



MEMORANDUM

TO: COG Board of Directors
FROM: Kanti Srikanth, COG Deputy Executive Director for Metropolitan Planning
Paul DesJardin, COG Community Planning and Services Director
Timothy Canan, COG Planning Data and Research Program Director
SUBJECT: Equity Emphasis Areas
DATE: July 19, 2021

SUMMARY

The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) approved the region's long-range transportation plan, *Visualize 2045*, in October 2018. As part of that update, the TPB considered the effects of the plan's proposed projects, programs, and policies on low-income and minority residents in accordance with new federal regulations.

To perform this assessment, the TPB developed a methodology to identify census tracts in the region that contain higher concentrations of low-income or minority residents compared to the rest of the region. The methodology revealed that approximately 350 of the 1,222 census tracts across the region met these criteria and were identified as **Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs)**. Figure 1 identifies the location of the EEAs throughout the region.

Beyond the long-range transportation plan, EEAs can be applied in various additional ways to consider equity and inform regional decisions and actions. For example, the TPB also uses EEAs as selection criteria in all its grant programs that fund planning for access to transit stations, improving roadway safety, alternative modes of travel, and connecting land use and the transportation system.

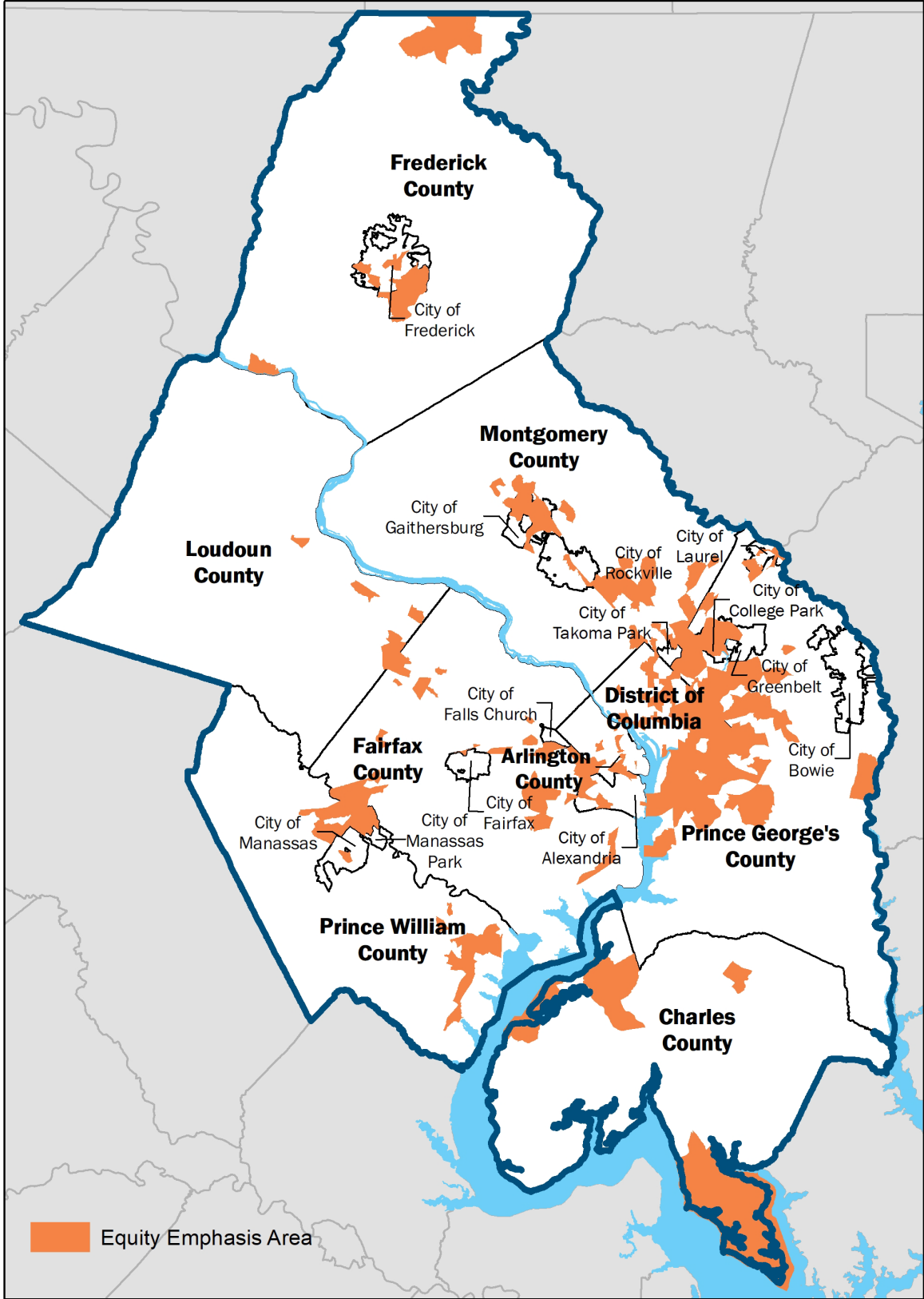
During the 2021 Leadership Retreat, members will consider how EEAs can be used to advance racial equity in additional planning and program areas. Staff will demonstrate how EEAs can be used to examine other equity factors, including educational attainment, economic independence, housing, language proficiency, transportation accessibility and safety, among others.

