

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

MEMORANDUM

TO: Long Range Plan Task Force

FROM: Marc Elrich, Montgomery County
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SUBJECT: New Approaches to Promoting Regional Transportation Priorities and Goals

DATE: May 16, 2016

BACKGROUND

Last fall, during the finalization of the Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP) Amendment, TPB members expressed a general sentiment that:

- (i) regional transportation priorities and goals, as set forth in the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan adopted by the TPB in January, 2014 (the “RTPP”), did not appear to be adequately reflected in the list of approved CLRP projects, or in the CLRP as a whole;
- (ii) the TPB is not providing adequate guidance to the participating member jurisdictions with respect to regional transportation priorities and goals, or projects that advance those priorities and goals;
- (iii) the CLRP process is driven overwhelmingly by localized project selection rather than by implementation of policies and projects that advance the regional vision set forth in the RTTP; and
- (iv) forecasted performance of the regional transportation system over the 25-year period of the CLRP, is unacceptably weak relative to the goals of the RTPP.

On January 20, 2016, the TPB convened a special work session to discuss ways in which the Board could: (a) refine the CLRP project selection process to better identify and promote projects that support regional transportation priorities and goals; (b) examine possible non-project driven policy alternatives that could be implemented to promote the other goals set forth in the RTTP; (c) promote “outside-the-box” thinking to better address the region’s continuing failure to meet its long-range transportation goals; and (d) leverage the work of the previously established Unfunded Capital Needs Working Group to find new avenues to address the foregoing.

Most recently, at the April 20, 2016 meeting of the working group (now renamed the Long Range Plan Task Force), many of the TPB members present expressed further sentiment that the Task Force, and

ultimately the TPB, must find a way to advance, discuss and adopt new approaches and solutions to regional transportation planning and project selection. Members requested that a follow-up meeting in May, 2016 provide the opportunity for further, robust discussion of ways to find this new path. To that end, members listed above have agreed to put forth this Memorandum to stimulate discussion at the May meeting of the Task Force.

PROPOSAL

The Task Force, recognizing that the existing process does not produce approved projects, programs, or a long-range plan that adequately addresses the region's professed long-range goals, should promptly launch a series of exercises to explore the creation of a new tool kit for achieving these goals, with the goal of making specific recommendations to the TPB in conjunction with the TPB's next-planned major update of the CLRP in 2018. We suggest naming our initiative, "The Quest For Competitive Mobility." We are simply not competitive as a region when we are stuck in traffic:

1. **Select objective, measurable goals.** Before we can productively select projects or programs, we need to know the goal, in objectively measurable terms. We may have a broad vision, but what, specifically, are we trying to accomplish? How do we meaningfully "move the needle" in the right direction rather than acquiescing to the needle continuing to move in the wrong direction? Reduce the "journey-to work" interval by a specific percentage? Reduce the hours/commuter in congested traffic by a certain amount? Reduce vehicle miles traveled in congested traffic? Remove a specific number of vehicles from certain specific arterials or other roads at am/pm peak? Increase transit ridership or telework by a specific number of individuals per year? Other metrics? The Task Force could utilize a professional facilitator to help define and develop objective, measurable goals. The region's success in meeting air quality standards shows that when objective, measurable goals are adopted, it is possible to actually meet them, or at the very least, measure just how far short we have fallen.
2. **Expand the tool kit.** The entire emphasis of the CLRP is on projects. Projects are expensive, often costing tens or hundreds of millions of dollars, sometimes billions. We need to expand the menu to include various kinds of travel demand management (TDM) programs designed to change expectations and behavior. Such programs could, and often do, involve incentives, access enhancements, even subsidies. Or they can be designed to change government action, such as incident response. Or they can influence land-use planning and zoning, such as the establishment of "activity centers." Certainly, there are many worthwhile new projects that should be included in the CLRP, but projects alone cannot constitute the entire tool kit. To this end, the Task Force could organize a professionally facilitated brain-storming conference at which members, TPB staff and other invited guests, would present their most creative, forward thinking ideas for new programs or projects, or even programs or projects already initiated, but perhaps with a new approach that enhances their effectiveness.
3. **Take action.** The Task Force, with the assistance of the professional facilitator and TPB staff, would evaluate and prioritize all suggestions, based on cost, likely effectiveness in reaching the objective measurable goals developed from the exercise described in Paragraph 1 above, practicality of implementation and the like, and then make appropriate recommendations to the TPB. The Task Force also would examine ways to restructure the CLRP process to include non-project solutions when and where appropriate. Examples of non-project solutions include: (a) incident management strategies aimed at right-sizing accident response; (b) travel demand

management strategies designed to affect commuter behavior, such as incentives for telework or work schedule alteration, (c) modal split mandates at transit-accessed activity centers, (d) land use policy mandates aimed at minimizing future sprawl and better concentrating growth at identified, transit-accessed activity centers, (e) low cost, high impact strategies such as repurposing existing lanes for high capacity vehicles, or walkability improvements, and (f) proactive implementation of technology enhancements that move vehicles, buses and trains more safely and efficiently.

4. **Improve the measurements.** The Task Force would continuously work with TPB staff to review existing transportation modeling tools, and to identify and examine new modeling tools as they become available, in order to ensure that the TPB is utilizing the best modeling and analytical tools available.
5. **Get the word out.** The Task Force would make recommendations to the TPB to develop a more effective dialogue with (a) the member transportation agencies and their respective policy boards, and (b) the member jurisdictions, to ensure that project planning and development within the various agencies or localities will better reflect regional transportation priorities and goals, as set forth in the RTPP and as operationalized through the exercise described in Paragraph 1 above.
6. **Encourage cross-fertilization of ideas.** The Task Force would invite other policy boards operating within the region (or even outside the region) to meet and share their most creative, forward thinking ideas with the TPB. This will not only add to the universe of ideas on the table, but also stimulate better interaction and cross-fertilization among the various policy boards. For example, the Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) has convened a technology working group to examine the impact of advances in autonomous vehicle technology on long-term transportation investment. The co-chair of that working group has offered to brief the TPB board on their work.

NEXT STEPS

The Task Force should discuss this proposal at its May 18, 2016 meeting and, if ready to do so, adopt this proposal as a blueprint for its future activities.