

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 300, Washington, D.C. 20002-4290 (202) 962-3310 Fax: (202) 962-3202

MEMORANDUM

Date: February 14, 2013

To: National Capital Region
Transportation Planning Board

From: Ronald F. Kirby
Director, Department of
Transportation Planning

Re: TPB Staff Comments on 2012 End-of-Year Report by the
TPB Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) on
The Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP)

At the January 23, 2013 TPB meeting, Ms. Tina Slater, the 2012 Chair of the CAC, presented a 2012 End-of-Year Report. The first section of this report, “Continued Interest in the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan”, is provided in italics below, along with TPB staff comments on key points raised by the CAC throughout the report.

Continued Interest in the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP)

As a committee with a mission to promote public involvement, the CAC has been working for more than two decades to promote a regional discussion of transportation priorities. The committee long ago realized that the TPB’s current planning process provides very limited opportunities for public involvement because most of the decisions reflected in the Constrained Long-Range Plan (CLRP) are made at the state and local levels, not the regional level. In order to provide an enhanced forum for meaningful regional planning and public involvement, the CAC since 2006 has sought the development of a regional priorities plan by the TPB.

The committee was pleased that the TPB finally initiated the development of the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP) in 2011. We are pleased that progress appears to have been made on the RTPP in 2012 and we were impressed with information we received about the focus group that was conducted on June 2.

However, the committee has also has some serious concerns regarding the RTPP. In recent months, we have not received much information about the plan and many members are confused about the direction it has taken.

Staff comment: The CAC received staff briefings on the status of the RTPP and responses to questions raised by CAC members at its meetings on January 17, 2013, November 15, 2012 and July 12, 2012.

To begin, we are concerned about the inclusiveness of the planning process. We had hoped the RTPP development would engage TPB stakeholders and leaders in a constructive and creative dialogue about our region's future. To date, few opportunities for such exchange have occurred. In April, the CAC passed a resolution (included as Attachment A) calling upon the TPB to either reestablish the priorities plan scoping task force or establish a new group to provide regular, substantive input into the development of the RTPP. In responding to our request, Ron Kirby, MWCOG Director of Transportation Planning, said that work sessions on the RTPP would be held prior to TPB meetings and the CAC members would be welcome to attend. We look forward to attending such meetings.

Staff comment:

- As noted in the report to the TPB under Item 14 of the July 18, 2012 TPB agenda, TPB staff conducted five regional stakeholder and listening sessions between January and February 2012, including one session on January 12 with the CAC. Based on the results of those five listening sessions, TPB staff enlisted the assistance of America Speaks in conducting a Citizens Forum on June 2, 2012 to test a revised, less technical approach to communicating the RTPP process. At the conclusion of this forum, 92 percent of the participants stated that we were “on the right track” or “almost right, but needs a little tweaking” in communicating regional transportation goals and challenges to the general public.
 - A work session on the development of the RTPP was held from 10:30 am to 11:45 am in the COG Board room in advance of the June 20, 2012 TPB meeting. Some members of the CAC attended and participated in that work session.
 - An interim report and PowerPoint overview on the RTPP process were presented to the TPB at its July 28, 2012 meeting. Section E of that report sought comments from the CAC, the Access for All Committee, interested stakeholder groups, and members of the general public on “the refined RTPP materials and proposed public outreach strategies.” A web-based comment page provided opportunities for comment during a 4-week period ending on August 15, 2012.

We are also concerned about the role of public involvement. Instead of the “top-down” approach that the plan seems to be taking, we had hoped for more collaborative involvement from a variety of different constituencies throughout the region. Instead, it seems that the RTPP is almost solely focusing on public opinion research through focus groups and surveys using

paid participants. While we appreciate the value of controlled opinion research, we believe that public outreach for the RTPP should be much broader.

Staff comment: As noted in the July 18, 2012 interim report, the current phase of the RTPP process is focused on communicating with and receiving feedback from “a sample of 600 individuals who represent the region, in addition to regional stakeholders and the TPB’s citizen committees.” A web-based tool using MetroQuest software is being prepared to conduct this public outreach.

According to the Draft Interim Report for the RTPP, issued in July of 2012, the TPB staff had planned to conduct a web-based survey of 600 paid participants this past fall. The committee understands that this survey has been delayed. We further understand that in the spring of 2013, the RTPP process was scheduled to conduct additional outreach “during which a number of public outreach tools will be utilized, possibly including a combination of web-based polling, additional deliberative forums, and mobile kiosks throughout the region. The purpose of these efforts would be to inform the selection of priority strategies from a longer list of strategies under discussion.” We hope that all these outreach efforts will still occur, even if delayed.

Staff comment: As reported by staff to the CAC at its January 17 meeting, the web-based survey has been delayed from the fall of 2012 to the spring of 2013 for two major reasons:

- We did not want to be competing for public attention with the media barrage associated with the national elections; and
- We wanted to take the time to take full advantage of the capabilities of the MetroQuest software (the key features of which can be viewed on the MetroQuest web-site)

Once this web-based survey has been completed, an additional work session will be scheduled before a TPB meeting to discuss the results and additional outreach activities.

Finally we are concerned about the final product and the methodology for the plan. Many CAC members had originally hoped the plan would identify priority projects. However, we understand now that the plan will instead identify general strategies. We are concerned that many TPB members and other stakeholders do not have a clear understanding of how the final product focused on strategies will look and how it will be useful. Furthermore, the initial “longer list of strategies under discussion” has never first been adequately vetted by either TPB stakeholders or the general public.

Staff comment: The relationship between strategies, programs, and projects was discussed in detail in the “scope and process” for the RTPP, which was endorsed unanimously by the CAC at its June 9, 2011 meeting, and approved by the TPB at its July 20, 2011 meeting. The strategies to be included in the web-based outreach activity currently underway will be based on the lists of near-term, ongoing, and long-term strategies presented in the July 18, 2012 report to the TPB, and the comments received during the 4-week public comment period conducted through August 15, 2012.

Last year we understood that the plan would be grounded in performance analysis and cost/benefit analysis – and while we expressed some concerns about that approach, we were interested to see its application. But more recently it seems that the emphasis on quantitative analysis has been reduced or even eliminated. It is not clear to us why that original proposed approach was altered.

Staff comment: As reported in the July 28, 2012 report to the TPB, the TPB staff learned from the five regional stakeholder and listening sessions held in January and February of 2012 that “greater emphasis should be placed on the use of narrative, simple charts, and pictures to describe challenges and potential strategies to address them. In general, listening session participants found the performance measures too technical and did not understand their significance for identifying regional challenges.” The materials for the June 2, 2012 citizen forum were designed with this lesson in mind. The web-based outreach currently under development will attempt to strike the right balance between qualitative and quantitative materials. The MetroQuest software has some excellent capabilities for helping us strike that balance.

The CAC represents a group with considerable transportation knowledge. We believe we can contribute to steering the RTPP going forward, and ask the TPB for special consideration to solicit our involvement. We look forward to closer involvement in the RTPP planning process in 2013.