

March 20, 2007

Catherine Hudgins, Chair
National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board
777 North Capitol Street NE
Washington, DC 20002

Christopher Zimmerman, Chair
TPB Variable-Priced Lanes Task Force
777 North Capitol Street NE
Washington, DC 20002

Regarding: Highway Pricing Strategies for Regional Mobility and Accessibility Scenario Study

Dear Ms. Hudgins and Mr. Zimmerman:

On behalf of various individuals and organizations, we wish to express concern about the interpretation by TPB staff of a key recommendation made by the TPB Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC).

The CAC recommended recently that TPB analyze a scenario or scenarios that assume the conversion of existing general purpose lanes to variably priced lanes. CAC noted that the extensive toll lane scenario under analysis mainly looks at new roads or widening existing roads. The CAC recommended a scenario that focuses mainly on converting existing lanes to variably priced lanes to boost their productivity during peak hours and support high efficiency express bus, bus rapid transit, and other transit services. One approach could emphasize enhanced transit utilizing the variably priced lanes. Another could integrate variably priced lanes into an existing scenario that emphasizes transit, including increased rail transit. The scenarios could be refined by including limited additional road capacity increases in the segments of the system where tolls would have to be set very high to keep traffic operating efficiently even with improved transit services.

We are concerned at the TPB staff response (handout for Item 16 on March 21, 2007 TPB agenda): "*TPB staff is currently examining the conversion of existing capacity to variably priced lanes on a number of facilities, including roads in the District of Columbia and on parkways. As the study continues, additional existing facilities could be considered for conversion to variably priced lanes.*" This response suggests an intention to work from the initial base road pricing scenario which consisted of about 600 lane-miles of toll-managed facilities, of which 400 lane-miles would be newly constructed high speed motorways, with half of these new lanes not now in the adopted long-range transportation plan. If this becomes the starting point for considering pricing more existing lanes, it would be highly inconsistent with the CAC recommendation.

In an e-mailed response to concerns expressed by CAC members, Director of Transportation Planning Ronald F. Kirby noted that Scenario B removes the added capacity the base scenario included on the Southeast/Southwest Freeway and I-295. He also noted that “[a]dditional reductions in the base of capacity expansions are being considered by staff for future scenarios.” While this clarification is welcome, it falls well short of a commitment to test the type of alternative recommended by the CAC.

It is important for the RMAS to consider a full array of options for dealing with our region’s challenges. The RMAS is an important initiative to help our region consider ways to address global warming, manage traffic congestion and sprawl, and finance transportation improvements that boost performance and travel choices. We urge you not to disregard the recommendations of your own Citizen’s Advisory Committee on this matter. Both elected officials and the public would be ill-served if TPB artificially constrains RMAS scenarios to consider only major highway expansion options.

Many citizens and planning professionals believe our region can do better by managing existing highways more effectively to improve productivity and expand travel choices, adapting from the successful approaches taken in London, Oslo, Stockholm, Singapore, and elsewhere, and now under consideration in many other world class cities. Such an approach should not start by presuming a massive expansion of the region’s motorways.

Sincerely,

Michael Replogle
Transportation Director
Environmental Defense

The Sierra Club
Stephen Caflich
Transportation Chair
Maryland Chapter

Allen Muchnick
President
Arlington Coalition for Sensible Transportation

"Delay is Our Enemy"

Statement of Robert O. Chase

To the National Capital Regional Transportation Planning Board

March 21, 2007

Having just visited Phoenix, Arizona, I want to put to rest rumors that 99 degrees of dry heat isn't hot. It is.

Phoenix is also known for pursuing the radical notion that building arterial and freeway capacity to meet projected demand is necessary to accommodate the more than 1 million new residents expected in the next few decades and keep its economy strong.

At next month's meeting the TPB will be asked to approve key highway improvements including I-66 westbound spot improvements and I-95/I-395 HOT lanes for air quality conformity testing.

Frankly it is astounding that spot improvements amounting to essentially extending acceleration lanes to ameliorate several bottlenecks should have to be tested for air quality conformity. The likelihood of such minor improvements impacting the region's air quality is less than remote.

The HOT-Lanes facility essentially involves the re-striping and extension of an existing HOV system to Massaponax.

In a just world in which government is truly concerned about the well-being of its citizens, the federal government and/or Commonwealth of Virginia would have started extending the I-95 HOV corridor to points south of Fredericksburg within 60-days of September 11, 2001.

