



**Alexandria Transit**

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**ACPS Pupil Transportation on DASH:  
Summary Whitepaper on Fixed-Route  
Transit for High School Commuting**

March 2026

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# Introduction

This whitepaper is intended to inform future decision-makers about an initiative that began as a City Council-directed, problem-solving effort: examining whether some Alexandria City High School student commuting could be served more efficiently by Alexandria's fare-free fixed-route transit network (DASH), reducing unnecessary duplication with yellow school bus service while preserving student access, safety, and reliability.

Rather than re-opening the policy debate, this document captures the practical work completed during the planning effort: the proposed pilot concept, key operational and safety considerations, preliminary fiscal and capacity estimates, and a draft evaluation framework that would have been used to measure performance before any expansion. The initiative ended before a pilot could be implemented, leaving several items that would have required joint closure.

## How to use this document:

- **Executive Summary:** the decision context, key conclusions, and conditions that would need to be in place for a credible restart.
- **Technical sections (Evaluation Framework, Capacity, Fiscal Impacts):** the underlying assumptions, constraints, and what would need to be validated with improved data.
- **Questions and Concerns:** a consolidated record of the most common issues raised (operations, safety and security, equity/access/ADA, sustainability) and the responses developed by the project team.

# Executive Summary

## BACKGROUND

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The City of Alexandria’s taxpayers currently fund transportation services for students in two ways: through Alexandria City Public School (ACPS)’s pupil transportation program and through DASH’s fixed-route public transit system. In January 2025, the Alexandria City Council requested an analysis of redundancies between the two programs and to explore the possibility of shifting some responsibility of student transportation from ACPS to DASH. The goal of this effort was to maximize the usage of taxpayer dollars, while still providing a safe, effective, and sustainable transportation solution for ACPS students.

## SUMMARY OF PRIOR RECOMMENDATION

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In June 2025, the City Manager issued a recommendation that would have been implemented as Phase 1 for school year 2026-2027. This phase would transition general population high school students who live within a quarter mile of existing DASH routes 31 and 36A/B stops, to no longer receive yellow school bus service, and instead rely on existing DASH route 31 and 36A/B for transportation to/from school. No other students were to be impacted by this recommendation. General population high school students who do not live on DASH routes 31, 36A/B, special education and special needs students, all elementary and middle school students, and all special activities and inter-campus transportation would still receive ACPS school bus transportation. No other phases were being considered at the time.

## BENEFITS

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If implemented, this proposal would have reduced redundant City taxpayer investment in student transportation. Phase 1 would have reduced ACPS’s transportation costs by an estimated \$282,000 annually, while increasing DASH’s operating expenses by \$210,000 to accommodate the additional riders, for an estimated annual savings of \$72,000. Students transitioning to DASH service would have utilized a transportation solution that is established, safe, effective, and flexible.

## RESULTS

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The ACPS Board and City Council met in a joint work session on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2025 to discuss this proposal. At that time, it was announced that the ACPS Board had decided not to support the proposal. As such, the parties ended the project to evaluate the feasibility of transitioning students to using DASH.

The results of the research and planning work that went into this project are documented within this white paper. It is intended to serve as a reference should the parties decide to revisit the idea in the future, and for other localities that might be considering such a venture.

This document has been created and published by the Alexandria Transit Company (DASH) using the information and experience gained from work on this project.

## TIMELINE

The following timeline provides the milestones of the exploration and research process of this proposal.

Date	Milestone
<b>January 2025</b>	City Council members request exploration of DASH use for High School commuting
<b>February – April 2025</b>	City - School Subcommittee briefings on ACPS transportation, DASH operations, safety, and regional models
<b>June 2025</b>	City Manager memo recommends pilot phase implementation beginning SY 2026–27 with requested ACPS fiscal impact analysis
<b>September 11, 2025</b>	ACPS Board work session discusses fiscal/operational implications, safety, process, and evaluation rubric
<b>September 29, 2025</b>	Joint City Council/ACPS Board work session



# Proposed Pilot Evaluation Framework

## LONG TERM GOAL

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Most general-population Alexandria City High School (ACHS) students living within a reasonable walking distance of a DASH bus stop would take public transit to school.

(This would affect ~86% of high school students.)

## SHORT TERM GOAL

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General-population ACHS students living within a quarter mile of DASH routes 31, 36A, and 36B would take DASH buses to school.

(This would affect ~30% of high school students.)

## WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPACTED

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In the pilot phase (originally proposed to be implemented in the 2026-27 school year), **only students living within a quarter mile of DASH routes 31, 36A, and 36B** would have been impacted by this change. These students would no longer receive ACPS transportation but instead would have enhanced DASH transportation provided to and from school; ACPS would have eliminated a stated 10-12 school bus routes.

## WHO WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN IMPACTED

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- All special education and special needs students
- All students experiencing homelessness (supported by the McKinney-Vento Act)
- All high school students who do not reside within a quarter mile of DASH routes 31, 36A, and 36B
- All elementary school and middle school students
- After school, athletics, and special event transportation
- Shuttles between the Minnie Howard and King St. campuses

In the pilot phase, all of these students and trip types would still have yellow bus service provided by ACPS, not DASH.

## AT THE END OF THE PILOT PHASE

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The pilot was proposed to have run for two (2) years. In the second year of the pilot, the City, ACPS, and DASH would evaluate its successes before broadening the proposal to include more ACHS students. The following metrics were developed to determine the potential success of the pilot:

- Overall % of affected ACHS students riding DASH
- Overall % of student satisfaction with ACPS/DASH transportation services
- % of students reporting on-time arrival to school and home
- Overall reduction in city investment for student transportation over time
- Growth in DASH transit ridership
- Stable or reduced number of ACPS & DASH safety incidents involving students, normalized by student ridership

If the pilot phase had been successful, the following additional phases would be considered for implementation:

- **Phase 2:** DASH would improve service along lines 35 and 36A/B in order to offer rides in under 30 minutes to students living in the West End. ~60% of ACHS riders would be covered by the Pilot (Phase 1) and Phase 2.
- **Phase 3:** ACHS students living within ¼ mile of a bus stop on any DASH route would be expected to take DASH instead of an ACPS bus to reach school. DASH would implement widespread and targeted improvements to improve service for students. If Phase 3 is implemented, ~86% of ACHS students would be covered by DASH service.

For both phases 2 and 3, the same exemptions as the pilot would have applied (e.g., ACPS would have continued to provide service for elementary and middle school students).

# DASH's Capacity Considerations

Based on an ACPS ridership survey conducted in Spring 2025, an estimated 1,445 and 1,518 additional students in the AM and PM periods, respectively, would have transitioned to DASH service with the implementation of the full three-phase plan. To allay concerns about students potentially being turned away from full buses, DASH would have added enough trips around bell times to ensure that all additional student ridership is accounted for.

For the capacity estimates below, a capacity of 60 passengers per 40-foot bus is assumed. DASH also has 60-foot articulated buses which have a capacity of over 90 passengers. DASH would have deployed as many of these articulated buses as possible on the affected routes, which would decrease the number of additional trips and their associated operating costs.

An added benefit of this project would have been that there is no risk of “missing the bus,” as students are not restricted to just one bus each day. Instead, they could have counted on multiple buses arriving regularly throughout the day, increasing their flexibility for getting to school and reducing truancy.



Students board a 60 articulated DASH bus to Alexandria City Public Schools

## PROPOSED PHASE 1 PILOT

For the pilot phase, DASH would have increased frequency on routes 31, 36A, and 36B around bell times to coincide with the start of the 2026-27 school year.

	AM	PM
<b>Route 31 Passengers</b>	147	198
<b>Route 36A/B Passengers</b>	321	399
<b>Total Additional Passengers</b>	468	597
<b>Passengers/trip</b>	60	60
<b>Additional Trips Required</b>	8	10

*Phase 1 Ridership Impacts*

The ten additional trips in the afternoon would have originated at either King St and Bradlee Shopping Center (for eastbound trips) or King St and Kenwood Ave (for westbound trips), meaning students boarding these additional trips would have been the first passengers on board the bus.

For the AM period between 8:00 and 8:30 a.m. and the PM period between 3:10 and 4:00 p.m., buses would have left from or arrived at the ACHS campuses every two minutes or better (every four minutes or better per direction):

### AM Service

- Route 31: every 10 minutes (every 5 min from 8:25 a.m. to 8:35 a.m.)
- Route 36A/B: every 5 minutes

### PM Service

- Route 31: every 5-10 minutes
- Route 36A/B: every 5 minutes

## CONCEPTUAL PHASE 2

For Phase 2, all students would have been required to make a transfer from route 35 to either route 31 or 36A/B. As a result, DASH would have added a sufficient number of additional trips on both the route 35 and the route 31/36A/B legs of the journey to school.

