

***Moving Forward With the Development of
A Regional Transportation Plan***

Comments from the TPB's Citizens Advisory Committee
October 2009

The Issues

The Washington metropolitan area's Regional Transportation Plan is effectively an assemblage of State and District projects, with incidental coordination where necessary. The *Financially Constrained Long-Range Plan* (CLRP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) are the official planning documents produced by the Transportation Planning Board, but they really are compilations of local and State projects into single documents. While the TPB Vision Statement criteria established in 1998 were useful and path breaking, the Vision criteria are not effectively used to prioritize the CLRP and TIP project submissions. The TPB needs a guiding process that ensures transportation project selection effectively achieves the TPB's goals, objectives, and strategies. The need and justification for an effective TPB process to advance transportation project priorities has been repeatedly articulated by the CAC.

The CAC noted in 2006:

The TPB has extensively discussed the region's unfunded needs in aggregate, but there is no regional plan that specifies unfunded priority projects. Therefore, it is difficult to put the constrained plan into context within the region's broader needs or to know which projects the region believes should be funded if more money would become available.

[2006 CAC Recommendations: refer Appendix A]

To further amplify this lack of a true "Regional Plan" and the need for such a guiding process, a TPB member in 2008 said:

"We are not really prepared to put the regional projects on the table that we would love to have in our region if we could fund them."

[2008 CAC Recommendations: refer Appendix A]

And finally, a memorandum from 2008 stated:

[The TPB should] develop the Scenario Study process to support creation of a Financially Unconstrained Transportation Plan of regionally prioritized projects for consideration.

[September 17, 2008 Memorandum from CAC to TPB Scenario Study Task Force]

The CAC faces an opportunity to provide recommendations to the TPB regarding the CLRP/TIP. A kickoff forum for the new planning cycle was held on October 15, 2009. For the CAC to meet its responsibilities (provide candid and actionable recommendations to the TPB and to effectively communicate with the public about regional transportation

issues), it must assist the TPB in developing a true regional plan that can be used by all as the basis to guide transportation project and management decisions.

The CAC's Continuing Position

The CAC continues to recommend to the TPB that it use its Scenario Studies, (henceforth referred to as the “scenarios”) as the major guiding process to determine if a project, including rail and trail projects, should be included in the CLRP/TIP. The TPB is currently at work on two scenarios: 1) the CLRP Aspirations Scenario is identifying and analyzing potential priorities for the CLRP update in 2010. The “What Would It Take?” Scenario will lay out strategies to achieve an ambitious reduction in carbon dioxide emissions.

If a project is shown through scenario analysis to effectively achieve “Regional” criteria, that should give it extra weight for the TPB decision-making process. While certain projects will be needed to address local mobility needs, the focus of the TPB must remain regional.

A review of the CAC's End-of-Year reports and recommendations from 2005 to 2008 indicates that this has been an overriding theme (refer Appendix A). This long-standing CAC position was further noted in two Memoranda presented to the TPB last year by Ron Kirby, Director of TPB Staff:

[Memorandum](#) from Ron Kirby to the TPB responding to CAC comments, October 15, 2008, page 3:

The TPB Scenario Study is intended to serve as a de facto unconstrained long range transportation plan that can directly inform the development of the CLRP, particularly the 2010 full CLRP update. The comprehensive cost-benefit analysis intended to be used in the scenario analysis also provides an opportunity to begin prioritizing the projects within the unconstrained plan.

[Memorandum](#) from Ron Kirby to the TPB, December 17, 2009, page 8 under **Developing the CLRP Aspirations Scenario**:

More specifically, the scenario seeks to better align land use and transportation planning with the goals of the TPB Vision and of the previous RMAS initiative... It could serve as a regional unconstrained long-range transportation plan in anticipation of the full 2010 CLRP update.

Proposed:

To launch the development of a more effective regional transportation planning process using the scenarios, the CAC recommends the following important actions:

- 1) The TPB should host a regional forum of planners, elected and high-ranking appointed transportation officials, and citizens to achieve regional agreement on

the need to develop a long-range regional transportation priority plan. The event should also be used to achieve consensus on a set of performance measures for the plan.

- 2) A TPB work plan needs to be developed to create a long-range regional transportation priority plan.

