

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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April 30, 2010

Ms. Melissa Barlow
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Washington, DC 20006-1103

Ms. Sandra Jackson
Federal Highway Administration
D.C. Division Office
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RE: Response to Preliminary Observations Reported At the April 21, 2010 TPB meeting

Dear Ms. Barlow and Ms. Jackson:

Thank you for your work to prepare for and conduct the U.S. Department of Transportation Planning Certification Review of the TPB's transportation planning process on April 15, 19, 20, 22 and the special travel demand model meeting on April 29. The TPB and the staff welcome the opportunity to discuss the regional planning process with our Federal partners and welcome any feedback on areas we can improve on.

The following three preliminary observations from the Federal Team were reported to the TPB by Mr. Lawson, FHWA Administrator for the D.C. Division, on April 21, 2010:

- 1) The TPB should consider ways to increase transparency of financial planning and fiscal constraint through improved documentation to make analysis and results more comprehensible to the public;
- 2) The Federal Team expressed concern about the extensive reliance on the website and the need for specific outreach efforts to reach and engage the general public; and
- 3) The MPO should take a greater role in outreach to transit operators and long-range planning, addressing limited capacity, revenues, and decreasing ridership.

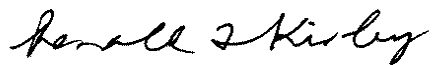
Recognizing that the TPB process is complex and TPB staff may not have clearly conveyed some information in the two-day on-site visit, we are providing you and the Federal Team some additional information and clarification regarding these preliminary observations.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or clarifications on the attached information, the Responses to 2010 Certification Review Questions document submitted to you on

March 24, or if we can provide more clarification to the information provided at the numerous meetings held for the review.

We look forward to our continued work together on critical transportation issues in the metropolitan Washington region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronald F. Kirby". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "R" and "K".

Ronald F. Kirby
Director, Department of Transportation Planning

ATTACHMENT:

Additional Information Regarding Preliminary Observations Reported to the TPB on April 21, 2010

Observation 1: The TPB should consider ways to increase transparency of financial planning and fiscal constraint through improved documentation to make analysis and results more comprehensible to the public.

During the regular financial analysis process that occurs every four years each project's cost is reviewed by the submitting agency, TPB staff, and an independent consultant with expertise in transportation finance and economic analysis. These costs are compared against expected revenues to ensure that the CLRP is financially constrained and realistic.

Between each four-year financial plan update, each agency is asked to review and update the costs for their projects. The CLRP database reflects when each record was last updated. Records that have not been updated in the past year are flagged by TPB staff and forwarded to the submitting agency for their review to ensure the data is accurate and up to date.

When new projects are submitted for inclusion in the CLRP, agencies are required to complete a project description form that includes the cost of the project and proposed funding sources. These are reviewed by TPB staff. If the project represents a significant new capital cost, the implementing agency is asked to submit a more detailed financial plan to support the cost estimate and proposed funding sources. The costs and funding are reviewed by TPB staff and the TPB's Technical Committee. To a large degree the TPB is dependent upon the cost estimates submitted by the implementing agency since staff does not have the resources to independently audit this information.

The Financial Plan is defined as a distinct element of the Constrained Long-Range Plan (CLRP), as documented on the CLRP website (<http://www.mwcog.org/clrp/elements/financial.asp>). A summary of the financial plan is presented there. Using graphs and charts, the summary shows where the funding is coming from and where it's going. It shows that more and more funds are needed just to maintain the existing system and that the funding for new projects is shrinking.

The Region magazine, the TPB's annual report, continually emphasizes the results of financial planning and the need to address the funding challenges that the region faces. The 2009 Region magazine provides an excellent summary of the efforts that the TPB has made to inform and educate the public about the fiscal constraints and the local, regional, state, and federal funding challenges facing our transportation system. See <http://www.mwcog.org/uploads/pub-documents/zFZeVg20090522125642.pdf#page=31>.

Observation 2: The Federal Team expressed concern about the extensive reliance on the website and the need for specific outreach efforts to reach and engage the general public.

TPB staff would like to clarify that while the TPB website, along with electronic communications and social networking platforms, has become the primary means of communicating information to the public and soliciting input, staff continues to utilize traditional communication forms to reach members of the public, particularly at key junctures in the planning process and when certain TPB activities may be of special interest to the general public or to certain segments of the population. The TPB maintains a database of 1,200 contacts that receive notification via postcard mailings and/or the monthly TPB Newsletter of TPB public events, in addition to those that receive TPB emails or are informed via the website and other media. Notice is also published in the region's newspaper of record, *The Washington Post*, as well as *El Pregonero* which serves the area's Hispanic community. Events for which such notice is provided include the approval of the submissions for the update of the CLRP, the approval of the CLRP and TIP, and semi-annual public forums on the development of the region's CLRP and TIP.

With regard to efforts to reach out to the general public, decision-making on transportation priorities and project selection occurs predominantly at the state and local levels¹ because of the structure of funding allocations. Despite this constraint, the TPB has found innovative and novel ways to engage members of the public and facilitate a public dialogue about regional transportation issues, and serve as a positive example for the region's transportation implementing agencies as they conduct their own planning- and project-related public involvement.

TPB Staff held an interactive dialogue with members of the public during development of the TPB Participation Plan, which was adopted in December 2007². The central concept of the Participation Plan is that there are three constituencies for the TPB, each having a different level of knowledge and familiarity with the TPB and the transportation decision-making process:

- The ***Involved*** public consists of a relatively small group of people who are familiar with the TPB and participate in its processes through professional roles, membership on a TPB committee, or as a commenter on TPB plans or at meetings.
- The ***Informed*** public consists of people who are engaged in civic issues and have a general understanding of transportation issues – these people are often referred to as “community leaders” by virtue their status as information conduits to larger citizen groups.
- the ***Interested*** public is the largest group, consisting of everyone who has an interest in transportation in the region simply by the role it plays in their daily lives.

