

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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Item 7

M E M O R A N D U M

March 16, 2011

TO: Transportation Planning Board

FROM: Ronald F. Kirby
Director of Transportation Planning

SUBJECT: Review of Comments Received and Recommended Responses on Project Submissions for the Air Quality Conformity Assessment for the 2011 Financially Constrained Long Range Transportation Plan (CLRP)

Background

At the February 16 meeting, the Board was briefed on the major project changes submitted for inclusion in the air quality conformity assessment for the 2011 CLRP. These project submissions were released for public comment and agency review at a public meeting on February 10, 2011. Announcements of the public comment period were published in the *Washington Post* (attached), the *AFRO American Newspaper* (attached), and the *EL PREGONERO* newspaper. The public comment period closed on March 12.

Public comments submitted by individuals, organizations, and businesses were posted as they were received on the TPB web site at

<http://www.mwcog.org/transportation/public/comments.asp>.

This memorandum provides recommended responses to comments received.

The Board will be briefed on the comments received and recommended responses, and asked to approve project submissions for inclusion in the air quality conformity assessment for the 2011 CLRP.

Comments and Responses

The comments received and recommended responses are summarized below:

A. The Proposed I-95 HOV/HOT Lane Project and Seminary Road Ramp Project in Virginia

1. **Comments:** 273 support the I-95 HOV/HOT Lanes project and Seminary Road Ramp project as amendments to the 2010 CLRP and 165 also support the inclusion of the projects in the 2011 CLRP because they will have a number of positive impacts including:
 - addressing significant congestion in the corridor by reducing travel time
 - offering drivers more choices and improved traffic flow by extending the HOV lanes to Stafford County and adding more capacity to the existing HOV lanes
 - by linking the I-95 HOV/HOT lanes to the I-495 HOT lanes, currently under construction, creating a network of HOV/HOT lanes to provide access for transit and carpoolers to more employment centers such as Tysons Corner
 - transit and carpoolers continuing to enjoy the HOV facility toll free with enhanced enforcement of violators and increased incident response to improve safety

Comments: Two comments oppose the I-95 HOV/HOT Lanes project: At a time when gasoline prices are increasing every single day, it makes no sense to invest our scarce transportation dollars in single occupancy vehicles. We call for a full Environmental Impact Statement to consider the full range of alternatives including both termini that have been proposed and independent HOV, Bus and VRE alternatives with links to better land use. We should not be making multi-billion dollar decisions or turn over public land to private companies for 75 years without a thorough understanding of the alternatives, costs/benefits and impacts.

Response: The TPB has received and considered these comments from individuals, the Greater Washington Board of Trade, multiple chambers of commerce, and private businesses and believes that on balance these projects are beneficial and should move forward.

B. The Proposed Extension of the I-66 HOV and General Purpose Lanes between US 29 in Gainesville and Rte. 15 in Prince William County

2. **Comment:** More focus should be put into improvements of the I-66 interchanges at Route 243/Nutley Rd, Route 28, and Route 29(Centreville) before adding more lanes to I-66 and fixing the route 15 interchange in Haymarket. We recommend that I-66 from Gainesville to Haymarket be limited to one new HOV lane instead of both an HOV and General Purpose lane, because the GP lane will undermine the HOV.

Response: This project continues the existing cross-section and removes a bottleneck on I-66 at Gainesville. I-66 is one of the most heavily traveled facilities in Northern Virginia and in the

region as well. VDOT has implemented and continues to develop plans and projects for further improving mobility and reducing congestion along the facility. These include: plans to build a new ramp from I-66 HOV lanes to the Vienna Metro station in the vicinity of the Rte. 243 interchange; adding capacity to Rte. 28 in the vicinity of I-66; an Active Traffic Management System to utilize available capacity more efficiently by addressing incidents quickly and effectively; and ongoing survey and conceptual studies for some improvements at the signalized intersection of Rte. 28 and EB I-66 entry ramp. Additionally VDOT is undertaking two studies of I-66 (one between the Beltway and US 15, the other between the Beltway and the Potomac River) to identify operational and transit improvements that can provide increased mobility and reduce congestion without adding lanes. Initial recommendations from these two studies are expected to be available by late 2012.

C. The Proposed Widening of US 1 (Telegraph Rd. to VA 235 North)

3. **Comment:** The Southeast Fairfax Development Corporation supports the widening of US 1 and asks that several elements be accommodated in the project design, including: accommodations for high capacity transit, access and accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians, easy access to residential and commercial areas, and screening and landscaping to improve appearance.

Response: Fairfax County with assistance from FHWA and VDOT is working on the preliminary engineering and environmental assessment for improvements along this stretch of US 1. This work will be followed by project design which will consider, among other things, the provision of space for mass transit, ensuring bike and pedestrian accessibility, and access to residential and commercial areas. Additionally provision of screening and landscaping for this project will be part of VDOT's practice of providing context sensitive solutions in all of its designs.

