Honorable Patrick Wojahn, Chair

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

777 North Capitol Street, NE

Washington, D.C. 20002

Dear Chair Wojahn:

Thank you for providing an opportunity to the Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee (MWAQC) to comment on the draft Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP).

MWAQC is a Clean Air Act mandated policy body for addressing air quality issues in the Washington DC-MD-VA metropolitan region. The committee is responsible for the development and adoption of air quality improvement strategies and State Implementation Plans (SIP) for the region. Like in many urban areas, the transportation sector has a significant contribution to the region’s air pollution and green house gas (GHG) emissions and. The region’s SIPs include a series of commitments to reduce air emissions from transportation and other sectors.

MWAQC commends the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) for its multi-year effort to develop the plan and proactively engage stakeholders. We are pleased the effort included a focus on enhancing environmental quality and protecting natural resources. TPB’s RTTP demonstrates a thoughtful assessment of challenges facing the region’s transportation sector going forward and careful identification of strategies and priorities for solving these challenges.

MWAQC believes that establishing regional transportation priorities and using them as a guide for development of programs and projects for future inclusion in the region’s Constrained Long-Range Plan (CLRP) will improve the efficiency and function of the region’s transportation system and provide a path forward for a sustainable transportation approach. We hope TPB will move to adopt the plan and will begin taking steps to implement the plan in early 2014.

However, in light of the continued challenges faced by the Washington metropolitan region for achieving the air quality goals for ground-level ozone and the regional GHG goals, MWAQC is concerned that the TPB’s 2013 CLRP Performance Analysis shows that the vehicle miles travelled (VMT) and GHG emissions from the transportation sector have been increasing and are expected to continue to increase in the future, due in large part to anticipated population and economic growth in the region.

MWAQC hopes that implementation of the RTPP process will lead to a more concerted effort to address air pollution and GHG emissions from the transportation sector and to the development of additional strategies and measures to reduce on-road mobile air emissions. MWAQC also hopes that the transportation sector will take a holistic view of its overall impact on emissions in the region, including related non-road sector contributions, such as from commuter rail operations, commercial aviation and construction. The sector can also begin to further examine its ability to integrate renewable energy technologies and continue to support new clean alternative fueling infrastructure. Such additional focus will also contribute to achieving the environmental goals outlined by Region Forward.

One area of strong MWAQC support is the plan’s focus on transit-oriented development and the long-term strategies to accommodate future growth and enhance circulation within Regional Activity Centers. These efforts will help alleviate traffic congestion and reduce VMT growth, resulting in improved air quality and lower GHG emissions, which are objectives of the Region Forward vision. In particular, there should be more emphasis on reducing growth in VMT. While emissions of precursors of ozone and fine particles such as, volatile organic compounds (VOC), nitrogen oxides (NOx), fine particulate matter (PM2.5), nitrogen oxides (NOx), and sulfur dioxide (SO2) have been on the decline, yet strategies and measures to achieve further reductions may be needed to meet current and potentially more stringent future ozone and fine particle standards.

MWAQC agrees with the need to continue funding for the metro system to improve access, maintenance and reliability. A robust public transit system will be critical to reducing air pollution and GHG emissions while accommodating regional population growth.

MWAQC supports the plan’s multimodal approach, including strategies to promote electric vehicles and commute alternatives, to expand pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, to develop the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, and to introduce express toll lanes in the region. Initiatives promoting a variety of transportation options will further contribute to reducing automobile dependency and cutting air pollution and GHG emissions in the region. MWAQC suggests promoting alternative fueled vehicles, such as compressed natural gas buses, in addition to hybrids and electric vehicles, as these vehicles can further reduce emissions.

MWAQC applauds the TPB’s efforts in developing the RTPP, and believes that it will be a great step forward for the region. The plan provides a framework for accommodating future growth and will continue the region’s leadership in the land use-transportation nexus.

MWAQC acknowledges that achieving the goals outlined in the plan will be a long term process involving many stakeholders. MWAQC would like to be a partner in this regional conversation and in the efforts to make the plan a success. In order to realize the RTPP goals, it will be critical to establish a framework to assist state and local governments to develop projects and take actions that are responsive to and advance the priorities identified in the plan, as well as to foster the necessary investments for regional and local projects. The committee would like to offer its assistance in bringing stakeholders to the table and encouraging local leaders to take action on the region’s priorities, such as providing support for funding of the Metro 2025 plan.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the draft Regional Transportation Priorities Plan. We look forward to working together to advance our common goals for a more sustainable future for our region. Sincerely, Chair MWAQC