

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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Item #5

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 6, 2013

To: TPB Technical Committee

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

Re: Comments Received on the Draft TPB Regional
Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP)

Following the work session and briefing at the July 17 TPB meeting, a draft version of the RTPP report was released for a 30-day public comment period on July 24. Comments received during this period were posted under Item #5 of the TPB Technical Committee packet for the September 6 meeting. In addition to these comments, TPB staff has assembled and is reviewing comments made by respondents in optional comment boxes in the web-based survey of 660 residents of the Washington region, as well as those by individuals who took this survey after it was made available to other groups and the general public on July 24. All of these comments will be made available shortly for review on the TPB's RTPP web-site, grouped into two categories: those associated with the selected sample of 660 residents; and those associated with other groups and the general public.

The TPB will be briefed on the comments received on the RTPP at its September 18 meeting, as well as on potential revisions to the plan. Staff proposes to develop a revised version of the RTPP document for presentation at the October 16 TPB meeting, and to provide for another 30 day comment period on the revised document. In addition to the comments received to date, staff will also address in the revisions to the RTPP any comments or recommendations received at the upcoming COG Economy Forward event on September 27, at which the draft RTPP will be presented and discussed along with COG's Activity Center Strategic Development Plan.

An initial review of the comments received to date suggests that there are three particular topics that need to be clarified or expanded upon in the revised version of the RTPP:

- (1) Tolling of existing highway lanes
- (2) The relationship between regional strategies and specific programs and projects
- (3) The relationship between the RTPP and the CLRP

(1) Tolling of existing highway lanes

A number of comments urged that the RTPP should include a strategy of applying congestion pricing by tolling all existing highway lanes. The TPB has conducted a number of scenario studies involving the tolling of a significant number of existing highway lanes (including the major parkways, for example), and recently completed a study funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) of the public acceptability of congestion pricing in the Washington region. This latter study included three different congestion pricing scenarios, all of which included pricing of existing highway lanes, and one of which including pricing of the entire highway system. The study found support for some of the scenarios, but also found significant concerns about a number of aspects of the pricing proposals.

During the course of the FHWA sponsored study of the public acceptability of congestion pricing, the new MAP-21 legislation enacted in July of 2012 included language which permitted pricing of existing Interstate highways only if there were no net reduction in the number of toll-free lanes. This restriction also appears to apply to other federal-aid roadways. As a result of this new legislative requirement, the TPB Aspirations Scenarios were revised to remove any instances where the number of toll-free lanes would be reduced. The results of the revised scenarios were reported to the TPB in April of 2012, and were used in the RTPP web-based survey and subsequent July 2013 draft RTPP report.

(2) The relationship between regional strategies and specific programs and projects

There were some comments relating to the lack of specific programs and projects in the RTPP, and the exclusive focus on regional strategies. The relationship between strategies, programs, and projects was considered and discussed at some length in the development of the RTPP work scope approved by the TPB in July of 2011. The work scope called for a focus on regional strategies that offer the greatest potential toward addressing regional challenges and that the public can support. A major focus of the RTPP work effort has been in communicating regional goals, challenges, and strategies to representative groups of the public in the region, and seeking their comments and responses. This involved presenting challenges and strategies in a form to which the public could relate and respond. Potential benefits and costs of alternative strategies were presented in largely qualitative terms that would allow survey respondents to provide some rankings of the relative importance of alternative approaches. Respondents were invited to suggest additional strategies in optional comments boxes.

As the RTPP process moves forward, highly ranked strategies can be developed into more specific programs and projects, including those aimed at system maintenance and operations as well as location-specific improvements in system capacity. An in-depth review of benefits and costs based on quantification of program components and location specific factors will be necessary for this level of assessment. The recent "bus-on-shoulder" discussions conducted for a TPB Task Force illustrate the complexity and effort involved in taking a broad strategy like "bus-on-shoulder" to the level of location-specific projects.

(3) The relationship between the RTPP and the CLRP

The draft RTPP report noted that the TPB will soon initiate steps toward the next federally required four-year update of the CLRP, and that the results of the RTPP should be considered in this significant CLRP update. (The 2010 CLRP update was approved the TPB on November 17, 2010, and approved by

FHWA and FTA on February 9, 2011. The 2014 update must be completed within four years of these dates.)

A number of comments sought additional information on the CLRP update process, and the revised RTPP report will address this topic in greater detail. Additional discussion will be provided on the continuing and cooperative nature of the CLRP process, and the relationship between inclusion of programs and projects in the CLRP and the extensive location specific studies conducted by sponsoring agencies. It will be noted in particular that the CLRP is not “carved in stone”, and that in the past CLRP projects have been modified and even removed entirely along with the addition of new programs and projects.