But the federal government hasn't and Virginia's road construction fund is down to about \$1.39. So improvements to I-95 corridor fall to the private sector for which the public will pay tolls for congestion free travel.

The point is, if the TPB believes its own projections about the region adding more than 1.6 million people in the next 25 years, it needs to be in the business of expediting, not delaying projects that provide more capacity to our transportation network.

This is particularly true for projects with major regional security ramifications.

I-66 spot improvements are a meager, but essential addition producing benefits many times their cost.

HOT-Lanes are a more complex issue that will be subject to environmental and other analysis in the months ahead.

However, it is important to approve both for air quality conformity testing.

Delay is our enemy, not only because of the daily time, fuel and frustration taxes imposed on area residents, but also, as we see in the case of Dulles Rail, delays mean higher construction costs that can doom a project altogether.

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Another CLRP/TIP Cycle Starts with Minimal Progress on Rail Transit March 21, 2007

In the project submissions for this TIP/CLRP I am aware of no new major rail projects, while continuing projects (Dulles Rail, DC Streetcar, Corridor Cities Transitway, and Purple Line) have been delayed. At the same time, the I395/95 Hot Lanes seems to be on a “fast track” with a TPB committee closely monitoring them.

From my transit advocate role, I view transit improvements as a three legged stool- additional bus service in the regional network, buses in HOT lanes or dedicated lanes, and rail expansion. An expanded rail system is as critical as the other two legs. Rail expansion will add many suburb-to-suburb rail trips, and it drives land use decisions in the right direction. Metrorail makes our region the special region that it is. (Recent comment from Chris Leinberger, fellow at Brookings Institute)

Some may argue that rail projects are studied at the jurisdictional level, and, thus they don't need a regional focus. But our rail (and bus) system has huge connectivity with many riders crossing jurisdictional lines. When a rail line doesn't move forward it is not just that jurisdiction that is impacted. There definitely are regional synergistic benefits from adding more rail links.

What am I saying? The expansion of our rail transit system deserves as much regional attention as the Variably Priced Lane study effort at TPB. We need to elevate the analysis of rail transit/land use options in the Regional Mobility study by applying the same diligence as used in the Variably Priced Lane study. Perhaps, this is an effort that should be lead by WMATA working with TPB staff. I don't claim to know the details, but I see this gaping hole in our regional planning efforts.

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Smart Growth News

Northeast Leaders Say Expansion of Rail Service Must Be First Priority to Limit Sprawl, Protect Environmental Assets

Northeast Leaders Say Expansion of Rail Service Must Be First Priority to Limit Sprawl, Protect Environmental Assets Its population of 50 million likely to approach 68 million within a few decades, the nation's historic Northeast corridor from Maine to Virginia must work as one region to expand transportation choices, cut greenhouse gas emissions and protect such environmental treasures as the Appalachian highlands and the Chesapeake Bay, reports Washington Post Writers Group columnist Neal Peirce on a consensus reached at the Northeast Climate and Competitiveness Summit in Philadelphia, quoting former Massachusetts Office of Commonwealth Development Douglas Foy, who sees this urban corridor as the clean air, smart growth and transit leader in America.

Prompted by the same message from former Massachusetts and Maryland Democratic Governors Michael Dukakis and Parris Glendening, and U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Democratic Chairman James Oberstar (Minn.), the 200 summit participants outlined a "compelling new agenda," whose first priority is "radical expansion of rail service" with world-class high-speed and freight trains, which will also help limit sprawl, energy use and tailpipe emissions.

"We have the best rail Congress in my lifetime," rejoiced Governor Dukakis, a former Amtrak vice chairman, noting New Jersey Democratic Senator Frank Lautenberg's bill to earmark almost \$20 billion for new Amtrak equipment and repair of Northeast routes.

Representative Oberstar promised a committee rewrite of the organic act of Amtrak, pointing out that in comparison with high-speed rail investments in China, France and Denmark -- the last two spending \$6.8 billion and \$5.4 billion, respectively -- the Bush administration's \$900 million looks like a shutdown amount.

Governor Glendening, now president of the Washington-based Smart Growth Leadership Institute, urged Northeast governors and the Washington mayor to "think outside the box," suggesting a joint "visioning" process and a regional fund for major transportation and conservation projects.

"Would independent states ever do that?" the columnist wonders while hoping for the best, given "an unmistakable new sense of urgency," New York Regional Plan Association President Robert Yaro's commitment to the agenda, and the call for the Coalition of Northeast Governors to join the effort. -- *Washington Post Writers Group* 3/11/2007