The additional trips on route 35 would have all headed east from Van Dorn Street Metro in the morning and east from Pentagon Metro in the afternoon, resulting in buses that arrive every five minutes or less through the West End around bell times.

	AM	PM
<b>Total Phase 1 Riders</b>	468	597
<b>Total Phase 2 Riders</b>	1,007	1,156
<b>Phase 2 Marginal Ridership Increase</b>	539	559
<b>Passengers/trip</b>	60	60
<b>Total Additional Phase 2 Trips Required (assuming one transfer for all students)</b>	18	19

*Phase 2 Ridership Impacts*

## CONCEPTUAL PHASE 3

Phase 3 would have required broader service improvements across the city to serve the students covered by this part of the project. Service improvements may have included new patterns on existing routes or new routes designed to directly serve the ACHS campuses and communities connected to them. For the purpose of estimating the additional trips required for this phase, we assumed that no student would be required to make more than one transfer to reach school.

	AM	PM
<b>Total Phase 2 Riders</b>	1,007	1,156
<b>Total Phase 3 Riders</b>	1,445	1,518
<b>Phase 3 Marginal Ridership Increase</b>	438	362
<b>Passengers/trip</b>	60	60
<b>Total Additional Phase 3 Trips Required (assuming one transfer for all students)</b>	15	12

*Phase 3 Ridership Impacts*

# Fiscal Impacts

## ACPS COST SAVINGS

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These assumptions were reported by ACPS staff at the September 11, 2025 ACPS School Board meeting.

- Average driver wage = \$35.01/hour
- Benefits = 37% of salary
- Fuel = \$1.18/mile
- Maintenance = \$0.30/mile

ACPS has estimated potential savings at:

- **Phase 1 Pilot ≈ \$282,000 per year**
- Phase 2 ≈ \$564,000 per year
- Phase 3 ≈ \$940,000 per year

ACPS leadership had expressed further concern that the effects of this proposal would extend beyond the hourly cost impact. Loss of hours/coverage might negatively impact driver retention. Furthermore, cost savings might be partially offset by any resulting increases in ACPS hired private carrier costs, which is currently at \$3 million, up from \$1.2-1.5 million.

## DASH COST IMPACTS

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The fiscal impacts below are calculated to account for adding additional trips to supply the necessary capacity for the affected students under Phase 1.

- Average driver wage \$35.40/hour
- Benefits ≈ 28% of salary
- Fuel ≈ \$6.34/hour
- Maintenance ≈ \$7.51/hour
- Insurance ≈ \$2.80/hour
- **Total direct operating cost = \$62.19/hour**
- **Annual service days operated for additional trips = 255 days**
- **Revenue hours per trip:**
  - Phase 1 Pilot: **0.75 hours/trip**
  - Phases 2 & 3: Conservatively estimated at **1.5 hours/trip**

## PHASE 1 PILOT

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DASH estimated the cost of the additional trips in the pilot at approximately **\$210,000 annually**.

- AM: 8 additional trips x 0.75 hours x \$62/hr x 255 days ≈ **\$95,000**
- PM: 10 additional trips x 0.75 hours x \$62/hr x 255 days ≈ **\$115,000**

## PHASE 2 & PHASE 3

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Based on the level of research and development at the time of this paper, there is insufficient information about student travel demands and patterns to determine the associated costs for DASH to successfully accommodate both Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the proposal. These would need to be further researched and determined would Phases 2 and 3 be considered.

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# Responses to Questions and Concerns

Operations

## CONCERN

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ACPS policy aims to keep student trips to school to 60 minutes or less. Would that be preserved under this proposal?

## RESPONSE

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All rides in the Pilot should take less than 60 minutes, even assuming the longest possible wait time for a bus.

## QUESTION

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How would this proposal accommodate transportation needs during abnormal school schedules, such as early release days?

## RESPONSE

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DASH would be committed to working together with operational leadership of ACPS to prepare for, plan for, and adjust in the event of abnormal schedule days, such as early releases, adverse weather, or delayed openings. DASH is experienced at working with other stakeholders, such as the Federal Office of Personnel Management (OPM), to adjust service schedules when Federal offices have delayed starts or early closures.

By default, most DASH routes, such as the 31 and 36A/B, operate full robust service at all hours of the day. Therefore, there would always be a consistent baseline transportation service provided during abnormal school hours, regardless of any special service modifications.

