

REPORT

TPB Citizens Advisory Committee

November 12, 2009

Farrell Keough, CAC Chair

The CAC's meeting on November 12 included a briefing on the Greater Washington 2050 initiative of the Council of Governments and a briefing on the TPB's proposal to conduct a study on the public acceptability of road-use pricing. The Committee also discussed the TPB staff response to the CAC's recommendations regarding development of a regional transportation priorities plan.

Briefing on the Greater Washington 2050 Initiative

John Mataya of COG staff gave a presentation to the CAC on the latest developments with the Greater Washington 2050 Initiative led by COG, including the publication of a report called "Region Forward." He explained that this report outlines a vision for the National Capital Region in the 21st Century, and contains regional goals in the categories of land use, transportation, environmental, climate & energy, economic, housing, health & human services, education, and public safety. He told the Committee about how COG planned to communicate and build support for the initiative through an outreach effort, assist area governments in achieving the goals with a toolbox of strategies, and gauge regional progress toward the goals along with public attitudes about them at regular intervals. He also summarized the results of an initial survey of public attitudes about challenges facing the region and the need for a fresh approach to those challenges.

CAC members were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the Greater Washington 2050 report circulated at the meeting, both in written form and through a brief discussion. Members particularly interested in how the Greater Washington 2050 initiative meshes with TPB planning efforts, including the CLRP, the Scenario Study, and regional emergency preparedness plans. Some questioned some of the underlying figures and assumptions of the initiative, particularly regarding regional growth in population and VMT.

Other comments focused on ways to make the report more accessible to the general public, including better explanation of maps and other visuals, and the possibility of an appendix with definitions of various terms used that may not be familiar to the layman reader. Members also suggested ways in which to strengthen the approach of the initiative, including dealing more with local budgeting commitments to regional efforts and regionally significant projects, and the idea of developing a scoring system by which projects and policies could be evaluated against the regional vision and goals. In particular, one member called for transportation targets that are more quantifiable so that progress toward goals could be more easily assessed.

In general, members praised the work that has gone in to the Greater Washington 2050 initiative to this point and said that it represented progress in reaching a unified vision for the region.

Briefing on the TPB Proposal for a Study on the Public Acceptability of Road-Use Pricing

John Swanson of COG/TPB Staff briefed the Committee on TPB approval of an application for federal funds to study public acceptability of road-use pricing. He talked about the motivation behind the proposal, including encouragement from FHWA, and the structure that the study would take if funded. He also briefly summarized the discussion at the October 21 TPB meeting, noting that while there certainly is not unanimous support for the idea of a road-use pricing system (such as a VMT charge), most members of the Board welcomed the opportunity to further study the possibilities and the public appetite for additional or alternative methods of raising revenue for transportation.

CAC members raised some issues about the proposal, including concerns about possible political bias of the study if think-tank involvement is limited to the Brookings Institution. Members proposed other possible participants, and staff noted that there would be an expert panel guiding the study that would be made up of diverse interests and viewpoints. Members also sought to clarify which pricing alternatives would be included in the study.

There was also a brief discussion about the merits of gauging public opinions on transportation issues, with one member asserting that it is not worthwhile to analyze or solicit opinion from the general public on transportation matters because they are fed so much misinformation by the energy and automobile industries. Another member thought that the study would be useful because transportation planners and elected officials don't want to be putting a lot of effort and investment in something that will just be killed by negative opinion at a later stage.

Discussion of the TPB Staff Response to the CAC Recommendations “Moving Forward With the Development of a Regional Transportation Plan”

Chairman Keogh led a discussion about the staff response to the CAC recommendations, and noted initially that the version of the staff response memo included in the TPB mailout was substantially different than the one provided to the Technical Committee. The memo outlined a three-step approach to address the CAC's recommendations, beginning with development of a consolidated list of unfunded transportation projects and priorities that have been identified at the regional, state and local levels, to provide better context for a discussion of the universe of unfunded projects in the region. A regional forum would then be held in Spring 2010 to provide information about ongoing regional and unconstrained planning efforts and determine the need and desire among key stakeholders for any additional regional priority planning activities. The third step would be development of an enhanced work plan for long-range planning activities at the TPB that more explicitly integrates CLRP development, CLRP outreach, and scenario planning activities.

Several members felt that although the memo did not commit to everything the CAC had wanted, particularly the development of an unconstrained priorities plan, it did represent a significant step forward in the CAC's efforts to integrate the scenario study activities with CLRP development

and encourage regional-level planning. Some expressed concerns, however, that the steps outlined in the memo would still lead to what would just be a collection of projects with no regional perspective, while what the CAC called for is a prioritized regional plan that is not simply a wish list.

Ron Kirby noted that the intent of holding a regional forum on the issue would be to determine the feasibility and appetite among key stakeholders of actually engaging in such an effort, and while the staff response does not preclude the eventual development of a regional priorities plan or some other unconstrained planning element, it cannot commit to it either without buy-in from key stakeholders.

CAC members also expressed some frustration that a frequent refrain is that the key issue is the lack of funding for transportation in the region, regardless of the existence of an unfunded regional priorities plan. One member said that even if there is no regional unfunded priorities plan, it should be clear what the priorities of each implementing agency are in the event that more money becomes available. The suggestion was again made that a system of scoring proposed projects against a set of regional criteria or a regional preferred scenario would be helpful, although some expressed skepticism that such a process would be politically palatable. It was noted that staff analysis of the performance of the CLRP can be (and to a certain extent, already is) compared against regional scenarios.

There was a general discussion of the combination “bottom-up” and “top-down” process by which transportation project development takes place in the region, and CAC members expressed understanding and appreciation of that fact, but a desire to make the top-down part more robust so that a regional perspective is better reflected in the CLRP and a regional message on transportation is conveyed to the public.

Other Business

- Ron Kirby, Director of Transportation Planning, briefed the committee on the upcoming TPB agenda, and in particular clarified that the item pertaining to the Union Station Intermodal Transportation Center is largely an accounting matter and not a reflection of a reduced commitment to the project by DDOT.
- Staff noted that a summary of the 2010 CLRP Outreach Planning Session held in place of the regular CAC meeting in October was distributed to the TPB and posted on the Web.
- Staff reported briefly on the session of the TPB’s Community Leadership Institute held on October 29 and 31, describing the audience and some new elements of the curriculum, and noting that the session was again well-received. Two members of the CAC attended the CLI, and one commented on the experience.
- Staff updated the Committee on progress in planning for the December and January CAC meetings. The December meeting will be held in Alexandria and feature speakers on the federal transportation policy picture and on high speed rail initiatives. The January meeting will be at the COG offices as usual, but will be a special meeting focusing on issues related to the transportation impacts of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) in the Washington Region.

ATTENDANCE

CAC Meeting, November 12, 2009

Members in Attendance

1. Farrell Keough, MD, Chair
2. Maureen Budetti, VA
3. Harold Foster, DC
4. Bill Klenke, MD
5. Larry Martin, DC
6. Allen Muchnick, VA
7. Gail Parker, VA
8. Emmet Tydings, MD
9. Shirley Williams, DC

Members Not in Attendance

1. Roland Gunn, VA
2. Bernard Hill, DC
3. Jim Larsen, VA
4. Rich Parsons, MD
5. Trudy Reeves, DC
6. Lynn Shanton, MD

Staff/Others

Ron Kirby, COG/DTP
John Swanson, COG/DTP
Darren Smith, COG/DTP
Deb Bilek, COG/DTP
John Mataya, COG
Todd Helton, interested citizen