

The Committee of 100
on the Federal City



METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
Transportation Planning Board

Statement of
Monte Edwards
On behalf of
The Committee of 100 on the Federal City
Wednesday, January 15, 2014

The Committee of 100 on the Federal City is pleased to present comments in support of the revised Regional Transportation Priorities Plan that now addresses commuter and passenger rail. The treatment of commuter rail in the revised Plan is both accurate and objective. By assigning commuter rail the status of a major study “to identify increased capacity for commuter rail services between Virginia and the District of Columbia on or near the Long Bridge” and to examine “MARC and VRE strategic investment plans” (page 76), the Board will set in motion a comprehensive and coordinated plan based on the functions, needs and relationship of commuter, passenger and freight rail. By providing for the expansions of all three modes of rail we can reduce congestion and improve air quality, improve freight rail as an alternative to trucks, and improve passenger and commuter rail as alternatives to cars in the region.¹

The Present Situation.

Rail projects in Washington are being approached in isolation of one another. The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, the Virginia Avenue Tunnel expansion (now at the EIS stage) and the Long Bridge Study are being managed by three separate Project Managers, each of which has a different consultant, and partners with different federal agencies, including EPA, the National Park Service, the Department of Interior and the Department of Transportation (Anacostia Waterfront Initiative), the Federal Highway Administration (Virginia Avenue Tunnel) and the Federal Railroad Administration (Long Bridge Study). Each project has a different focus and a different time-line, but all three projects impact freight, commuter, and passenger rail. Further complicating this are two separate plans for increasing commuter and passenger train operations:

- Amtrak’s Union Station Master Plan proposes to triple the number of passengers and double the number of commuter and passenger trains, including expansion of

¹ Page 41 of the draft Regional Transportation Priorities Plan points out that “In the region’s core jurisdictions, our most congested areas, more than 43 percent of workers rely on transit to get to work.” But according to the US Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, only 21,523, or less than 2.8% of the total number of commuters, use commuter rail. For comparison, 11% of Manhattan commuters and 8% of Boston commuters use rail.

high-speed rail service south to Virginia and the southeastern states that would use the shared rail facilities south of Union Station.

- The National Capital Planning Commission's SW Ecodistrict Plan proposes to enlarge the L'Enfant train station and combine its operations with L'Enfant Metro Station, thereby providing commuter rail riders with access to the Blue/Orange and Yellow/Green Metro Lines at L'Enfant Station and a connection to Metro's Red Line at Union Station. The plan also calls for MARC trains to through-run from Union Station to Alexandria, greatly increasing the cross-river commuter options.

These different projects and plans involve four separate entities: Amtrak, MARC, VRE and CSX. The interests of Amtrak, MARC and VRE are similar – they move people: but the interests of CSX are quite different - they move freight. It is a vital public interest to understand and accommodate these policy and operational differences.²

The three different projects and two separate plans address different segments of the same railroad tracks, but there is just one transportation system that serves metropolitan Washington. A comprehensive, coordinated planning effort is urgently needed. The revised draft Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP) offers an opportunity to comprehensively evaluate the short-term and long-term needs of commuter, passenger, and freight rail operations; evaluate the constraints that are frustrating the ability to satisfy those needs; and identify solutions that will allow the expansion of all three modes of rail transportation to better serve metropolitan Washington. The Committee of 100 urges this Board to assign the highest possible priority to the RTPP rail study because the segmented projects now underway in DC, if undertaken, are likely to result in solutions that do not serve the long-term interests of freight, passenger, and commuter rail, and that will be difficult to undo and could foreclose, significantly complicate and/or exponentially increase the cost of more optimal solutions.

Constraints:

The constraints that restrict increasing commuter and passenger rail are considerable:

² Both locally and nationally, CSX's leadership has been quite vehement that it will resist any passenger rail proposals that threaten its own bottom line (Mark Szakonyi, "CSX CEO Ward rejects high-speed rail," *Jacksonville Business Journal*, April 7, 2011 http://www.bizjournals.com/jacksonville/blog/trade_trucks_trains/2011/04/csx-ceo-ward-rejects-high-speed-rail.html):

CSX Corp. CEO, President and Chairman Michael Ward told Bloomberg News yesterday that he "can't be part of" President Barack Obama's push for high speed rail.

Ward said high-speed passenger rail service won't make enough money and freight rail systems can't withstand trains moving as fast as 110 mph. Class I railroads have expressed concern over high-speed rail's impact on their freight rail systems, but Ward's recent criticism takes a more aggressive stance.

"I'm a corporation. I exist to make money, OK?" Ward said. "You can't make money hauling passengers, so why would I want to do that? That wouldn't be fair to my shareholders."

- River crossings. As the revised draft RTPP points out (at page 29), freight, passenger, and commuter trains compete to use the Long Bridge, the only Potomac River rail crossing within 70 miles, and also compete in sharing rail tracks in Southwest (SW). The proposed rebuilding of the Virginia Avenue Tunnel and the expansion of the Panama Canal and the resulting capacity of Norfolk and Baltimore to accommodate the larger container ships that will be passing through the Canal, will greatly increase CSX freight traffic. But freight trains will still have to come across the Potomac River.
- CSX Restrictions. The current operating agreement for the Potomac River rail crossing at the Long Bridge precludes any increase in the frequency of VRE commuter trains. In the future, with the increase in freight traffic, that competition will increase, and unless there is a new rail river crossing, commuter rail traffic will not be able to increase and may be forced by CSX to decrease. CSX refuses to disclose their expected increase in freight traffic, so the amount of additional river crossing capacity available for passenger and commuter trains is not known.
- Electric versus Diesel. MARC's Penn Line is electric, the Brunswick and Camden Lines (that operate on CSX tracks) are diesel, and VRE is diesel (as required by CSX). Because of the lack of electric catenaries in SW, Amtrak has to change locomotives at Union Station to use diesel to the south and electric to the north. Electrification of the tracks south of Union Station is desirable for passenger and commuter trains and would improve air quality, but is opposed by CSX because of possible interference with their planned double-stacked container trains.
- Operational Restrictions. CSX designs their rail lines for freight loads, not for passenger or commuter loads. Freight operations are typically slower and less time critical than passenger rail. As a result, signaling, scheduling, and basically all other operations are optimized for CSX's freight operations. Rail operations would avoid conflicts and inefficiencies associated with the Long Bridge and shared rail operations in SW if commuter and passenger rail were operated on separate networks than freight rail.

