

VII. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the preceding pages, it is easy to conclude that Alexandria lags far behind its historic counterparts in the United States and Canada in regulating the movement of motorcoaches within its historic area. It may also be concluded that the presence of motorcoaches in Alexandria is raising public health, safety, and welfare issues in the sensitive residential and historic areas.

To recommend that Alexandria should eliminate *all* motorcoach traffic is a difficult argument to make. Most cities seem to make allowances for *some* high-value motorcoach visits within their historic areas. However, these visits are restricted to necessary traffic and are very tightly controlled through policy and regulation.

On the other hand, to argue for no limits to motorcoach travel within the Old and Historic District of Alexandria is even more difficult to do. Restrictions in other historic cities are common. Also, many, if not most, motorcoaches coming to Alexandria are of little or no economic value in light of the costs that must be borne by the community. The ACVA Motorcoach Task Force in its final report published in November of 2005 did provide a matrix which stated that all motorcoaches visiting Alexandria provided at least some value. But because this study did not include costs and was largely based on assumptions, guesses and estimates, the product of this analysis was unconvincing.

If some motorcoaches must be allowed into the city and others not, then special issues are raised for control and management. A system must be devised that will permit only the necessary motorcoach traffic while prohibiting the rest. Putting such a system into place would involve careful thought and some amount of work. There are, however, an ample number of examples in other cities to use for such a system.

Finding the middle ground between *motorcoaches galore* and *no motorcoaches* is a matter for discussion and consensus. This paper will conclude by making some recommendations based on what has been done in other places. However, it is recognized that each place is unique and that those who live in each community must make their own decisions as to what is proper. Alexandria is no exception.

In building consensus, it is critical that community organizations be involved in the process. Civic groups, neighborhood associations, preservation societies, historical organizations, and community-based ad hoc committees have all been involved in finding appropriate solutions to this issue in other cities. Those who have lived with motorcoach traffic are usually the ones who must step forward. According to Kristopher King of the Historic Charleston Foundation, "The burden falls on the residents." Residential involvement will therefore be critical in addressing the issue.

Ask anyone in a neighborhood or town meeting, *Who is for a better community?*, and everyone will raise their hand. Who would not? But that is not the right question since everyone has a dif-

ferent view as to what a better community should be. All parties to an issue have interests. Residential interests and business interests are not always in alignment. That is the nature of the situation. Both may want a strong community but both may disagree as to how to get there or what that community should look like in the end.

In spite of all that has been done, residential interests have yet to be addressed regarding motorcoach traffic. Residents' objections regarding the increase of motorcoaches on city streets were heard at the ACVA Motorcoach Task Force meetings with little result. The only concession offered was better awareness through signage of the ban on motorcoach engine idling, an issue which the motorcoach industry has repeatedly argued as operationally dangerous. Parking issues were also addressed but will now have the effect of increasing motorcoach traffic rather than decreasing it. Residents have continually argued for less of this traffic, not more.

It is a well-recognized concept of community that residential areas should be provided with healthy surroundings for family life and with laws enacted to facilitate the creation of a convenient, attractive and harmonious environment. Residents have an expectation that they will have quiet enjoyment of their homes, that transportation systems be carefully planned, and that the dangers and nuisances that can develop in such systems shall be understood and minimized.

It is becoming clear that there must be a counter to the trend of exploiting residential areas for private profit as tour-oriented motorcoach traffic now does. Residential areas need better protection from this inappropriate activity.

Alexandria has one organization that endeavors to represent both residents and community issues at large, the Old Town Civic Association (OTCA). While the OTCA leadership has expressed a high level of interest in getting the current levels of motorcoach traffic reduced and under control, little has been done so far. If OTCA is unable or unwilling to be involved, then other organizations must be found or created to push for control of this traffic. Neighborhood-generated petitions to City Council could also be used if Council will not address the issue.