## CONCERN

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Would students end up walking farther to the bus under this proposal?

## RESPONSE

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While there is a chance that some students have to walk farther to the bus, overall, we expect that walking distances would be less on average. ACPS sets a maximum walking distance from home to school bus stop of a half mile. DASH's standard for this proposal is a quarter mile.

## Safety & Security

### QUESTION

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What are DASH's operator training standards?

### RESPONSE

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DASH operators undergo comprehensive criminal background checks, driving record checks, and past-employment verifications prior to hire. As part of training, all operators must successfully complete a rigorous 12-week training program covering various topics, such as:

- Safety and Defensive Driving
  - We prepare operators to anticipate hazards, master defensive driving strategies, and respond confidently to emergencies to protect passengers, themselves, and the community. Professional Standards & Policy
- Professional Standards & Policy
  - Operators uphold DASH's expectations by completing vehicle inspections, following policies, and demonstrating professionalism through all instances of operating a bus and serving the public
- Accessibility & Inclusion
  - We ensure operators understand ADA requirements and securement procedures so all passengers are served with dignity and accessibility.
- Customer Service & Communication
  - Operators are trained to deliver the DASH Difference through great service, respectful communication, and effective conflict de-escalation.
- Operational Excellence
  - From mastering routes, paddles, and onboard technology to navigating varied environments and adopting new zero-emission vehicles, operators are equipped for success on the road.
- Health, Wellness & Resilience
  - We support operators with tools to manage fatigue, reduce stress, and maintain personal well-being for long-term success on and off the job.

## QUESTION

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What are DASH's hiring standards/practices?

## RESPONSE

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DASH's hiring practice includes a comprehensive criminal background check, motor vehicle record check, past employment verification, and full compliance with its drug and alcohol program, including pre-employment and random screening. As of 2023, DASH prohibits employing individuals on the sex-offender registry to jobs that have direct public interaction.

## QUESTION

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What are DASH's operations safety standards?

## RESPONSE

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All DASH Safety Sensitive Employees, not just operators, are required to meet DASH safety practice standards, which include:

- Compliance with DASH's Drug and Alcohol Program, which includes pre-screening, random testing, and post-accident testing.
- Zero tolerance for electronic devices. We ensure a sterile operating environment free of distractions such as radios, earpods, headphones, handheld devices, smart watches, etc.
- Fitness for duty inspection. Each operator reports in front of a supervisor prior to every shift to ensure proper uniform and that there are no signs of impairment or fatigue.
- A pre-trip inspection is performed before every shift and a post-trip inspection is completed at the end of every shift to ensure all vehicles meet safety requirements.

## QUESTION

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What safety tools and support does DASH have?

## RESPONSE

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All DASH buses are equipped with 8-14 cameras covering all angles internally and externally. Each of these cameras have live-look capability.

Additionally, DASH has a dedicated DASH Operations Control Center which is staffed and monitored 24/7, and 19 Transit Supervisors with round-the-clock coverage to provide support for incidents, accidents, and other events. The DASH Operations Control Center has direct access to live-look on any DASH bus, as well as a direct line to field supervisors and APD for further support.

DASH also has a dedicated Safety and Security Team as well as a dedicated Customer Service team to ensure comprehensive and timely investigation into any events relating to a passenger.

### QUESTION

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Does DASH have access/retention of video on-board buses? What is the incident reporting protocol? What parent notification pathways exist?

### RESPONSE

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Each DASH bus features anywhere from 8 to 14 on-board video cameras recording full video and audio at any given time. The video is stored on physical drives and is generally retained for upwards of 30 days. DASH has a Safety and Security Team focused on investigating events, incidents, and safety matters. This team can provide any requested video generally within 24 hours or less. This is subject to the nature of the request and the amount of investigatory work required.

Students on DASH buses are generally considered members of the general public. Therefore, there are no specific protocols currently in place for alerting parents of an on-board incident with a student, as DASH does not maintain any form of student/parent directory.

### QUESTION

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Who is liable and responsible for students on board DASH buses?

### RESPONSE

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DASH takes full responsibility and liability over the safety and well-being of any passenger while onboard a DASH bus, including our youth and students. However, it is important to note that, as with any public infrastructure, DASH is not responsible for any individuals before or after they use a DASH bus. This is no different than the type of liability that is assumed if a student were to walk on public roadways to get to or from school or use any other form of public transportation, such as Metrorail. This is aligned with many other peer transit agencies in transporting youth populations.