Conclusion:

We can't solve our automobile congestion problem unless we find a different way to get lots of people in and out of the city to work every day. The automobile, truck and bus congestion on our streets is painfully obvious. Metro is at or near capacity, and this will recur at some point after the Silver line opens. By removing the constraints now imposed on commuter and passenger rail, we can move a lot more people into and out of the city. The major constraints are requiring freight and passenger/commuter rail to share the same congested tracks in Southwest, and having limited capacity of a single rail river crossing that precludes any increase in the amount of commuter traffic.

The Committee of 100 respectfully recommends that the primary objectives of the RTPP rail study should be to figure out how to separate commuter and passenger rail from freight rail, and where and how to provide an additional Potomac River rail crossing.

Comment [A1]: Comma suggested to separate the two objectives (especially given the multiple "and"s).

**Regional Transportation Priorities Plan
Lacks Priorities, Misses the Big Picture
Statement of Robert O. Chase
January 15, 2014**

So much to say; so little time.

Next to its failure to actually identify any project-specific transportation priorities, the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan's (RTPP) most obvious shortcoming is its failure to reflect and address the magnitude of the region's transportation challenges as identified by the latest assessment of its CLRP which projects by 2040 --

- A population increase equivalent to another Philadelphia
- 3 million more daily auto trips and statistically insignificant differences in current and future travel mode splits
- More jobs becoming more inaccessible to more people
- Most growth occurring in outer communities, numbers that would be even greater were not Herndon, Reston, Gaithersburg and Bowie considered inner suburbs

Big numbers. Big problems. Big challenges for a regional transportation network already the nation's most congested.

Rather than addressing our regional network's most obvious deficiencies – the Maryland Beltway, I-66 corridor, American Legion Bridge, new Potomac River and suburb-to-suburb capacity, the RTPP offers a locally-oriented approach with no estimate as to what its implementation might cost, no evidence that its implementation would make a measurable difference in reducing congestion, improving travel speeds or regional mobility in general and no accountability on the part of this organization for its implementation.

In our last conversation following the TPB's October meeting, Ron Kirby bemoaned the fact that following the 2040 CLRP assessment presentation, the discussion reverted quickly to relatively insignificant, essentially local solutions offering no measurable impact on the greater, clearly dire regional transportation challenges.

It may well be that this locally-constituted body is incapable of the necessary big-picture transportation focus. A Maryland-Virginia-District body constituted by the governors and mayor may be the best hope.

Ours is a regional economy and a regional society, not a collection of localities and neighborhoods. Levels of inter-jurisdictional travel exceed that of any region in the nation. And until and unless we recognize and forge a plan to address this reality, our regional network will become more dysfunctional. And at a time when economic diversification will be more important than ever, our region will become an increasingly immobile and unattractive a place in which to generate jobs and sustain prosperity.

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Comments concerning the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP) delivered to the Transportation Planning Board (TPB), January 15, 2014

My name is Stuart Whitaker. I am a financial economist by training and an alum of a 2011 Transportation Planning Board (TPB) Community Leadership Institute (CLI) program, which I commend for its role in helping spread an understanding of transportation and its intricacies.

Public transit plays a crucial role in our economy and economic mobility, so consider for the moment the fact that WMATA operates a de facto segregated transit system, where 75% of the Metrobus riders are minority residents, and 55% of the Metrorail riders are majority residents.

We will celebrate Martin Luther King Day on January 20th and though we can't have benefit of Dr. King's thoughts on the world today, Dr. King did provide his thoughts about transportation in 1967. Dr. King wrote this:

"When you go beyond the relatively simple though serious problems such as police racism, [however,] you begin to get into all the complexities of the modern American economy. Urban transit systems in most American cities, for example, have become a genuine civil rights issue—and a valid one—because the layout of rapid-transit systems determines the accessibility of jobs to the Black community. If transportation systems in American cities could be laid out so as to provide an opportunity for poor people to get to meaningful employment, then they could begin to move into the mainstream of American life. A good example of this problem is my home city of Atlanta, where the rapid-transit system has been laid out for the convenience of the white upper-middle-class suburbanites who commute to their jobs downtown. The system has virtually no consideration for connecting the poor people with their jobs."

Fast forward to today and one of the things we find is that the opportunities to move into the mainstream of American life are fewer than they were during Dr. King's lifetime and the disparity in income and wealth in the United States is greater than it has ever been.

When I looked at the most recent RTPP draft, I was struck by the fact that this racial segregation is not mentioned, much less is it addressed by a remedy. To the contrary, it seems as though the RTPP outlines a program under which transportation services utilized by white upper middle-class suburbanites will likely receive a disproportionate amount of transportation investment, and transportation services utilized by non-white lower-class residents will receive short shrift.

I am concerned that the transportation investment that will flow out of this plan may not pass a fair and equitable test. I provided more detail in my written comments and would encourage the TPB to postpone adoption of the RTPP until this and a number of other outstanding