The memo provides a more in-depth look at the methodology used to develop EEAs and highlights opportunities for using the EEAs in other local and regional planning, project implementation, and decision making.

At the retreat, members will consider EEAs as an analytical framework for local and regional decision making in the areas of land use, transportation, and much more.

EEAs can potentially assist member governments with weaving equity into all that they do and help realize our shared vision for a more prosperous, accessible, livable, and sustainable region for all area residents.

Figure 1: Equity Emphasis Areas



BACKGROUND

Methodology

The methodology developed by TPB to identify EEAs is an enhanced approach to what is required for the Title VI/Environmental Justice Analysis, and relies on the most recently available five-year data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) on income, race, and ethnicity to determine which census tracts have concentrations of low-income populations, minority populations, or both, higher than the average concentration in the TPB planning area. Data from the ACS for each of the following four population groups is used:

- Low Income¹
- Black or African American²
- Asian³, and
- Hispanic or Latino⁴

Federal guidance defines the following three fundamental Environmental Justice (EJ) principles that serve as the guiding principles for EJ analysis:

- To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations.
- To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision making process.
- To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.

Executive Order 12898 on US DOT's EJ analysis further defines a "disproportionately high and adverse effect on minority and low-income populations" as an effect that:

1. is predominately borne by a minority population and/or a low-income population, or
2. will be suffered by the minority population and/or low-income population and is appreciably more severe or greater in magnitude than the adverse effect that will be suffered by the non-minority population and/or non-low-income population.

The above could serve as the minimum framework for outcomes of an equity analysis within any area of local or regional decision making.

¹ Individuals with household income less than one-and-a-half times the federal government's official poverty threshold, depending on household size.

² A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

³ A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent.

⁴ A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race

The metropolitan Washington regional planning area covers slightly more than 3,500 square miles and includes 24 jurisdictions. This planning area includes dense urban areas, such as the District of Columbia, and relatively rural outer suburban locations, such as Frederick County. In addition, the demographics and built environment vary widely throughout the region.

Given the variation in land area, its use, and population among the various census tracts within the planning area, Index Scores were developed and assigned to each tract to help provide a standard basis to determine areas with high concentration of the four population groups previously identified. Index scores are assigned to each population group by first calculating the proportion of these four groups within each census tract and then determining the ratio of the tract's concentration to that of the region's ⁵ concentration for the group. Tracts are identified as EEAs if one of three criteria are met:

1. Tract has a concentration of individuals identified as low-income more than one-and-a-half times the regional average.
2. Tract has high concentration for two or more minority population groups.
3. Tract has high concentration of at least one minority population group and the concentration of individuals identified as low income that is at or above the region's average.

