


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: AUGUST 8, 2019

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: COMMUTER WATER TAXI UPDATE AND EXTENSION

Earlier this year in anticipation of the WMATA Platform Improvement Project, I approved a waiver allowing Potomac Riverboat Company (PRC) to operate prior to 9:30 a.m. in order to provide an alternative commute option for residents and workers during the WMATA Platform Improvement Project. The PRC license approved by the City historically has not permitted service before 9:30 a.m. in order to prevent commuter service. Since starting the commuter water taxi service on May 25, the water taxi has reported an average of 3,800 passengers per week since the shutdown began with 165 passengers utilizing this service before 9:30 a.m. each weekday. The vast majority (82%) are commuters going from Alexandria to the Wharf in D.C. Some water taxi commuters commute from D.C. to Alexandria (including two City employees). Early signs indicate the water taxi is working as intended and has exceeded our expectations. Staff surveyed mode of travel for commuters who applied for ticket reimbursement from the City. Of the surveyed commuters, 82% said they took Metrorail prior to the shutdown. In terms of accessing the water taxi, 61% walked, 17% biked or scooted, 11% took the bus or trolley and *only 6% drove or were dropped off* (5% other/no answer).

PRC has stated interest in continuing this service after the Metrorail stations reopen in September. They have indicated that they would likely reduce the number of boats from three to two and the number of runs from seven to four during the morning commute. The company added during the shutdown two additional afternoon trips to accommodate commuters, and they would maintain this level of service through the end of the year. They would continue to honor the 50% discounted commuter rate of \$10 for a round-trip commuter ticket without a subsidy from the City. Most commuters using this service purchased an annual pass, which is valid through the end of the year.

I plan to sign a letter authorizing the PRC to continue their operations prior to 9:30 a.m. until the end of the calendar year, which is the latest date that I can approve without Council action. Subsequently, Council will be asked to approve a lease amendment to waive the restriction that prohibits boat operations before 9:30 a.m. I intend to docket this lease amendment in the fall prior to the beginning of the water taxi season in March 2020 (the water taxi does not operate in January or February). I plan to propose a one-year waiver as an extended pilot program to see how the water taxi program works post Metro shutdown. PRC has indicated that they plan to get

customer feedback this fall to determine a pricing structure that would encourage riders to use the service, should it be continued in 2020. This might include a monthly pass and/or discounted commuter ticket.

Staff will provide a summary of summer ridership numbers for the Water Taxi in its WMATA Platform Improvement Project Final Report later this fall.

cc: Emily A. Baker, Deputy City Manager
Yon Lambert, Director, T&ES
Hillary Orr, Deputy Director, T&ES
Katie North, Division Chief, /Mobility Services, T&ES
Thomas Hamed, Transportation Demand Manager/Mobility Services, T&ES