

Board Public Comments October 2020 – Consolidated

FROM: Anne & Tom Innes

Carrie,

Thank you for your role in setting up the earlier meeting for the Grove Avenue neighbors.

The various impacts on our neighborhood have been enumerated by others and we basically agree on all items.

While I am not sure of the exact numbers, by looking at the GRTC website, it looks like you generate \$20 million in income, you have \$54 million in expenses and therefore there is a \$34 million loss which is subsidized from a number of sources. It appears that the City of Richmond contributes about \$15 million into the pool, which if accurate, amounts to over \$60 per year per City resident. This lack of economic reality is the reason that there is no conventional logic determining the GRTC choice of routes. Marginal routes should be abandoned, like the old Grove Avenue 16, in favor of higher density routes. There has to be a better solution that services the greatest demand.

In terms of the actual comments at the meeting, the most amazing justification was the need for the bus for the UR students that work downtown.

Thank you in advance for sharing our comments with your Board. We urge them to revisit the need for Route 77 Grove Avenue and apply the resources where they are actually needed.

Anne & Tom Innes

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FROM: Crist Berry

cristberry@earthlink.net

2006 Grove Ave

Richmond, VA 23220

10/23/20

Board of Directors, GRTC

For the BOD meeting of OCT 27, 2020

Dear BOD members:

Many of us in the Fan District have questions, concerns and complaints about the recently added 77 Grove route—especially between Arthur Ashe Blvd and Harrison. NOTE: This is a highly congested residential street—with several day care centers and almost NO retail.

This route is roughly the same as the old route 16—which GRTC discontinued when the Pulse opened in 2018. We were told that this was due to a lack of ridership—something many of us had observed and agreed with. So—our first question that we have asked several times and has gone unanswered: **What has changed? Where is the information that suggests demand has suddenly appeared?** NOTE: Observation by many indicates it hasn't—as the busses are often empty and seldom have more than 1-2 riders. It appears to be unneeded.

If something suggests there is a change, then there are additional questions: **Why are you utilizing the largest busses in the system when much smaller ones would seem to suffice?** One driver suggested that they prefer the larger one and seniority dictates who drives and what busses they get. If true, this suggests the whole route structure is dictated by the union rather than by need. Could this possibly be true? Using smaller busses would reduce congestion as well as reduce the parking spots lost to the bus stops.

The old Route 16 went West on Hanover and East on Grove—spreading out the congestion. **Why was this not done with the new 77 Grove Route?** This, coupled with smaller busses, eliminates the need for two massive busses to take up the road.

What follow on studies will be done? The limited analysis shared by your staff suggests we are spending almost \$1 million of the limited funds provided by the City of Richmond on a route that has very limited ridership. Frankly, I suspect the City would get a better return on investment if it funded UBER/LYFT for the few riders we see.

We feel that the need for the route is not demonstrated, that the size of the busses used is unjustified and expensive and that the planning failed to take into account the needs/wants of Fan residents. (Note: There was poor communication of the entire process with most learning of it when the bus stops suddenly appeared.) We request that you review this and either correct what appears to be a mistake or provide satisfactory answers to the above questions.

Thanks for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

R. Crist Berry

From: Michael O'Connor

To: Rose Pace Carrie

Subject: Re: Recent concerns about portions of Route 77

Date: Friday, October 23, 2020 10:48:34 AM

Carrie,

Please make this a formal comment to your Board. Thanks.

Mike

On Thursday, October 22, 2020, 7:28:16 AM EDT, michael oconnor <julesgarcia@verizon.net> wrote:

Thank you and your colleagues again for hosting a meeting of the Fan residents affected by parts of the new Route 77. I understand this kind of pushback is challenging.

As you have likely gathered from some of the responses you have received the meeting was less than well received by many residents for a number of reasons. The most important of these was the lack of a path forward to address the concerns raised. I would like to make a couple of observations and suggestions.

My wife and I support improving public transit In Richmond and the surrounding suburbs. We have each lived in much larger cities with robust public transit that we used and relied on. However, it was not uncommon to walk a few blocks to get on the best line or to make connections. Main Street is two blocks from Grove. If there

were significant ridership on the Fan stops of Route 77 I would seek to try and mitigate the parking issues, as many of us have no off street option, but would not object to the route. Given the negative impacts that have been described, seeing empty buses and buses with one or two passengers going back and forth all day is frustrating. It seems that many of the positive survey comments were general and have not translated into riders. We look forward to seeing the more detailed ridership information that was promised. I also note that the spaces allotted for the bus stops on Lombardy take at least 4 parking spots and are much greater than other stops. This is apparently due to the already expanded no parking zone recently created by the city to allow for emergency vehicles to turn more safely. It is unnecessary to consume this much space.

