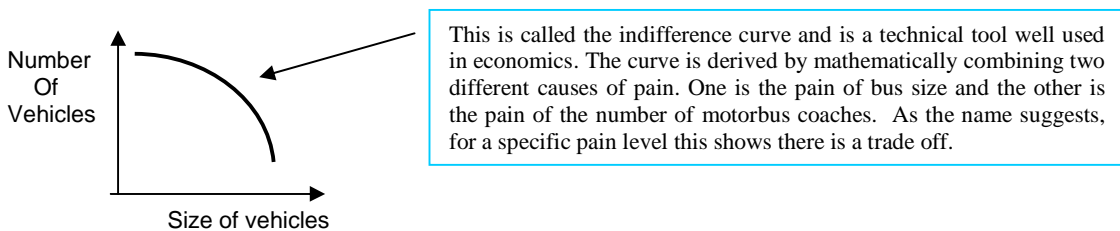
RATIONAL CHOICE FOR MOTORCOACHES

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.

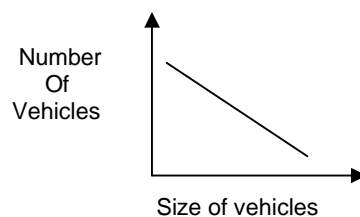
This is not an easy article to read, but it does shed much needed light on the darker recesses of the problem. We start by looking at the residents, who have articulated clear reasons for why they feel affected. Obviously, the size of the street matters. Not only does the distance between the curbs affect 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*

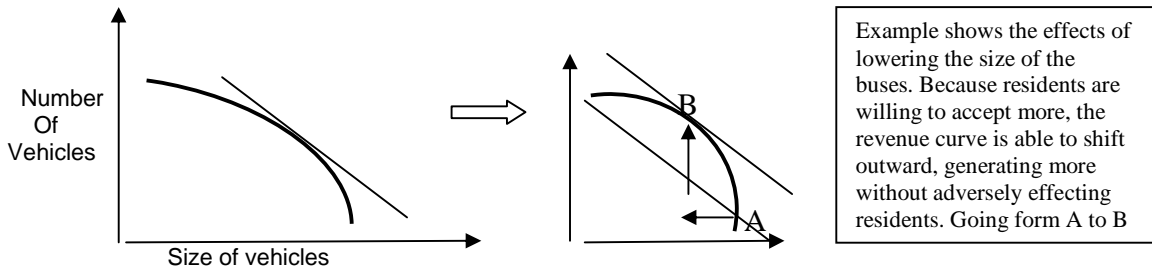
The next item is slightly more difficult to explain. Bus size and numbers of them are a problem. However, on close inspection we find that people are willing to tolerate more buses the smaller they are. In fact how many complaints do we get about cars ruining our houses?



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.

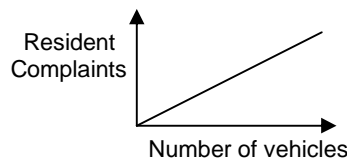


Then, from a resident's perspective, the optimal solution is to set a limit on the size of buses such that the marginal pain is equal to the marginal revenue.

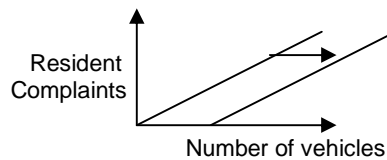


The essence is not to demonstrate mathematical prowess, but to prove a point. What these curves demonstrate is that by switching to smaller buses, the City can generate more revenue without additional controversy. They also show that a reduction in size will actually decrease the controversy without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