The City of Alexandria needs to go through the same process that other cities have gone through—cities with sensitive historic and residential areas. There needs to be a *finding of fact* to see if the issues raised in this paper are not important enough to regulate motorcoach traffic within Alexandria. Are public health, safety and welfare concerns being raised by this unrestricted traffic? If these are not concerns, then the City should be prepared to argue how they are not.

Charleston and New Orleans, the first two cities in the U.S. to gain historic status, have been able to incorporate reasonable motorcoach and tourist regulations into their city codes. Alexandria, the third such city, needs to catch up before the situation gets worse than it is.

The place to begin is with consensus. The issues must be defined and understood before discussion can occur. That has been the purpose of the first six chapters of this paper. The remainder of the paper shall be used for recommendations as to how to proceed.

- **Building consensus in the residential community.** Community inputs to the process are critical to achieving consensus. Use sustainable tourism arguments to create the conditions where tourism does not adversely affect the interests of residents. If broad-based sustainable tourism is something that the city authorities feel is worth pursuing, review the Principals and Steps for Heritage Tourism as a way to begin implementing these ideas on page IV-8.
- **Acquire the authority to regulate motorcoaches.** This does not yet exist in Alexandria but should not be difficult to acquire with the approval of city council (see page III-9). Approach council for this approval. Once council has approved of the city having this authority, acquiring the power from the Commonwealth’s legislature will take some time.

Interim action: Use community consensus and organizational authority to ask tourist associations and touring companies to reduce the level of motorcoach traffic immediately. Ask for industry cooperation to use smaller vehicles when touring the city or when delivering passengers. Ask companies that have established regularly scheduled motorcoach touring routes in residential areas to cease. When motorcoach use is necessary, ask that they be filled to capacity. Work with touring companies to achieve objectives.

- **Eliminate all drive-through motorcoaches in Alexandria.** Exceptions shall be made for those motorcoaches passing through to other places while using Washington Street or other state or federal highways.
- **Allow motorcoach stops in Old Town for core purposes only.** Core destinations are those that are demonstrated to be of high cultural value. Motorcoaches should only be allowed to stop in the Old and Historic District when passengers must be kept together, i.e. at hotels (with luggage), some boat tours, and some museums (Carlyle House, Stabler-Ledbeater Apothecary, and Gadsby’s Tavern).
- **Eliminate motorcoach stops for fast food, ghost tours, and casual shopping east of Washington Street.** Work with the tourist industry to devise alternatives. Promote the use of smaller vehicles for accessing locations east of Washington Street. Can staging areas for “walking” businesses such as ghost tours be moved to Washington Street when receiving motorcoach customers? Can these customers be brought to Market Square in smaller vehicles?



- **Regulate ALL touring-for-hire in Alexandria.** Because the tourist industry in Alexandria is growing and because of its impacts to residential areas and other parts of the community, touring-for-hire should be a regulated activity. Regulating touring activity *as a business* is an additional way of controlling motorcoach travel within the city. Touring of the city in motorcoaches should be forbidden but allowed in smaller vehicles, e.g. under 31 feet. Vehicles-for-hire are currently regulated by the city but touring-for-hire as a business is not. It is an important activity that should be subject to license. Licensing fees for touring businesses, guides and patron use fees should be charged to help support the management of this activity.

- **Establish rules for motorcoach drivers.** Drivers should be restricted to driving duties and nothing else. For public safety reasons, site narration by motorcoach drivers should be prohibited on local streets and roads. Driver distractions **MUST** be minimized.
- **Night running prohibited.** No motorcoach shall be permitted to operate east of Washington Street after dark. This part of Old Town area is characterized by limited maneuvering room, intensive pedestrian use and sensitive residential areas. Additional safety issues are raised at night when visibility and situational awareness is greatly reduced. The noise level of this traffic is a major disturbance for households that are asleep or readying for sleep. All heavy traffic should be completely eliminated on Old Town streets after sunset.



Not all motorcoaches are well marked. A number of coaches coming to Old Town carry no markings at all as with this one at Robinson Terminal. The absence of markings makes it difficult to identify the owner or operator of such vehicles.