Some details about these proposals:

- A Regional forum should involve not only planners, but include elected and high-ranking appointed transportation officials (especially TPB members) and the interested stakeholders from the community. This event, which the CAC believes is critical, should bring all interested parties together to agree on the decisions that advance the TPB's adopted goals, objectives, and strategies.
- TPB consensus on a set of performance measures for evaluating the scenarios and prioritizing the projects is imperative. However the necessary performance measures are currently missing, neglected, not well-defined or not established. The CAC believes that these measures for large-scale projects should include but not be limited to:
 1. Cost/benefit analyses,
 2. Environmental factors, and
 3. Mobility measures, (for instance, a measure of how many jobs an individual can access via the regional modalities offered).
- Finally, a TPB work plan needs to be adopted to implement this proposal. With the 2010 CLRP/TIP updates coming up soon, a well developed plan to implement this proposal is needed.

Impact and Discussion:

Over the very near term this proposal will have a three-fold effect:

1. More systematic and productive attention by TPB staff on the scenarios and the various multi-modal proposals they contain,
2. More attention by all stakeholders on the directions the scenarios are promoting, and finally,
3. More attention by the TPB on how the scenarios work and what solutions are being proposed. The importance of ensuring that the scenario analysis remains "in synch" with the process recommended here cannot be overstated.

The Scenario Study process must not result in a one-size-fits-all outcome. Often, government programs are perceived as a single solution for all circumstances. Real or imagined, this perception limits the ability of worthy programs to be forwarded. By leveraging the capability of these scenarios, a variety of solutions can be forwarded.

Placing the onus on the TPB Staff to determine the direction for a Regional Plan is neither reasonable, nor the point of having such a plan. This will mean continued and persistent focus by the CAC and TPB on the direction of the scenarios.

This proposal will create more work for the CAC, the TPB, and the TPB staff, but, the gains should outweigh the difficulties. A viable Regional Plan should ensure that all political and government agencies have one playbook as the focus for major projects and planning rather than disparate foci.

Ongoing regional scenario development and analysis should provide a coherent regionally defined and oriented process to drive decision-making, in contrast to the incongruent, balkanizing pressures that each jurisdiction must contend with now. That said, in making this recommendation the CAC recognizes that the CLRP and TIP processes cannot ignore pressing local needs. However, to succeed, this process should be driven by an organizing perspective that recognizes how fundamentally interconnected and interdependent the regional transportation network is.

By proposing this new method to review and decide upon projects for the CLRP/TIP the TPB can achieve three distinct accomplishments:

- A rational process to effectively coordinate and advance major regional transportation projects and management changes in accordance with the TPB's adopted policy goals, objectives, and strategies.
- An involved public that has access to understandable criteria.
- An ability to provide decision-makers from the various jurisdictions with a prioritized list of regional tasks from which to advocate for long-term transportation project funding.

Related Issues

Establishing guiding principles for the CLRP/TIP project selection process has been a focus and recommendation of the CAC for some years, (see Appendix A). While the Scenario Studies offer necessary guidance, other influences will need to be considered. These issues are outlined below in no particular order.

- To achieve public acceptance, mutual agreement, best scenarios, and prevent the problems of single solutions for a "Regional Plan", coordination with the local and State planning agencies and an informed public is a must, especially considering the sovereignty of the various States.
- The TPB has long-standing partnerships with various interested parties, including the DOTs, interested groups, and State and local authorities. A highly focused meeting or set of meetings with these partners must take place -- specifically focused on the development of a "long-range regional transportation priority plan". Without gaining acceptance and input from these groups, such a plan is doomed to failure. This aspect for the creation of a "long-range regional transportation priority plan" must be addressed and consistently cultivated.

- The TPB does not have the authority to enforce (nor the ability to achieve) the implementation of “activity clusters”, business centers, or the manifold localities for work and transit coordination. But to determine a realistic and useful Regional Plan, these areas must receive focused attention. As noted by one commentator, “[o]f all the regions in the country at least DC does have the unique benefit of working with the Federal Government on locating jobs near transportation and housing, or vice versa.”
- It is recognized this region needs to reduce CO₂, and this (as with all other goals, objectives, and strategies) needs to be done in a cost effective manner. Hence, it is recommended that a cost/benefit analysis be an integral part of the Scenario Studies. This component of the Scenario Studies does not currently exist and must be a part of any recommended actions.
- Inter-community connectivity is critical. The TPB’s Regional Plan must fairly and effectively balance all parts of our region (i.e., the urban core and the inner and outer suburbs); otherwise, regional consensus will not be possible and continued congestion will be perpetuated.
- Telework and other transportation demand reduction strategies are vital to an effective regional transportation plan

Conclusions

The concept of a “long-range regional transportation project priority plan” is not new; it has been part of the CAC proposals and end of year reports since at least 2005. While the TPB’s scenario analysis is useful for evaluating potential projects and for “thinking outside the box”, more often than not, there has been little integration of scenarios proposals into the final decision making during the CLRP/TIP project submission process. By generating a true Regional Plan, a direction for evaluating the CLRP/TIP project submissions will exist and, more importantly, the public and deciding authorities will have a known basis for promoting certain projects.