The TPB Participation Plan is based upon the fundamental premise that in order to most effectively use its resources the TPB must tailor its outreach to these three different groups.

¹ As described in response R10 in the “Responses to 2010 Certification Review Questions” submitted to FHWA and FTA on March 24, 2010.

² See response R9.

Information about the more arcane and complex aspects of the region's transportation planning process, such as the development of the TIP, approval of the Unified Planning Work Program, and the federal certification review process, while readily and easily available to all, is targeted to the **"Involved"** public.

The TPB Community Leadership Institute is targeted to the **"Informed"** public.³ It has allowed the TPB to educate citizens on regional transportation planning issues, and most importantly, how transportation decisions are made in this complex region. Through role-playing activities, participants learn the roles of various agency players and the ways in which citizens can most effectively gain information about and influence transportation plans and projects. CLI also establishes the TPB as a resource for community leaders for getting information and finding out whom to contact with a project-related question. Because the CLI participants are opinion leaders in their communities with extensive networks of communication, CLI also enables the TPB to efficiently disseminate this key information.

Periodically, the TPB has also sought to engage the **"Interested"** public in a constructive dialogue about regional transportation issues. Development of the TPB Vision in 1998 included extensive public outreach. More recently, in 2006 and 2007 TPB staff conducted nearly 40 presentations at various venues throughout the region, sharing the results of the TPB's Regional Mobility and Accessibility Scenario Study and gathering feedback about the study and regional transportation challenges through activities and discussions. Preparation for many of these events included working with local partners to advertise and promote the event, and in many cases audiences were quite large and included citizens who had not previously been engaged in regional transportation issues or even heard of the TPB.

³ See response R4.

Observation 3: The MPO should take a greater role in outreach to transit operators and long-range planning, addressing limited capacity, revenues, and decreasing ridership.

The TPB has taken a very proactive approach to involving transit operators in the long-range planning process over the last several years:

- In 2007, the TPB created the Regional Bus Subcommittee to provide a permanent process for the coordination of bus planning throughout the Washington region, and for incorporating regional bus plans into the CLRP and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The following transit operators are actively engaged in the bus subcommittee:

Metrobus	Fairfax Connector
Montgomery County Ride On	Loudoun Commuter Transit
Prince George 's County The Bus	PRTC Omni Ride
DC Circulator	MTA Commuter Bus
Alexandria Dash	Metrorail
Arlington Transit (ART)	Virginia Railway Express
Falls Church George	Maryland Commuter Rail
City of Fairfax CUE	

The Regional Bus Subcommittee webpage is at:

www.mwcog.org/committee/committee/default.asp?COMMITTEE_ID=215

- In 2008, the subcommittee released a *Status Report on the Bus Systems in the National Capital Region*: which provides an overview of the subcommittee's work to date, and highlights current operational issues and long-range planning needs which have been identified. The report is available at: www.mwcog.org/store/item.asp?PUBLICATION_ID=328.
- WMATA is a voting member of the TPB. The transit operators are represented on the TPB by the elected officials and/or county executives that represent the jurisdiction in which the bus system operates. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (VDRPT) is represented by VDOT and the Maryland Transit Administration is represented by MDOT.
- Representatives of the transit systems listed above also participate in the TPB Technical Committee, the Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force, the Access for All Advisory Committee and the Private Providers Task Force Annual Public Transit Forum.
- WMATA and TPB collaborate on long range planning initiatives and have worked together to address limited capacity and shrinking revenues, as demonstrated by the:
 - Development of the CLRP financial plan which is an important forum for examining the regional picture of revenues and expenses;

- Metrorail ridership constraint in the air quality conformity analysis;
- Successful Regional TIGER bus priority grant; and
- Application for a Regional Bus Stop Improvement Program under the FTA’s Livability Bus grant program.

With regard to the point about “decreasing ridership”, TPB staff was asked by local jurisdictional staff to respond to this statement. Some transit operators experienced a slight drop in ridership during the first part of the fiscal year which is largely attributable to the economic downturn. However, ridership is now growing and local operators anticipate that FY2010 ridership will show an increase. Metro is expecting to end the year about even with FY2009 or with a slight increase from FY2009. Table 1 below shows the ridership of transit operators in the last two years with some operators showing an increase in ridership between FY2008 and FY2009.

Table 1: Transit Ridership in the Metropolitan Washington Region

	FY2008	FY2009	Change	% Change
	Annual Ridership			
Alexandria DASH	3,978,773	4,006,825	28,052	0.7%
Arlington ART	1,225,427	1,428,827	203,400	16.6%
Circulator	2,798,418	4,001,264	1,202,846	43.0%
City of Fairfax CUE	1,047,346	1,031,659	-15,687	-1.5%
Fairfax Connector	9,810,228	9,576,635	-233,593	-2.4%
Frederick TransIT	664,732	709,015	44,283	6.7%
Loudoun County Transit	777,273	890,011	112,738	14.5%
Metrobus	132,795,000	133,800,000	1,005,000	0.8%
Metrorail*	215,315,000	222,900,000	7,585,000	3.5%
Montgomery County Ride-On	29,673,140	29,627,391	-45,749	-0.2%
Prince William County OmniLink	1,008,626	1,025,633	17,007	1.7%
Prince William County OmniRide	1,840,722	2,146,441	305,719	16.6%
Prince George's County The Bus	3,389,620	3,510,433	120,813	3.6%
VRE	3,628,563	3,868,035	239,472	6.6%
Total	403,974,095	414,515,344	10,541,249	2.6%

*Metrorail trips are linked trips.