While DASH does not have any mechanism to notify parents directly of incidents or misconduct, it is open to exploring functional partnerships with ACPS to leverage ACPS resources in communicating student-related incidents onboard DASH buses.

## Equity, Access, and ADA

### QUESTION

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Are DASH buses ADA-compliant?

## RESPONSE

Every DASH bus meets ADA compliance with low floor design functionality, wheelchair ramps, and two wheelchair securement positions on each bus. Certain DASH buses are equipped with automated wheelchair securement systems that do not require operator interaction, and all DASH buses kneel to further accessibility for all individuals.

Each bus is equipped with Automated Stop Annunciators, which announces each bus stop by audio, and Next Stop Displays, which displays it visually.

All new DASH bus stops installed following the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 are compliant with the disability requirements mandated by the act. The entire DASH bus system, inclusive of services, vehicles, and facilities, is compliant with the ADA.



## Environmental Sustainability

### QUESTION

What are ACPS's/DASH's fleet electrification goals? What is the status of that progress?

### RESPONSE

Both ACPS and DASH have invested in electrification as part of a city-wide goal of reducing emissions from transportation. The ACPS fleet currently includes seventeen (17) Zero-Emission Buses (ZEBs), while DASH currently operates sixteen (16) ZEBs with an additional twenty (20) buses funded and in the process of being procured.

DASH also has over \$20 million committed investments in electric bus charging infrastructure in various project stages, including the region's first on-route opportunity charger and a facility expansion for parking and bus depot charging.

DASH ZEBs offer a greater return on investment and offer a larger carbon footprint reduction compared to ACPS buses, as the vehicles are used all day, nearly every day of the year, rather than just during school hours, substantially increasing their effect of carbon reductions in Alexandria.



## Next Steps (for future use)

As there was a decision not to proceed with the original proposal, no immediate next steps were formalized. However, the following are proposed next steps as discussed throughout the planning process, and as identified by DASH. These reflect the stated priorities of the City Council, ACPS Board, and DASH staff. They can serve as guidelines for mobilization should this project be revisited.

The ACPS Board requested a team-based approach, with consideration of a pilot before full phase-in. As originally planned, Phases 2 and 3 would not have been considered unless the pilot was demonstrated to be a success for all three parties (ACPS, DASH, and the City). Should this be pursued in the future, an evaluation method is proposed below:

### Phase 1:

- **School Year 1:** Preparation, outreach, and education of Phase 1 for the upcoming school year
- **School Year 2:** Implementation of Phase 1 pilot
- **End of School Year 2:** Evaluation of the pilot to be conducted between ACPS, DASH, and the City. If successful based on the metrics below, stakeholders would re-engage with assessments for Phase 2, with implementation of Phase 2 no sooner than the Budget Development Guidelines for the next School Year.
- **School Year 3:** Pilot continues

After one full year of operation, and each successive year, the success of the pilot and any added service would be measured based on the following:

- % of affected ACHS students utilizing DASH.
- Assessment of students reporting to class and home on time.
- Satisfaction rating of students using DASH.
- Presence of systemic crush loads or overcrowding.
- Satisfaction rating of school administrators and parents of DASH handling of student incidents.

If a pilot is approved, the following steps need to be taken between ACPS, DASH, and the City before implementation could occur:

1. Request written capacity & cost memos from DASH/City; aligned with ACPS fiscal sensitivity analysis.
2. Draft and ratify DASH/ACPS Student Conduct & Incident Response MOU.
3. Publish bell-time operations policy (delays/closures) with route-level details.
4. Finalize the data-sharing spec; integrate with ACPS attendance workflows and family communications.
5. Identify stop-accessibility quick wins; fund and deliver prior to any pilot.
6. Develop and distribute a family travel training kit (maps, transfer guides, real-time app) 6–8 weeks prior to the pilot.

7. Confirm workforce pathways for ACPS drivers/mechanics (and communications plan).
8. Stand up a time-bound pilot with KPIs; track and report weekly; apply a go/no-go gate at the pilot end.



# Recommendations: Future Data Collection on Student Ridership

Current student ridership numbers which inform capacity estimates were based on a three-day survey conducted by ACPS bus drivers in March 2025. The limited nature of this survey, and student ridership data generally constrains the accuracy of DASH's capacity and financial estimates.