As noted above, some issues still exist surrounding the use of the scenarios. For instance, integrating a financial component will both inform the public and decision-makers as well as guide the development of proposed projects. While various difficulties will always exist, these can be overcome, and the utility of a guiding document cannot be overemphasized.

To achieve such a proposal, we must keep our focus narrowed. Creation of the Scenario Studies and related activities was a mammoth step in informing and promoting plans for the TPB. Because of the timing for the next CLRP/TIP, this is an opportunity to take the next step and integrate the scenarios into this process. Rather than simply voting to accept or deny various projects, the TPB will have a guiding process and document to determine, coordinate, and integrate these projects into a coherent Regional Plan.

This is a time for change in our nation, our politics, and our funding practices. With serious constraints on State and local budgets, now is the time to implement such a major enhancement to our regional transportation planning.

Approved by the CAC
October 19, 2009

Appendix A

The following excerpts are taken from CAC recommendations and end-of-the-year reports going back to 2005. These statements are provided to validate the CAC's proposition that the "Aspirations Scenario" & "What Would It Take" should provide the guiding principles for the development of a Regional Plan.

***CAC Recommendations for Improving Information and Analysis of the
Constrained Long-Range Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program
January 18, 2006, Stephen Caflisch, Working Group Chair***

The CAC is fundamentally interested in a planning process that is open and deliberative. In order to optimize the improvements recommended above, and to provide a fuller context in which the public can understand regional transportation decision making, the CAC believes the TPB should consider whether the fundamental changes should be made in the planning process.

[...]

In previous years, there has been little time to conduct much analysis of the plan until after the TPB approves it...

The CAC appreciates that the 2006 CLRP development cycle has been lengthened by two months. However, the committee believes the TPB should further extend the CLRP/TIP cycle to permit the development of more analysis and the release of more public information. Alternatively, the committee would ask the TPB to identify another way to permit more time to integrate analysis and strategic thinking into the development of the CLRP and the TIP, including analysis of alternatives and mitigation strategies.

[...]

Currently, the implementing agencies hold public meetings on specific projects as they proceed through planning and development, but they do not publically explain how their annual project submissions are justified in a regional context.

[...]

The CAC believes the TPB should ask the major implementing agencies – the state DOTs and WMATA – to clearly explain in public forums how the projects for the CLRP are chosen.

[...]

The TPB has extensively discussed the region's unfunded need in aggregate, but there is no regional plan that specifies unfunded priority projects. Therefore, it is difficult to put the constrained plan into context within the region's broader needs or to know which projects the region believes should be funded if more money would become available.

The CAC believes the [Scenario] study should become the principal tool in project selection and project implementation and should influence local efforts to better integrate land use and transportation planning. As 2006 CAC Chairman Emmet Tydings has noted, TPB leaders are on record in stating that the RMAS should influence project selection. For example, in the *Region* magazine, former TPB Chairman Phil Mendelson wrote that “[w]ith this information [from the scenario study] available, transportation leaders can give high priority to projects that advance the TPB’s goals.” In that same publication, last year’s TPB Chairman Michael Knapp emphasized that “[w]e need to think about how the study can feed back into planning decisions.”

We understand that ours is a complex, multi-jurisdictional region, and, therefore, project selection can be quite nuanced and will inevitably occur at a variety of levels and in a variety of ways. For this reason, among others, the CAC is not seeking or recommending a regionally imposed “one-size-fits-all” approach to project or implementation. The committee understands that the responsibility for most project selection will – and should – remain at the jurisdictional level, which is responsible for funding and political accountability. But, as a planning tool, the results of RMAS can influence both bottom-up decision-making at the local or state level and regional top-down policy setting and prioritization.

[...]

The TPB should use the scenario study not just as a tool to raise awareness, but also as a vehicle to obtain public input. This input should be used to develop refined, new or composite scenarios that identify regional priorities. Public feedback should also help identify steps that TPB member jurisdictions can take to implement some of the strategies and projects identified in the study.

[...]

The CAC recommends that the TPB and staff establish a process for public outreach efforts that will inform the development of refined, new or composite scenarios. This process should determine the extent of outreach efforts and target a number of outreach forums that will be held around the region. The process also should lay out a method for documenting public input and for using the input in the development of new scenarios.