There are several ways to mitigate or eliminate the concerns raised by those directly affected and maintain the advantages of the route. These include:

- a. terminating the route at Robinson as was suggested in favor of other parallel routes.
- b. eliminate Meadow and Lombardy stops
- c. reroute the Westbound bus to a different street

Other suggestions made, while making marginal improvements, would provide little relief to the residents. These include smaller vehicles and bump outs.

What response might we expect from GRTC to these and other suggestions.

Thank you.

FROM: Tracie Clang

From: Tracie Clang

To: Rose Pace Carrie

Subject: GRTC 77 Route

Date: Friday, October 23, 2020 10:41:37 AM

Hello

I am a resident on Grove Avenue and would like to express my ongoing concern regarding the bus route 77 that comes both directions on Grove Avenue. I appreciated the opportunity to have a forum with you all last week; however, I do not feel the forum was productive in addressing concerns with a formal plan of action as to next steps.

I am very much an advocate of the expansion of public transportation in Richmond. I have been involved in helping Syrian refugees resettle in Richmond and they were not able to secure adequate housing AND work that allowed for reasonable transit times with public transportation while their children attended school in Henrico. So, yes...public transportation is critical.

However, I do not understand the rationale behind the current route on Grove Avenue. IF this route was necessary, then I think we would all agree that we must adapt to the inconveniences of having a bus route on our street and realize it is for the greater good of our community. After all, we all live "in the city" for a reason and we want to support strong city infrastructure. However, for reasons previously stated...it is clear that this route is not needed at this time. Ridership is non-existent, the Pulse is very convenient, and there is a main line route that could be utilized just two blocks away. I do understand that ridership is down during the pandemic; however, even if everyone was back at work, there is still no need to route a bus 60 times a day down a residential street when there is a main non-residential street that is just two blocks away.

We were not given the opportunity to provide input to this route before it was implemented.

Despite your assertion, we did NOT receive notification of a public meeting before it occurred.

Finally, in the call that we had with you it was stated that the vast majority of people who did provide input were "for" this route. I do not believe that they were expressing positive support for this particular route...but rather for expanding bus routes where they are needed and will be utilized! That is NOT the case with this Route 77.

If you truly believe this is a necessary route, then I think the residents deserve follow up on two issues:

A. An explanation as to why routing the buses along a main hub (such as Main) is not a feasible option

B. A commitment to a date at which time we will we "re-evaluate" ridership and give feedback to the residents as to the utilization of this route. It is not acceptable to wait six months to reevaluate this issue. If the reason that we are waiting this long is because you say the buses

would be much fuller except for the pandemic, then let's stop the route for now and reevaluate institution AFTER the majority of potential users have gone back to work. That way we are not wasting taxpayers money and causing such undue stress for the residents of the neighborhood.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to a response on these issues, and in particular to the

two requested actions listed above.

CC: Kim Gray

FROM: G. S. Collings

October 23, 2020

Dear Sir/Madam:

I watched for years as the old route 16 bus traversed Grove Ave. with few if any passengers and marveled at the waste of fuel, manpower, equipment and parking spaces. I pondered as to how such an unproductive route could be justified and who was paying the bill? In all those years I only saw the bus pick up twice at the stop across from our house at Grove and Granby. Fortunately, someone finally had an epiphany and discontinued this misconceived route.

Who decided and why are you resurrecting a historically unproductive route? We live on and walk and drive Grove Ave. daily and after nearly 6 weeks of observing hundreds of buses plying this new route, I have only counted a handful of riders. The vast majority of the buses are absolutely empty, save the driver, and the few that do have a rider never have had more than one! I have also yet to observe anyone waiting at a bus stop in the Fan or Museum district. Since GRTC will obviously lose money on this endeavor, who will be paying for this decision? The impacts on the environment, parking, traffic and the tax payer certainly do not warrant the resurrection of a historically unproductive route.