To better understand current student ridership trends and better plan for the transition of these students from ACPS to DASH service, data collection methods should be improved. The following recommendations are presented as options for future student transportation planning by both ACPS and DASH:

- **Automatic Passenger Counters (APCs) on school buses:** APCs are sensors that record boardings and alightings on buses. For fare-free transit systems like DASH which do not have farebox data, APCs are the primary method for counting riders. Installing APCs on yellow school buses would help ACPS better understand where they have unused capacity, as well as provide DASH with more granular data for planning to transition these riders to public transit service. In addition to data collected for ACPS, it is recommended that ridership using WMATA's free student service as funded through grants be collected and evaluated.
- **Periodic Student Ridership Surveys:** Conducting periodic student ridership surveys would be another way to assess student ridership and help quantify the ridership patterns of students who use multiple transportation methods to reach school on different days. If the proposed plan is implemented, these surveys could also be used to garner direct feedback from students and measure their satisfaction with the new system.
- **Develop GTFS feeds for ACPS routes:** General Transit Feed Specification or GTFS is a standardized data format for transit service. GTFS feeds allow service planners to quickly analyze the impacts of different service patterns. Formatting the current ACPS service into GTFS would also allow DASH to assess the impact of the proposed plan on the distance to each bus stop and the time to reach school for each stop. Doing so would help DASH adjust its service to ensure that no student would face a significantly longer commute to school.

# Conclusion & Summary

This whitepaper documents the City of Alexandria, Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS), and the Alexandria Transit Company (DASH) effort to evaluate whether a portion of Alexandria City High School (ACHS) student transportation could be transitioned from yellow school buses to fixed-route public transit service. The initiative originated as a City Council–directed, problem-solving exercise to identify potential redundancies in taxpayer-funded transportation, respond to ongoing school-bus driver and budget pressures, and test whether Alexandria’s fare-free DASH network could provide safe, equitable, and environmentally responsible mobility for eligible high school students where feasible and beneficial.

## OPPORTUNITIES & POTENTIAL BENEFITS

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- Preliminary analysis indicated a Phase 1 pilot could yield at least \$72,000 in annual net savings to the City/ACPS system after accounting for incremental DASH operating costs required to provide sufficient capacity.
- For eligible students, frequent fixed-route service (approximately every 10–15 minutes) would provide a more flexible and resilient commute than a single scheduled school-bus trip, reducing the “missed bus” penalty and potentially improving attendance and reducing truancy.
- Introducing transit to students early fosters a culture of youth who can get around using public transit rather than just driving, teaching independence and better equipping students for transportation access later in life.
- A shift in general-population high school commuting to transit can improve fiscal efficiency and service focus: educators can concentrate on education and student support, while transportation providers can concentrate on safe, reliable transportation operations.
- If - and only if - pilot performance validates assumptions and implementation capacity, later phases could provide materially larger ACPS savings (preliminary estimates up to \$564,000 in Phase 2 and \$940,000 in Phase 3).

## WHY THE INITIATIVE ENDED AND WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE IF REVISITED

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- The initiative ended prematurely. Despite substantial technical work and good-faith effort by the parties to design a safe, workable pilot aligned with Council’s directive, ACPS was averse to moving forward, limiting the parties’ ability to converge on shared facts, risks, mitigations, and decision criteria.
- Decision-making was compressed and, at times, hasty. The School Board’s consideration occurred before the analysis could be fully socialized, assumptions refined, and outstanding operational questions resolved through joint problem-solving, contributing to conclusions reached on incomplete information.
- A future effort must begin with a jointly-owned governance structure (City/ACPS/DASH) that establishes shared objectives, decision rights, and an agreed communications approach early, before positions harden and messaging diverges.

- Avoid “go/no-go” decisions based on sentiment or perceived intent. Establish explicit, data-driven decision gates (pre-pilot readiness, mid-pilot review, post-pilot evaluation) and tie any expansion beyond Phase 1 to validated KPI performance.
- Close process gaps before launch: expectation management (public transit vs. yellow-bus service norms), student/family travel training, safety and behavior protocols, data collection/monitoring, and coordinated public outreach must be designed and resourced in advance.
- Fully account for DASH capacity and capital needs. Any transfer of demand must be paired with realistic operating resources (service, operators, supervision) and, where required, capital investments so student peak loads do not degrade system reliability for existing riders.