The public has expressed a strong interest in toll lanes during recent presentations around the region. The scenario study’s analysis of variably priced lanes could be an important contribution to the regional discussion on this topic.

The “What If” presentation should be enhanced as soon as possible with information on the analysis of the variably priced lane scenario.

[...]

The CAC believes the scenarios should be used to develop a plan of regional priorities not constrained by available funding. The recommendation is consistent with our recommendations to the TPB in January 2006, which stated that the TPB should “develop a list or plan of unfunded priority projects that would provide a ‘big-picture’ context for understanding project selection for the Constrained Long-Range Plan (CLRP). The development of this plan could start with the projects that have been identified for study in the TPB’s Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study.”

CAC Recommendations on the Development of the ‘CLRP Aspirations’ and ‘What Would It Take?’ Scenarios

September 17, 2008, Larry Martin, 2008 CAC Chair

At the December 17, 2008 TPB meeting, members discussed the possibility that federal stimulus dollars may not be set aside for either [1] the most appropriate viable projects or [2] projects that are among the highest regional priorities; but instead may go toward projects on outdated lists of state-level priorities that may not necessarily reflect nor complement the TPB’s regional vision.

Within this context, one TPB member stated that he was “concerned that this region speak as a region in terms of setting priorities and giving guidance as to how this money ought best to be spent for the benefit of the people in this region.”

Another TPB member said, “We are not really prepared to put the regional projects on the table that we would love to have in our region if we could fund them.”

As such, the CAC would like to take this opportunity in its end-of-the-year report to reiterate its desire for the TPB to develop an Unconstrained Plan or some other systematic way of integrating regional prioritization into the planning process. The CAC requested information from staff earlier this year on practices by other MPOs in unconstrained planning or regional prioritization, and we believe that this region could take further steps in this direction be it through the results of the Scenario Study or some other process. It is most unfortunate that the National Capital Region is not better prepared to systematically target any presently available or future stimulus funds to best use.

[...]

In 2008, the 10th anniversary of the TPB Vision, the CAC took advantage of an opportunity to revisit the eight broad goals and principals laid out in this policy document that was designed to guide the region’s transportation investments

into the 21st century. In this regard, the goal of the CAC was to address the extent to which the CLRP is (or is not) linked to the vision, goals, objectives, and strategies delineated in the TPB Vision that was unanimously approved by the TPB after an extensive public outreach effort that lasted three years. As a result of this discussion, the CAC determined that the process for developing the new scenarios for study by the TPB should be more clearly grounded in the Vision. This CAC finding was incorporated into the recommendations memorandum conveyed to the TPB and the Scenario Study Task Force in September.

[...]

CAC members consistently have wished to explore alternative modes of transportation and new technologies, such as value-priced lanes and various forms of transit that are lacking in the region, including bus rapid transit (BRT), monorail, and intercity rail.

[...]

The CAC hopes to strengthen its relationship with the TPB subcommittees that generate these lists, and explore the possibility of the TPB adopting a region-wide “Complete Streets” policy that would commit the region’s jurisdictions and implementing agencies to multi-modal accommodation on new or reconstructed streets.

The primary purpose of this document is to bring to the attention of the Task Force a variety of considerations for the design of the two scenarios that the CAC believes can affect results of the Travel Demand Forecast Model, and better bring into focus key differences in strategy leading to different outcomes; thereby improving the analysis possible from these forecasts. The CAC sincerely hopes this will contribute to a spirited discussion of scenario assumptions and findings – as we believe this is one of the most important outcomes of the Scenario process for supporting planning in our region.

[...]

The CAC is hopeful that the TPB member use the scenarios under development to fully explore the priorities that will guide the build-out and development of our regional transportation infrastructure over the next 10-20 years...

The CAC developed **six recommendations** to inform the development of the two scenarios:

1. Tie the development of the scenarios more explicitly to the TPB Vision.
2. Transportation planning must take a more targeted approach for assigning land-use shifts among activity centers in both the CLRP Aspirations and “What Would It Take?”
3. The transportation component for the Aspirations scenario should focus highway and transit accessibility improvements on prioritized activity centers identified by a more targeted land-use development approach.

4. There should be a clearly articulated interaction between Aspirations and WWIT so that the conclusions from WWIT can be used to further explore option in the Aspirations scenario.
5. External factors such as gas prices and housing issues must be addressed either through change to the model or by using other tools to analyze the potential effects of these factors.
6. Develop the Scenario Study process to support creation of a Financially Unconstrained Transportation Plan of regionally prioritized projects for consideration.