

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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MEMORANDUM

TO: TPB Members and Stakeholders
FROM: John Swanson, Principal Transportation Planner
SUBJECT: RTPP: Comments, responses and potential changes
DATE: December 5, 2013

On November 21, TPB staff released the latest version of the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP), which included Ron Kirby's most recent revisions and edits. That document can be found at www.mwcog.org/transportation/priorities/files/RTPP_Draft_112113.pdf.

As a tribute to Ron, we want to move this plan toward approval as quickly as possible. But we also recognize that stakeholders may have continuing concerns that need to be addressed in the document. Therefore we are currently engaged in some intensive outreach. That process includes a number of individual discussions and meetings, as well as a special work session on Thursday, December 5, which will provide an opportunity for group discussion about how the document might be revised to adequately respond to comments and build consensus for approval.

We intend to release a newly revised draft of the RTPP on Thursday, December 12, for a 30-day public comment period. Immediately prior to the December 18 TPB meeting, we will hold a session to brief Board members on the latest draft. We are planning to bring a final draft to the Board as an action item in January.

In recent days, we have re-examined earlier comments and have spoken with a number of stakeholders about potential enhancements. The bullet points below describe a number of changes that we propose to make for the draft that will be released on December 12.

COMMENTS, RESPONSES AND POTENTIAL ENHANCEMENTS

1. Be more visionary and less constrained

Comment Received:

- The RTPP should be less constrained by funding and political constraints.

Current Response:

- The strategies in the RTPP were specifically designed to be "within reach." They are politically and financially feasible. Even the Plan's boldest ideas – particularly the combined toll/BRT network – were intended to make sense financially.

Proposed Enhancements:

- The Long-Term Strategies (and other sections of the document) will be enhanced to emphasize that the plan’s recognition of political and financial realities is, in fact, the source of its vision and power. Instead of the “Old Bold” approaches of the last century, we are calling for a “New Bold” – an approach that says we can respond to future challenges *smartly*. This means we need to make better use of existing infrastructure and make wise land-use decisions. We need to emphasize Activity Centers and focus on expanding the array of non-motorized transportation options in these places – which are often small-scale improvements. We need to acknowledge that in many cases, high-quality bus services can be cheaper, more extensive, and just as convenient as rail transit. And if we are going to build new road lanes, toll financing should be strongly considered.

2. Provide more specificity regarding implementation

Comment Received:

- Provide more information about how the priorities in the Plan will be implemented or made a reality.

Current Response:

- Chapter 5 describes the CLRP process in greater detail and notes that the 2014 CLRP “Call for Projects” asks implementing agencies to consider the RTPP strategies when making project submissions for the update.
- Chapter 5 now more explicitly calls for funding for Metro maintenance and core capacity improvements identified in *Momentum*.

Proposed Enhancements:

- We will make it clear that the top implementation action is funding for transit and road maintenance, including:
 - Funding for Metro maintenance and core capacity improvements, including eight-car trains and core station improvements.
 - Continued high priority on funding for highway maintenance.
- We will provide greater thematic cohesion to the three priority categories in Chapter 5 and more information regarding specific strategies. This added clarity will suggest what implementation in the CLRP might look like.
- In Chapter 5, we will emphasize the importance of the RTPP as an educational tool, which is designed to influence decision-making and planning processes throughout the region. The RTPP should support implementation from the bottom-up, by encouraging TPB members to think regionally and act locally. It will provide a common vocabulary for people throughout the region to use in promoting projects that increase transportation choices, promote integration among modes and encourage transportation/land-use coordination.

3. Integrate *Region Forward*

Comments Received:

- More explicitly acknowledge *Region Forward* as foundational for the RTPP.

- Identify Activity Centers as an underlying theme of the RTPP (i.e., not just a discrete component).
- Use *Region Forward* targets to evaluate the RTPP strategies.

Current Response:

- A new “call-out” box in Chapter 1 describes both *Region Forward* and *Economy Forward*, and explains that the RTPP is designed to support and advance the guidance provided by *Region Forward*.
- A new “call-out” box in the description for Goal 2 (in Chapter 2) features the 2013 updated Activity Centers map and describes the process by which it was updated.
- The description of Long-Term Strategy 2 (Concentrated Growth with More Transit Capacity) discusses at great length the importance of Activity Centers and how they should shape development patterns and transportation investments.

Proposed Enhancements:

- The document will more explicitly reference *Region Forward*, including in the executive summary and in Chapter 5. Also it will include references to *Region Forward* in places where land use and activity centers are mentioned, e.g., Goal 2 (Chapter 2).
- The overarching role of Activity Centers will be clarified. For example, we will make sure the importance of Activity Centers is emphasized in long-term strategies (Chapter 3) and in portions of Chapter 5 that discuss long-term strategies.
- The strategies in the RTPP are not specific enough to be measurable by *Region Forward* targets and this may need to be better explained in the document. However, we can revise the document to include key *Region Forward* targets (e.g., those listed in the *Region Forward* Coalition letter of November 8) and we can make the case that the RTPP strategies have been chosen because they will collectively and individually move the region toward achievement of those targets. The draft will also be revised to describe performance-based planning requirements that were called for in MAP-21, the 2012 federal transportation reauthorization legislation.

4. Highlight transit maintenance and core capacity

Comments Received:

- Specify categories of improvements and costs associated with Momentum.