### PRACTICAL DIRECTION FOR A FUTURE RESTART

- Reconfirm scope and eligible populations in writing, including explicit carve-outs for exempted populations and trip types that should remain on ACPS service.
- Execute a shared data plan first (origin-destination, loading/capacity, walk access, stop safety, travel times, equity impacts), and update fiscal estimates before any Board action.
- Develop an operational and communications playbook (student onboarding/training, code-of-conduct alignment, incident response coordination, and family support channels) and publish it alongside the pilot proposal.
- Implement a time-bound Phase 1 pilot with clear KPIs, routine reporting, and a jointly scheduled post-pilot decision point prior to any scaling.



# Miscellaneous FAQ's

## **Is it legal to use DASH for high school student transportation in Virginia?**

Yes. Virginia law does not require divisions to provide transportation to high school students except in specific circumstances; partnering with public transit is permissible.

## **Who would still ride yellow buses? Will students with disabilities (specialized transportation needs) and McKinney-Vento students remain on ACPS transportation?**

Yes. DASH is not designed/equipped for specialized transportation; ACPS would continue all SPED/McKinney-Vento service and after-school/field-trip shuttles.

## **Would DASH handle field trips, athletics, and other extracurricular service?**

No. Those remain ACPS responsibilities.

## **How many ACHS students currently ride ACPS school buses daily?**

~1,700 students (West End & Arlandria are the most common origins).

## **What share of those riders live near DASH service today?**

About 95% of current ACPS bus riders live within a ¼-mile walk of an existing DASH route.

## **Which DASH lines directly serve ACHS?**

Lines 31 and 36A/B provide direct connections to ACHS; Line 35 serves the West End with connections. (Slides show these as the focus of the Phase-1 analysis).

## **How many bus-riding students currently have a direct, one-seat DASH trip to ACHS?**

About 31%.

## **When could DASH add the extra peak capacity for students?**

No earlier than SY 2026–2027 (additional peak buses/operators would be needed to handle crowding).

## **Is a phased implementation anticipated?**

The workplan target was: analysis in 2025, budget actions FY26, and Pilot service improvements beginning August 2026 (aligned to SY 2026–2027). However, there was a joint decision to halt implementation.

## **Would ACPS save money by shifting some HS trips to DASH?**

Potentially, yes - the concept was to free some ACPS operating dollars by moving part of HS daily commuting to DASH; ACPS-specific savings must be quantified by ACPS (slides explicitly assign ACPS to identify its savings). City/DASH would have its own operating/capital costs to absorb additional student demand.

## **Could the City/DASH benefit budgetarily?**

Potentially, yes - through ridership increases that could improve eligibility for some regional transit funds; however, DASH would also incur ramp-up costs (operators, service frequency, and possibly buses).

**What safety training and standards does DASH use?**

CDL operators (Passenger & Air Brake endorsements), SMITH System defensive driving, emergency response, de-escalation, customer service, background checks, and ongoing drug/alcohol testing.

**How are vehicles monitored and incidents handled?**

Preventive maintenance, onboard cameras, real-time GPS, APD coordination, and supervisor dispatch for safety/security concerns; \$20M injury liability per occurrence; FTA safety compliance with triennial audits.

**Is there a rider Code of Conduct and enforcement?**

Yes. Zero-tolerance for violence/harassment/disruptive behavior; incidents investigated with action taken.

**How are equity and access being addressed?**

The memo commits to minimizing excessive walk times/transfers and considering targeted solutions (e.g., route tweaks or continued ACPS service) so specific students aren't disadvantaged.

**How would families/students get information and support?**

Plans would have been developed for a full communications & outreach plan for SY 2025–2026 (ahead of a 2026–2027 launch): town halls, “Know Your Route” workshops, student ride-alongs, a dedicated website, social posts, school-based pop-ups, and printed guides/starter kits.

**Will DASH real-time info integrate with ACPS systems (e.g., ParentSquare)?**

Not yet. DASH has robust real-time tools, but no direct ParentSquare integration is in place; exploring integration/clear comms protocols would have been recommended.

**What's the agreed evaluation plan and decision metrics?**

Defined evaluation across demand, cost, capacity/infrastructure, safety/regulatory, stakeholder engagement, and decision metrics (cost efficiency, service quality, customer satisfaction, scalability), with a timeline pointing to August 2026 service changes if approved.

**Does DASH advance environmental goals?**

Yes. DASH has a large hybrid/electric fleet and electrification is ongoing (funding dependent), supporting City climate goals by reducing car and school-bus VMT if mode shift occurs.





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