The Region's EEAs

Figure 1 displays the EEA map developed by the TPB as part of its 2018 long-range transportation plan using ACS 5-year estimates from 2012-2016. Of the 1,231 census tracts in the TPB planning area, 1,222 were analyzed (nine were not as they did not have people residing in them or had no reliable population estimates, ex., Dulles Airport, National Mall, etc.) and 351 met the criteria and were designated as EEAs. The 351 EEAs occupy 341 square miles of the total 3,558 square miles covering the TPB planning area.

Per the ACS data, the total population in the TPB planning area was 5.6 million persons, of which 1.6 million persons resided in EEAs. The analysis will be updated, and the EEA maps revised in conjunction with each major long-range transportation plan update using the latest ACS data.

Table 1 provides the total population of TPB member jurisdictions and the population of those jurisdictions residing in EEAs using more recent ACS 5-year estimates. Additional information on EEAs and the methodology and analysis can be found here: mwcog.org/equityemphasisareas.

⁵ Region is defined as the TPB Planning Area: mwcog.org/TPB

Table 1: Breakdown of Jurisdiction and EEA population

Equity Emphasis Areas per Jurisdiction			
TPB Planning Area Jurisdiction	Number of EEAs	Total	Population within EEAs
District of Columbia	97	692,625	373,236
Charles County	5	159,428	17,979
Frederick County	9	251,422	40,271
Montgomery County	49	1,043,530	259,093
Prince George's County	103	908,670	413,340
Maryland Subtotal	166	2,363,050	730,683
City of Alexandria	9	157,613	45,274
Arlington County	12	233,460	47,013
Fairfax County	43	1,145,857	215,246
City of Fairfax	0	23,531	0
City of Falls Church	0	14,128	0
Loudoun County	5	395,134	27,437
City of Manassas	1	41,174	7,609
City of Manassas Park	1	16,986	7,291
Prince William County	17	467,886	103,940
Fauquier Co. UZA portion	0	35,928	0
Virginia Subtotal	88	2,531,697	453,810
Total	351	5,587,372	1,557,729

Source: ACS 2015-2019 Data

BROADER APPLICATIONS OF EEAS

Advancing equity among traditionally underserved communities is a key principle for many working in local and regional planning and decision making in the region. Racial equity is a fundamental value for COG, affirmed by the Board of Directors in a resolution in July 2020:

“The Board affirms that our work together as the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments will be anti-racist and will advance equity; and The Board affirms that Equity will be woven into COG’s Region Forward Vision to ensure a more prosperous, accessible, livable, sustainable, and equitable future for all area residents and throughout COG’s analyses, operations, procurement, programs, and priorities.”

The 351 EEAs can be useful in informing discussions on equity in other social and community planning activities in housing, health, public safety, education, economic opportunities, and more.

For example, the impact on EEAs could be used for determining the best location of additional housing, climate planning initiatives, tree canopy planning, and food security programming. Moreover, additional data can be examined inside EEAs and in areas outside of EEAs to cultivate a deeper understanding on the nature and magnitude of equity disparities throughout the region and help inform important policy discussions that seek to address them.

While the TPB is required to examine disproportional impacts of long-range transportation plans on low-income and minority residents, there are numerous other equity considerations that can be taken into account. Other data sources are available at the census tract level. These include information on factors such as households on food stamp assistance programs, persons with limited proficiency in English, single-parent households, levels of education achieved, and the cost of rent as a percentage of annual income. In addition, the TPB recently conducted a study on traffic safety in the region. As part of the study, data on fatal crashes were compiled and analyzed at the census tract level, providing information on traffic safety inside and outside of EEAs.

These additional factors can provide much broader understanding of the disparities present in the region’s communities and signal a need to take actions that address them.

WORKING TOGETHER TO ENHANCE EEAS

At the retreat, members will consider whether EEAs should be used in local and regional decision making as means to achieve their shared vision for a more prosperous, accessible, livable, and sustainable region for all, including addressing inequities in the areas of accessibility, quality of life, safety, and more.