Motorcoach Permits for Alexandria should be prominently displayed inside the front windshield. Information should include:

- permit number
- vehicle ID (license)
- date
- time of arrival
- destination/purpose
- duration of stay
- parking assignment

Routes to and from the destination and driver regulations should be supplied with the permit.

- **Establish a system for management of ALL motorcoaches within the City.** The only way to know if a motorcoach belongs where it is supposed to be is if it displays a City-issued permit (with relevant information) where it can be clearly seen by any casual observer. Any motorcoach *not* displaying a permit can be easily determined to be out of compliance.

All motorcoaches traveling on City streets must be subject to the *same* City permitting system. Enforcement will be ineffective if different motorcoaches are allowed to carry permits in different ways. Real penalties shall be established for non-compliance.

Motorcoaches traveling through Alexandria to other destinations on state or federal highways shall be exempt from having to

carry City-issued permits. However, motorcoaches traveling on the George Washington Memorial Parkway will still need to carry proper commercial vehicle permits from the National Park Service. Motorcoaches that will also travel with City permits should demonstrate compliance with the National Park Service rules for traveling on Washington Street and the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

Permit fees should be established and should be in-line with what other communities are doing. Permits shall be for the time period requested and shall not exceed the time frame of one permit per day except in the case of hotel stays and then only for the duration of the visit. Motorcoaches will stay on arterial streets where possible and no touring of the City on local streets and roads shall be allowed at any time.

Permits will allow the level of activity to be monitored over the long-term and allow instructions to be provided for the motorcoach visit. Driver directions for parking, routes, and other relevant information can be supplied at this time.

The permitting system could also be used to generate additional data to manage this activity into the future. Useful information to collect would be the motorcoach load factors (seats actually occupied), demographic information (school groups, senior tours, etc.), and customer feedback which could then be reviewed to assess the value of the visits to the community as a whole.

Motorcoach permits will be limited in number and only be made available for well-defined and necessary purposes. What number of motorcoaches shall be permitted east of Washington Street (if any) is a discussion that must occur. Residential impact is critical if any of this traffic is to pass through neighborhoods where people live. Actions in other cities indicate that the motorcoach carrying capacity for historic and residential areas will likely be very low (in some cases zero). Smaller vehicles carrying passengers, e.g. less than 31 feet long, shall still require a permit, but the number need not be restricted—for now. Smaller vehicles will be generally able to go where they please when they please unless numbers become a concern. The tourist industry in the area needs to begin to adapt itself to the appropriate use of smaller vehicles in residential and historic areas.

- **Small vehicle attributes should be established.** If smaller vehicles are to be used in Old Town, consideration needs to be given as to what attributes they should have. A maximum size must be established. Appearance, noise, emissions, and level of repair (no oil leaks or broken mufflers), and level of cleanliness are criteria that should be codified. The quality of these vehicles will reflect upon the quality of the tourist experience; they will need to be properly maintained.
- **Dependent businesses should be subject to public review.** Those Alexandria businesses that are dependent upon motorcoach traffic should be identified. They should also be subject to some form of public review if their business practices generate heavy motorcoach traffic in residential neighborhoods. It is imagined that this process would be similar to the SUP (special use permit) process that now exists for non-conforming uses. As long as motorcoaches must pass through sensitive residential and historic areas to access a particular tourist venue (see Chapter V for costs and effects), it is in the public interest that these venues be closely monitored and controlled for the sake of the community.

All Alexandria businesses and attractions receiving motorcoach passengers or a component thereof should provide information regarding past motorcoach visitation and the requirements for the future. Locations that receive motorcoach passengers should have a safe motorcoach loading area, a parking plan for the motorcoach, a traffic plan that guides motorcoaches to the location and away from it, and some mutually understood limit to the amount of motorcoach trips into and out of the city that may be generated.

