



John Bloom, Chair, Potomac River Group, Sierra Club
Testimony on Arlington's Capital Improvement Plan
June 29, 2021

Chair De Ferranti, Members of the Board, and staff:

I'm happy to be here tonight speaking on behalf of the Sierra Club's Potomac River Group, which covers Arlington, Alexandria and Falls Church.

There are two key challenges to reaching carbon neutral government operations: the first is making the electricity supply renewable. Here, the County seems to be well on its way, though we need solar panels on many more government buildings.

I think of the County's renewable electricity as its superpower. Everything powered by that electricity becomes operationally carbon neutral.

The point of having a superpower, of course, is to use it. That's the second challenge. It's a whole-of-government challenge because it involves all building systems, vehicle fleets, and operations.

Here, progress is not as encouraging.

It's hard to tell, but from cryptic comments in the CIP it seems that many, perhaps all, HVAC replacement projects funded through the CIP will install brand new fracked gas-powered systems instead of heat pump systems powered by renewable electricity. This locks the County into decades of greenhouse gas emissions. It hardly matters that the new gas systems are more efficient than the old ones when the alternative is zero emissions. There always will be technical challenges, but we are not convinced that those challenges require building-wide gas systems in every case. It's also not clear that the County is assigning any "cost of carbon" in its cost calculations.

There is a Transportation budget of about \$600 million for the next few years, and virtually none of that funding is directed at shifting county fleets and parking infrastructure to electric. There are more than ten projects involving parking lot construction, renovation, and repair with no sign that EV charging is part of the plan. At risk of stating the obvious, the time to install EV parking infrastructure is when lots are being built or renovated, not after.

Most significantly, Arlington stands utterly alone by having a 100% fossil-fueled bus fleet, without any plan or timeline for electrifying. Our neighboring jurisdictions all have committed to fully electric fleets -- by 2029 for DC Circulator, 2035 for Alexandria DASH, and, pending a final vote, 2035 for Fairfax County. Even the most reluctant bus operator, WMATA, has committed to electrify its entire fleet, though it needs to accelerate its timeline.

To address these deficiencies, we have five recommendations:

1. The 20 new CNG FY22 ART Buses should be carefully scrutinized and as many as possible should be deferred.
2. Any decision on the 12 CNG buses requested in FY24 should be deferred until an ART Bus electrification plan is approved.
3. Staff should be directed to make securing grant funding for electric buses and charging infrastructure a priority.
4. The Board should direct staff to consider EV charging possibilities in connection with every project involving parking lot construction or renovation.
5. The Board should require a memorandum documenting the rationale for any purchase of fossil fuel HVAC, hot water, or cooking equipment in County Government buildings. Where challenges exist, the memo should demonstrate that solutions, even partial solutions, were explored.

Thanks. I'd be happy to discuss any of these recommendations.