Current Response:

- New “call-out” boxes in Chapter 3 describe in greater detail both *Metro Forward* and *Momentum*. The former is addressed in Ongoing Strategy 1 (Transit Maintenance) and the latter is addressed in Long-Term Strategy 2 (Concentrated Growth with More Transit Capacity).
- Chapter 5 now calls specific attention to the improvements spelled out in *Momentum* as having the potential to be added to the CLRP as part of the 2014 update.

Proposed Enhancements:

- The priority categories in Chapter 5 will be enhanced to convey a greater sense of urgency regarding these needs.

- Long-Term Strategies in Chapter 3 will be revised to create a discrete strategy for core capacity improvements (i.e., those associated with Metro 2025 in Momentum).

5. Be less prescriptive regarding toll lanes & bus rapid transit

Comments Received:

- The RTPP should not preclude the tolling of existing roadway capacity.
- The RTPP should call for BRT on urban arterials, in addition to limited-access highways.

Current Response:

- The revised draft explains that MAP-21 placed restrictions on tolling existing capacity. Because the RTPP is designed to encourage the identification of projects that could be included in the CLRP in the short-term, the RTPP only calls for tolls on new capacity.
- The RTPP does not specifically preclude BRT on non-limited access roads. It emphasizes that combining priced lanes with BRT provides a unique opportunity to operate buses in free-flowing travel lanes *and* raise funds to pay for operation.

Proposed Enhancements:

- For tolling, we will include language supporting tolling on existing capacity in places where state and local decision makers deem it to be appropriate and where federal permission is obtained.
- For BRT, we will emphasize that high-quality bus services can be pursued on many different types of roads. Note the importance of Bus Priority Treatments as a strategy.

6. Call for greater accessibility for low-income populations and people with disabilities

Comments Received:

- Projects that would increase accessibility should be emphasized in all strategies.
- Ongoing Strategy 5 (Ensure Accessibility for Persons with Disability) should also apply to individuals with limited incomes and persons with limited English proficiency.
- Accessibility should not be relegated to the “third tier” priority based on the rankings from a public opinion survey

Current Response:

- Many of the strategies in the RTPP promote reduced auto-dependency, more concentrated land-use, and greater transportation choice. These outcomes greatly benefit traditionally disadvantaged groups.
- Some of the strategies in the current draft of the RTPP contain references to types of projects that address accessibility. Descriptions of the following strategies contain elements that improve accessibility for all users:
 - Near-Term Strategy 1 – Improve Access to Transit Stops and Stations
 - Near-Term Strategy 5 – Expand Pedestrian Infrastructure
 - Ongoing Strategy 5 – Ensure Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities
- Goal 1 includes all disadvantaged groups.

Proposed Enhancements:

- We will revise Chapter 5 to clarify the fact that accessibility is an overarching principle that underlies transportation decision making. We will make it clear that it is not a “third tier” priority.
- We will revise the document to show that the concerns of low-income communities are reflected in the following portions of the document:
 - Goal 1 (Chapter 2) will state that transportation -- mobility and accessibility – should be affordable for everyone. (We may reference or use language from TPB Vision, which called for affordability.)
 - We will ensure that the long-term strategies on land use (Chapter 3) emphasize the opportunities offered by Activity Centers on the eastern side of the region, which are located near existing transit stations. Consistent with past COG and TPB policies, the document will call for these places to be developed to their full potential, including a healthy job base and affordable housing.
- We will expand Ongoing Strategy 5 (currently focused only on people with disabilities) to encompass a broader definition of accessibility. Specifically, the strategy will address the need to keep the system affordable for all populations and to promote accessibility for people with limited English proficiency (LEP).

7. Specify commuter rail as a regional priority

Comment Received:

- The RTPP should emphasize or give greater weight to commuter rail as a regional transportation priority.

Current Response:

- In Chapter 2, the description of Goal 6 has been amended to include a paragraph describing the need to alleviate the bottleneck for commuter rail that the Long Bridge presents.
- Commuter rail is included among the transit modes included in *Ongoing Strategy 1 – Transit Maintenance*.
- *Long-Term Strategy 2* identifies commuter rail as “desperately” in need of basic capital improvements and “capacity improvements in key locations, especially the region core.”

Proposed Enhancements:

- We will ensure that the document emphasizes the important role that commuter rail does and can realistically play in the region.
- We will make sure that the section on long-term strategies (Chapter 3) that calls for increased capacity on the existing transit system also includes explicit references to improvements that will ensure commuter rail can accommodate new ridership. As an example of this kind of enhanced capacity we will include a reference to the Long Bridge project.

8. Call for the use of technology to manage congestion, deal with incidents and communicate with the public

Comment Received:

- Ensure that the RTPP adequately addresses incident response and other management techniques designed to deal with both recurring and non-recurring congestion.

Current Response:

- The draft emphasizes these issues in Goal 4 (in Chapter 1) and in Ongoing Strategy 4 (in Chapter 3).

Proposed Enhancements:

- As an overarching principle, Chapter 5 will more explicitly emphasize the importance of management and operations.

NEXT STEPS

As described above, we are on a “fast track” to respond to comments already received and release a new document. Therefore, we are asking that if stakeholders have any additional feedback, they provide that input by noon on Monday, December 9.

Please contact me, John Swanson, with any questions or comments. I can be reached at 202-962-3295 or jswanson@mwkog.org.