- **Routes shall only be used to disperse motorcoach traffic, not to concentrate it.** Routes shall not be used gather traffic on a single route that burdens any part of the community to repeated exposure.
- **Permitting requirements in neighboring jurisdictions must be enforced.** The National Park Service and the District of Columbia need to enforce their regulations if they are going to have them. A lack of enforcement in one jurisdiction can reflect on the attitude of the entire region. Rules will only be considered to be important if compliance is valued. For example, any motorcoach visiting Alexandria should also have a valid George Washington Memorial Parkway permit from the National Park Service. Whenever possible, the City of Alexandria should work with other jurisdictions to ensure consistent enforcement.
- **Costs shall be borne by those that directly benefit from motorcoach traffic.** One of the central tenets of sustainable tourism is that it pays its own costs. This assures a collection of businesses that are healthy enough to bear the costs of tourism. Motorcoaches must be part of this equation. As part of a larger tourist policy, special use fees, licenses, and taxes should be prioritized to fund the management of motorcoach and tourist activity within the city. Ongoing government subsidies used to allay the costs of for-profit tourist endeavors should be eliminated. These costs should be borne by the industry.
- **Establish a long-term vision for a new visitor center.** Most agree that the location of the Ramsey House is inadequate to support the long-term tourist needs of Alexandria. Even though the city has rejected the idea of an expanded visitor center on Market Square, motorcoach traffic is still drawn to this place to deliver passengers. A long-term goal of the city should be to establish a visitor and transportation center outside of the historic area in a location that is convenient for visitors. However, it is of the upmost importance to establish a proper regulatory environment for motorcoaches and other tourist activity before such a facility is designed and built.

Many are of the belief that a visitors center will immediately solve Alexandria’s motorcoach problem. It will not. It will not solve the problem of drive-through tours. These occur as part of larger tours (to Mount Vernon, etc.) within the Washington area. These drive-through tours are unlikely to transfer to smaller vehicles just to see Old Town. Neither will a visitors center solve the problem of bringing groups into the historic part of the city to specific destinations, groups will need to remain intact to access a particular destination (a boat tour, a hotel, a museum, etc.).

After viewing the complexities of motorcoach tourism, many become frustrated and throw up their hands and say that it is too complicated to solve without having a visitors center. That is the wrong approach. In other cities such as Charleston, Savannah, and St. Augustine, a visitors center did not just appear. They were only able to appear after a long period of simultaneously cultivating tourism and, more importantly, regulating the range of tourist activity—including motorcoaches.

Regulation is therefore the key. However, there has been considerable resistance to this concept from some in the ACVA and those benefitting from the motorcoach business. These fears are misplaced. Through regulation, a stronger tourist economy can be nurtured and managed. A larger and more versatile visitors center can then follow as a result.

Final Thoughts

The issues raised in this paper are not new. Many other communities have faced what Alexandria is facing now. Those places got through it and were able to come up with solutions that made their cities better places in which to live and to visit.

It is the purpose of this paper to make Alexandria a better place for visitors, residents, and business alike. It is hoped that it will be accepted in that spirit. Understanding the larger issues in play is important in moving forward with solutions. It is hoped that this paper has also aided in that understanding.

The bullet points on the previous pages are largely lifted from the experiences and actions of other cities. However, devising a set of recommendations for Alexandria in the absence of widespread conference and accord is a difficult thing to do; but at least it is a place to start.

These points are all meant for discussion and, it is hoped, that some level of consensus will follow. Alexandria will eventually come up with its own solution, hopefully to make our historic city a more beautiful, livable, and desirable place to be.

End of Chapter VII.

Postscript

This paper is not finished. As long as the motorcoach issues in Alexandria remain, it will probably never be finished. We thought it best to leave this paper as living document, to be updated as conditions warrant.

Discussions as to the contents of this paper remain welcome. While we have strived for accuracy and completeness, changes will no doubt be required from time to time. There have been several versions of this paper in 2006, 2007 and 2008. More may be required.

Another reason to keep this paper alive is the fact that it has not yet been widely read and it will be important to keep it available to anyone coming to study this problem for the first time or even for someone who wishes a fuller understanding of the issues at hand.

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