What study, data and criteria was used to justify a reinstatement of this route? I went through about half of the public comments and had already counted nearly 20 that used exactly the same cut and paste phraseology before I ran out of patience. A notable consistency on nearly all of these "canned responses" was only a partial or cryptic identity and nothing that indicated a neighborhood residency. There was also no statement whether they had or planned to actually use the bus route. In other words, there was no indication that these people had any "skin in the game". The identical phraseology used was: **"I support the Route 77 changes that took place on Sept 13, which greatly improved transit access for thousands of Richmonders between VCU and UofR"**. This smacks of a social media call to students and others to influence the numbers regardless of their standing in the debate or intent to use the bus route.

I have yet to find a single neighbor along Grove that received any notice of this planned route. GRTC has failed to do due diligence and look deeper into the input they are resting their

decision and stories upon. Another over represented genre of pro statements were more akin to "social justice" commentary rather than dealing with actual ridership or the impact on the neighborhood. Again, input from sources that went largely unidentified and with an agenda disparate from the actual need for the route.

Please reconsider this unjustifiable and wasteful use of city and neighborhood resources.

G. S. Collings

1904 Grove Ave

FROM: Oonagh Loughran

1423 Grove Avenue

Richmond

23220

To the GRTC Board of Directors

Subject; Route 77

Date of Board Meeting 10/20/2020

I write as an advocate for public transport, environmental issues, responsibility for public resources and safety. I am one of your stakeholders.

I fully support effective and efficient public transport and deem it necessary for equitable access for all. I purchased a home on Grove Avenue in 2013 knowing it was a bus route. At the time, the bus operated only on one direction on Grove and at appropriate times e.g. more during the commuting period and a lighter service during the day and at weekends. While it may not have been the most used bus route, its intrusion on the neighborhood did not appear to outweigh the benefits to commuters. This bus was terminated due to lack of ridership and cost of maintenance.

Early this year a new route, the 77, began operating. This route now travels on both directions on a narrow residential street with numerous stop signs. This new route began in the absence of effective local consultation. Absolutely no one I know who lives on Grove Avenue received any indication of this route before it began operating and therefore we had no opportunity to comment on whether we thought it appropriate or indeed whether we would use it.

Based on observations and indeed figures provided by the GRTC at a public meeting on October 14 the route does not have the ridership to sustain it. Most of the buses carry no passengers while some carry one or two. Working from home may partially explain this, however. Route 5 is located on a commercial thoroughfare two block to the south of Grove and runs directly parallel to the 77. Route 5 arguably offers greater connectivity as it goes through down town to the city, connects with the pulse and serves both the Munroe and MCV

campuses. This is not only a more appropriate route for connectivity, but also provides direct access to businesses on the route while not affecting residential streets.

Funding for the GRTC comes from not only farebox revenue but also, state, and local government funding. I recognize that all routes cannot be self-sustaining but I also believe that the board of the GRTC need to be responsible custodians and spenders of our taxes and aware of environmental impacts and equitable access for all. Looking at the GRTC route map this part of the city i.e. the Fan, appears to have far greater access to public transport than for example East Highland park, the Creighton road area or Montrose. This make me question the boards approach to equitable access to public transport.

The current rate of occupancy of your buses makes no financial or environmental sense. The noise pollution, increase in traffic and amount of CO2 produced does not balance against the ridership that you have. Based on the current ridership it would be both cheaper and more environmentally friendly to provide each passenger with a taxi ride paid for by GRTC. The effects on the neighborhood are further exacerbated by the bus using the same street in both directions.

The lack of any consultation with people who live on the route is disappointing. A leaflet through the door of residents on new routes should be your starting and minimal level of consultation. Local meetings are excellent, however. the GRTC should come prepared to answer the questions provided to them before the meeting. I am also deeply disappointed that following the local meeting where residents expressed their concern the GRTC deemed it necessary to give a press release to local newscasters ignoring our concerns and suggesting that the route was favorably received. This was an over the top and deceitful response and demonstrates a reluctance to build relationship with us

To paraphrase Einstein, doing what you have always done and expecting different results is a sign of madness. Continuing to run the bus service at the current frequency is counterproductive, irrespective of the cause of the low ridership. There is enough data from the past months to show the times of day and the parts of the route people use. Why not reduce the service frequency and route until people are back at work and then revisit the situation. This would save limited resources and build better relationships with us, your stakeholders.

Finally, the GRTC CEO attended our community meeting but did not address the meeting, the only way I knew they were present was when their presence was announced at the end. I am disappointed that the CEO of the GRTC does not feel the need to engage with their stakeholders.

