

TPB Agenda Item 12: Update on the April 15 Scenario Task Force Meeting and the Development of a Regional BRT Project

April 15, 2009 Harry Sanders

I have followed the Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study (RMAS) since its inception earlier this decade. Although I have refrained from speaking on recent TPB Scenario Task Force efforts, today, I have three comments.

1) It makes sense to pursue a competitive grant under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (i.e. stimulus funds). However, obtaining significant input from state and local jurisdictions and the public is needed. We should not "fast track" projects that have not been properly vetted with elected officials and the public.

2) I feel the term "regional BRT" project is misleading. Within the given time frame, it is possible to give priority to existing bus routes, to buy better buses, and to provide better information to bus riders. These are all good things, but are more accurately described as "Rapid Bus" rather than "Bus Rapid Transit" (BRT).

3) While the region would benefit from enhanced bus service, whether Rapid Bus or BRT, we also need to consider where streetcars and/or light rail (beyond the **Purple Line**) are appropriate. In my opinion, there has been a tendency to play these modes against one another, but they each have their place in a spectrum of transit options.

Under President Obama's administration at USDOT and FTA (including Maryland's John Porcari), a new day is dawning for transit projects. What some call the FTA "No Start" program will become "New Starts" again. Also, Congressman Earl Blumeneur is drafting a bill to change the FTA Small Starts program into "Fast Starts," with more attention for streetcar projects. On C-SPAN yesterday, DOT Secretary Ray LaHood said "...Portland's streetcar and light rail systems are a model for efforts to reduce the pollution that automobiles generate."

As the TPB Scenario Task Force and the TPB prepare for the major CLRP update (2010), I suggest it would be instructive not only to examine BRT systems, but also to explore how cities like Portland, Oregon and Denver have worked to move BRT, light rail, and streetcar projects forward in a complementary, rather than competitive, fashion

I wish my best to the Scenario Task Force and TPB in their efforts.

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**“Just the Facts”
Statement of Robert O. Chase
To the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board
April 15, 2009**

Several comments on several items before you this morning.

First, the TPB should support amending the FY 2009 to FY 2014 TIP to include funding the Fairfax County Parkway, I-495 HOT Lane and Richmond Highway Public Transit Initiative projects.

- The Parkway’s Engineering Proving Ground Extension is a critical missing north-south transportation link.
- Dollar for dollar, mile for mile, the Capital Beltway and I-95/I-395 HOT Lanes may be the region’s most cost effective public transit investment.

Second, with regards to the 2007/2008 Household Travel Survey --

- Recent public transit ridership increases are good news, but the Survey shows daily transit use remains at about 6%. The 17% commuting by transit is 2 percentage points higher than the pre-Metrorail 1970 percentage, but considerably less than the 1960 number.
- Much as we all look forward to celebrating Bike to Work day next month, as a percentage of daily trips, biking remains below 1%, at the asterisk level, and most bike trips are recreational in nature.
- Much as governmental policies focus on commuting trips, fewer daily trips involve commuting. Many peak hour trips are for non-commuting purposes.
- Commuting trips are longer than other daily trips and the most cost effective way to shorten those trips may be to move more jobs closer to where most people live.

Third, the Round 7.2 Cooperative Forecast continues to show most people live and most future growth will continue to occur outside the Beltway where new road construction and other services continue to lag far behind demand, and where the TPB continues to ignore the need for new multi-modal Potomac River bridges and parkways.

Furthermore, the TPB’s current method of jurisdictional classification most likely undercounts outer suburban growth. Residents of Gaithersburg, Rockville, Upper Marlboro, Chantilly, Herndon, and Reston would be surprised to learn they are considered inner suburbanites. Yet they are counted as such. A methodology that splits Fairfax, Montgomery and Prince George’s counties into inner and outer segments would provide a more accurate growth trend picture.

Conversely, central jurisdiction population growth has been historically overestimated, and it would not be surprising if the latest counts are as well.

Nearly 240 years ago, John Adams observed that facts are stubborn things and that wishes, inclinations, or passions cannot change the facts.

Making transportation investments based on documented demand as opposed to wishes, inclinations and passions would be one of the best gifts we could give to our children.