D. The I-270 Corridor Highway Expansion in Maryland

4. **Comments:** The Action Committee for Transit and Montgomery County Sierra Club state a number of objections to the widening of I-270, including: it is not a good investment because doing so would induce demand and fail to reduce congestion; funds would be better used to implement transit improvements in the I-270 corridor; it would preclude the possible extension of Metro's Red Line to Germantown; and an all-transit alternative for the corridor should be studied.

Response: This project has been jointly managed by the Maryland State Highway Administration and Maryland Transit Administration since 1994. The project team used a focus group approach and expert land use panel to develop the goals of the project and initial alternatives to be considered. The Action Committee for Transit (ACT) was an active participant of the focus group. The initial alternatives considered and studied included TSM/TDM options, highway alternatives, and transit alternatives.

The transit only alternatives considered during this stage of the study included heavy rail north of Shady Grove, as well as light rail and bus rapid transit options. The study results have shown that no single transportation strategy alone will meet the projected travel demand in the corridor. It is a federal requirement under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) that major capital projects be included in the region's CLRP before completing the NEPA process. For the CLRP a project placeholder for an I-270 improvement has been specified since 2003 with an assumed completion date of 2030. The project team then developed several "combination alternatives" that included transit investment (the Corridor Cities Transitway as either light rail or bus rapid transit) and highway investment (general purpose, HOV, or a combination of these on I-270 and US 15).

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) is currently focusing on building the transit component first and is in the process of separating the transit and highway components of the Multi-Modal Study, so that CCT can move forward independently of the highway alternatives. Until this happens, federal requirements dictate that the entire project must remain in the CLRP or the transit project cannot move forward. Due to the economic downturn, project planning of the highway improvement portion of the study has been placed on hold. Since the June 2009 Public Hearings, the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) completed additional alignment studies and held a public hearing in December 2010.

5. **Comment:** The MTA's MARC Growth and Investment Plan is not currently funded in the CLRP.

Response: MDOT has included \$679 million in the CLRP for MARC projects from the MARC Growth and Investment Plan and has entered them into the TPB database. However, projects included in the CLRP project lists are new facilities or new services, not improvements to existing service. Improvements to MARC service as well as improvements to Metro and other commuter rail services are accounted for in the financial analysis for the CLRP, and in the travel demand modeling process that the TPB uses to make its air quality conformity determination, but are not included in the CLRP major improvements maps or listings.

6. **Comments:** The Montgomery County Sierra Club raises objections to the widening of I-270, including: it will facilitate imbalanced development in the region, leading to long commutes, inducing sprawl, encouraging driving, and adding to congestion. It also inquires about the Montgomery County Council's request for only two reversible lanes on I-270.

Response: See 4 and 5 above. MDOT supports the CCT moving forward and project planning for the highway portion is officially on hold. The State Highway Administration is in the process of analyzing the reversible lane request from Montgomery County Council. A letter will be sent to the council with the findings in Spring 2011.

E. The 2011 CLRP Updates Continue to Favor Roads Over Transit in Maryland

7. **Comment:** Montgomery County Sierra Club is concerned that the 2011 CLRP updates continue to favor roads over transit in Maryland.

Response: The long range transportation plan for the region contains a mix of numerous transit, highway, freight, bicycle and pedestrian improvements over a 40 year period. This set of transportation facilities is necessary in order to provide a range of mobility and accessibility choices and to serve all of the different travel needs throughout the region. In Maryland, the CLRP includes two major and very important transit improvements: the Purple Line and the Corridor Cities Transitway. According to the comprehensive financial plan prepared for the 2010 CLRP, of all transportation expenditures forecast over the next 40 years 17 percent will be for transit expansion while 13 percent will be for highway expansion.

The Washington Post

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2011

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR THE WASHINGTON REGION'S PROPOSED SUBMISSIONS FOR THE 2011 UPDATE TO THE CONSTRAINED LONG-RANGE PLAN (CLRP), AND AIR QUALITY CONFORMITY ANALYSIS

The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) will initiate a 30-day public comment period for the proposed submissions for the 2011 update to the Constrained Long-Range Plan (CLRP), including an air quality conformity analysis, on February 10. This public comment period will extend through Saturday March 12, 2011. The TPB is scheduled to approve these submissions at its March 16, 2011 meeting. Members of the public are invited to review these draft documents on the COG website, www.mwcog.org/transportation/. These materials may also be reviewed at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), 777 N. Capitol St. NE, Washington, DC 20002.

The CLRP shows the road, bridge, high-occupancy vehicle (HOV), transit, bicycle and pedestrian projects funded through the year 2040. The air quality conformity analysis assesses the plan amendments and program with respect to the air quality requirements under the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments.

Members of the public are invited to submit comments on the draft documents on-line at www.mwcog.org/tbpubliccomment/. Written comments can also be mailed to TPB Chair Muriel Bowser, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), 777 N. Capitol St. NE, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20002.

For additional information or for special assistance, please call (202) 962-3311 or (202) 962-3213 (TDD).

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