I respectfully request the board request an immediate review of the operations of route 77 with a view to serving the needs of the residents of the city of Richmond and Henrico more effectively

Yours sincerely

Oonagh Loughran

FROM: Dan Motta

Good afternoon,

I understand that there are some residents of Grove Avenue who are unhappy with the redesigned Route 77 and would like to see certain stops moved. As someone who used GRTC prior to the pandemic and intends to make great use of the transit system once it again makes sense for me, Route 77 is a line that I look forward to using in the future. The stops at Lombardy and Grove are the closest to me and so those are the most convenient stops for myself and many of my new and future neighbors at apartment buildings being built in close proximity to Route 77.

I sympathise with the handful of residents who may be inconvenienced by some minor noise a few times a day, but please do all you can to continue to work for a better transit system for ALL area residents— including protecting Route 77.

Thank you,

Dan Motta

FROM: Jay Holloway

I am writing to add my voice to those opposing the Route 77 route on Grove Av. from Robison to Monroe Park. Almost no one is riding on this segment. It is my opinion that ridership up until Robinson should not justify empty buses for the remainder of the route. While there are a small number of riders on this segment, I have not seen anyone at any of the associated stops. I have heard concerns that more bus service is needed at Grace and Lombardy. Clearly, Broad St. buses should and are handling this traffic.

Despite what many critics of our efforts to address these unnecessary buses say, I would be happy to support the buses and associated bus stops if they were being used. That is simply not the case. As a taxpayer, I would like to see our transportation resources used where they are needed.

Jay Holloway

FROM: Liz Williamson

Ms. Liz Williamson

1507 Grove Ave

Richmond, VA 23220

cherokeew@gmail.com

October 26, 2020

Ms. Julie Timm

Ms. Carrie Rose Pace

GRTC Transit System

301 East Belt Boulevard

Richmond, VA 23224

RE: GRTC Bus Route 77 Extension on Grove Avenue through the Fan

Dear Ms. Timm and Ms. Pace:

I am a Fan resident that embraces public transportation. But not when it is unsafe. I am **strongly opposed** GRTC's decision add two-way bus service on Grove Avenue in the Fan area due to significantly diminished pedestrian safety, reduced parking, and increased noise and pollution. These sizeable negative impacts are not justified by the lack of ridership for the route.

GRTC has not addressed my primary concern: Safety of buses running eastbound *and* westbound on a densely populated residential 2-lane Fan street.

The prior route ran only one direction on Grove, but not both.

Why is this dangerous?

1. Buses are unsafely navigating frequent lane blockages due to double parking. Double-parking is necessary on Grove due to the lack of street parking, particularly in the lower Fan near VCU. Lanes are blocked on a regular basis because residents use package delivery services like Amazon, food delivery, home maintenance contractors, and City works services. City parking patrols are an hourly fixture. All of these uses temporarily block traffic flow due to the lack of street parking. For example, I have personally witnessed an UPS truck doubleparked in the eastbound in the 1500 block. An eastbound bus passed the UPS truck in the opposite westbound lane going at least 15 miles per hour without stopping or hesitating to look before passing the UPS vehicle in the opposite lane.

2. Speed: Buses are traveling at unsafe speeds on Grove in areas in which

there are many children on bikes and crosswalks and two day care centers.

3. Lack of Space: Grove does not have the space to safely accommodate 2 buses and parked cars on both sides of the street. There is hardly enough space for 2 buses to pass one another and not hit parked cars on either side of the street. In fact, it would be easy for a person exiting a parked car to open her door into a speeding bus.

4. Lack of visibility: Extending service on this route until 10 pm in 2022 is extremely problematic. After dark, there is less visibility for crossing pedestrians and buses. Many parts of Grove are not well-lit.

GRTC responded recently to safety concerns by providing traffic volume data. The safety concerns at issue have nothing to do with traffic volume, but instead lane blockages, space considerations, and lack of visibility. GRTC provided general City crash information. Crash information does not address the *changed* roadway situation with the buses added to the equation.

I submitted detailed comments on October 12, 2020, attached. I urge the Board to read my comments because they address all of my issues of concern. In summary, there are compelling reasons to discontinue this route and identify a solution to safely provide transportation to address the need GRTC has identified. We should not overburden one street. **Route 77 is clearly unjustified and should be immediately discontinued.** GRTC, please make the right choice and choose safety first.

Very Truly Yours,

Liz Williamson

Attachments

(Oct 12 letter in full shared by PDF)