As part of the retreat briefings, staff will highlight opportunities for optimizing land use and transportation in High-Capacity Transit Station Areas (HCTs), including by completing the National Capital Trail Network (NCTN), which can help improve accessibility of residents to jobs. When considering these opportunities, better understanding the relationship between EEAs and HCTs can further assist and inform decisions that will cultivate improved access of residents in EEAs to these jobs through investments in infrastructure like the NCTN.

More information on HCTs and the NCTN have also been provided to board members for the retreat. When considered together, taking actions to optimize HCTs, further examining and addressing equity using the EEA framework, and investing in the completion of the NCTN can result in meaningful progress for the region in achieving its priorities and goals.

MORE: mwcog.org/equityemphasisareas

**METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
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**RESOLUTION ENDORSING EQUITY EMPHASIS AREAS AS A KEY PLANNING CONCEPT AND TOOL TO
INFORM DECISION MAKING AND ACTION**

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) comprises the region's 24 local governments and their governing officials, plus area members of the Maryland and Virginia legislatures and the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, and COG provides a focus for action on issues of regional concern; and

WHEREAS, in July 2020 the COG Board passed Resolution R26-2020, affirming that its work together will be anti-racist and will advance equity, and that equity will be woven into COG's *Region Forward Vision* to ensure a more prosperous, accessible, livable, sustainable, and equitable future for all area residents and throughout COG's analyses, operations, procurement, programs, and priorities; and

WHEREAS, in 2018 the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) adopted a methodology to identify census tracts in the region that contain higher concentrations of low-income or racial or ethnic minorities compared to the rest of the region, to ensure its long-range plan does not have disproportionate adverse impacts on these communities; and

WHEREAS, the most recent analysis revealed that 351 of the 1,222 census tracts across the region (a number that will be updated periodically) meet the adopted low-income and racial or ethnic minority concentration thresholds and have been identified as Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs); and

WHEREAS, these 351 EEAs constitute about 10 percent of the region's land area and house about 30 percent of the region's population, with 214 EEAs located within one-half mile of High-Capacity Transit Station Areas (HCTs) and 340 located within one mile of a Regional Activity Center (RAC); and

WHEREAS, COG's multi-faceted regional planning efforts extend beyond transportation and include housing, health, and environment; and

WHEREAS, at the COG Leadership Retreat in July 2021 the board took an in-depth look at the TPB's EEA designations and engaged in discussions on how EEAs can be used to advance racial equity in local and regional planning, project implementation, and decision making across all sectors of COG work; and

WHEREAS, given COG's commitment to integrate equity considerations in all of its work activities, using the EEA planning construct along with the RACs and HCTs is a way to enable equity considerations in land use and environment and transportation planning to advance the region's housing, transportation, and climate change goals; and

WHEREAS, COG member jurisdictions could also use EEAs in a wide range of their jurisdictional activities and services such as housing, education/employment opportunities, environment, and livability, to cultivate a deeper understanding of the nature and magnitude of equity disparities across their jurisdiction and help inform important policy discussions that seek to address disparities.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS THAT:

1. EEAs should be prioritized for special consideration in regional and local planning and decision making as a means to further the *Region Forward Vision* for an accessible, livable, sustainable, and prosperous region.
2. COG committees and staff should explore and implement strategies, as appropriate, to further incorporate the consideration of EEAs in planning areas including but not limited to transportation, land-use, housing, climate, and water resources and COG should serve as a forum to elevate the conversation around these topics to provide regional thought leadership and demonstrate the connection between equity and greater prosperity for all.
3. Local governments should prioritize efforts that provide safe and convenient walk, bicycle, and micro-transit access to all of the HCTs and to complete the National Capital Trail Network as a means to provide enhanced mobility and accessibility options to the traditionally underserved population groups in the EEAs.
4. Local governments should consider adopting local resolutions committing to prioritizing EEAs identified within their jurisdiction.