

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



March 9, 2005

Paul DesJardins
Chief of Housing and Planning
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street, Ste 300
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Mr. DesJardins,

The District of Columbia Office of Planning, the Executive's representative to the MPDC, has reviewed the proposed Round 7.0 forecasts prepared by the Forecasting Sub-committee and forwarded by the Planning Directors to the Metropolitan Development Policy Committee for approval

The projections are alarming. The Round 6a Cooperative Forecasts predicted an imbalanced, but presumably manageable, jobs housing distribution that grew about 3% worse between 1995 and 2010 from 1.63 to 1.69 jobs per household. Round 7 presents an even worsening gap **growing 15%** from a relatively balanced 1.58 jobs per household in 1995 to **1.75** by 2030.

According to COG staff, experts have estimated that a jobs-housing ratio of 1.6 is the upper limit of that which can be supported within the region itself. Beyond that threshold, workers must commute into the region from homes outside in order to fill the available jobs.

This forecast has serious implications for the regional policies this committee has advocated:

1. **Mitigating traffic congestion:** The majority of imported workers will drive from their remote homes to the dispersed job opportunities in the region. This will add additional, primarily single occupancy, vehicles to our already congested roadways and bring commuters from outside our region to our neighborhood streets.
2. **Protecting air quality and the environment:** The long drives that in-commuters will need to take to access the jobs we are creating will result in huge increases in VMTs in the region and significant additional contributions to regional VOCs and NoX emissions that already press the limits of air quality conformity. The regional mobility and accessibility study found that creating housing to accommodate these in-commuters had the single largest effect on reducing the region's VMT's and other emissions;
3. **Providing for affordable housing:** Housing, already expensive in the region, will grow even more expensive as workers out strip available housing resources. Efforts to develop affordable housing policies may be futile as demand far out paces supply.

4. **Curbing urban sprawl:** As workers find fewer housing options in the DC region, rural communities in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Central Virginia, and Southern Maryland will grow rapidly to meet the displaced demand. Thousands of acres of farms, woodlands, and open space will disappear.

If regional policies for sustainable transportation, adequate air quality, and provision of affordable housing are ever to be achieved, the projections must not be accepted as “a given,” but rather as the first step in a dialogue on how to improve the regional jobs-housing balance. Local jurisdictions must use the projections as an indicator of where adjustments to their planning policies are needed. In the case of the core cities and inner suburbs, this means identifying locations for additional housing to accommodate future workers.

Projections that show both robust job growth and housing “buildout” are unrealistic and unsustainable. In fact, this outcome runs counter to metropolitan planning objectives and conflicts with COG’s very mission to promote sound regional planning.

The District of Columbia regrettably must vote against approval of the Round 7.0 Cooperative Forecasts. While the forecasts provide a useful starting point for a dialogue about regional growth, we believe that additional iterations are needed to bring the region’s jobs and housing closer into alignment. We urge the other jurisdictions on the MDPC to join us in this vote, with the aim of achieving more balanced, sustainable, and responsible growth across the region.

Sincerely,

Karina Ricks for
Ellen McCarthy, Interim Director