



# Regional Transportation Priorities Plan

For the National Capital Region



# Executive Summary

**T**he Regional Transportation Priorities Plan aims to identify strategies with the greatest potential to respond to our most significant transportation challenges. It also aims to identify those strategies that are “within reach” both financially and politically—recognizing the need for pragmatism in an era of limited financial resources and a lack of political will to raise significant amounts of new revenue.

The Plan calls for maintaining the region’s existing system of roadways and transit first, strengthening public confidence and ensuring fairness, and finding better, more efficient ways to move people throughout the region. Focusing our attention on these efforts will move us toward achieving our shared goals for the future.

Ultimately, the purpose of the Priorities Plan is to support efforts to incorporate into future updates of the region’s Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan (CLRTP) specific projects and programs that support regional priorities. The Priorities Plan serves as a policy guide to assist local, state, and regional leaders in “thinking regionally and acting locally”—that is, in considering regional needs when identifying local transportation improvements to advance to implementation.

**The Priorities Plan aims to identify those strategies that are “within reach” both financially and politically.**

### **Background: The Metropolitan Washington Region and the TPB**

The metropolitan Washington region includes the District of Columbia plus parts of Maryland and Virginia. The region is home to more than 5.3 million people and 3.2 million jobs in hundreds of communities linked together by a system of roads, transit lines, and bicycle and pedestrian paths. Both population and employment in the region are expected to continue growing over coming decades, putting greater demand on the region’s transportation system. Competition for funds will continue to present challenges, especially for rehabilitation and maintenance of existing roadway and transit systems.

### **Developing the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan**

The Regional Transportation Priorities Plan is rooted in more than a decade of TPB planning, including the establishment of regional goals through the *TPB Vision* and *Region Forward*, analysis of a range of transportation and land-use scenarios using the adopted Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan (CLRP) as a baseline, and various studies of the region’s transportation funding challenges.

The *TPB Vision*, adopted by the TPB in 1998, outlines a number of broad transportation-planning goals that provide policy guidance to shape the region’s transportation investments.

*Region Forward*, developed by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and approved in 2010, lays out comprehensive regional planning goals in a variety of sectors to guide future planning in the region. *Region Forward* also identifies specific targets to help measure progress in achieving those goals. The strategies in this Plan are designed, collectively, to support and advance the comprehensive regional planning guidance provided both by the *TPB Vision* and *Region Forward*.

The idea to develop a priorities plan originated from the TPB’s Citizens Advisory Committee. In 2010, the CAC recommended that the TPB develop a financially-unconstrained regional vision for transportation operations and investment. The TPB convened regional stakeholders to participate in a regional “Conversation on Setting Regional Transportation Priorities,” an event that led to the development of a scope and process for developing the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan.

Since then, the TPB and its staff have engaged in extensive technical work and public outreach—including listening sessions with key stakeholder groups and engaged citizens, a citizens forum in June 2012, and a public opinion survey in spring 2013—to refine the challenges and strategies in the Plan and to identify the key priorities for moving the region closer to achieving its goals.

## Building on the TPB Vision

Development of the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan over the past two years has involved identifying the key continuing transportation challenges the Washington region faces in achieving six of the major policy goals articulated in the TPB Vision. Those goals are:

- Provide a comprehensive range of transportation options for everyone
- Promote a strong regional economy, including a healthy regional core and dynamic regional Activity Centers
- Ensure adequate maintenance, preservation, and safety of the existing system
- Maximize operational effectiveness and safety of the transportation system
- Enhance environmental quality, and protect natural and cultural resources
- Support international and inter-regional travel and commerce

Identifying the region's most pressing transportation challenges relied on using the adopted CLRP as a baseline. The adopted CLRP, which includes only those projects and programs what we realistically expect to build by 2040—and which takes into account forecasts of future population and job growth, and where that growth is expected to occur—provides the best assessment of what our transportation future will look like under current planning and funding trajectories.

## REGIONAL GOALS AND CHALLENGES

Development of the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan over the past two years has involved identifying the key continuing transportation challenges the Washington region faces in achieving six of the major policy goals articulated in the TPB Vision.

### GOAL 1: Provide a Comprehensive Range of Transportation Options

**Roadway Congestion:** The region's roadways are among the most congested in the nation, making it harder for people and goods to get where they need to go.

**Transit Crowding:** The Metrorail system currently experiences crowding during peak hours and lacks the capacity to support future population and job growth.

**Inadequate Bus Service:** Existing bus service is too limited in its coverage, frequency, and reliability, making transit a less viable option, especially for people with disabilities and limited incomes.

**Unsafe Walking and Biking:** Too few people have access to safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure or live in areas where walking and bicycling are not practical options for reaching nearby destinations.

### GOAL 2: Promote a Strong Regional Economy, Including a Healthy Regional Core and Dynamic Activity Centers

**Development around Metrorail:** Too many Metrorail stations, especially on the eastern side of the region, are surrounded by undeveloped or underdeveloped land, limiting the number of people who can live or work close to transit and leaving unused capacity in reverse-commute directions on several lines.

**Housing and Job Location:** Most housing, especially affordable housing, and many of the region's jobs are located in areas outside of activity centers where transit, bicycling, and walking are not safe and viable options.

### GOAL 3: Ensure Adequate System Maintenance, Preservation, and Safety

**Metrorail Repair Needs:** Deferred Metrorail maintenance over the years has led to unreliability, delays, and safety concerns today, as well as higher maintenance costs.

**Roadway Repair Needs:** Older bridges and roads are deteriorating and in need of major rehabilitation to ensure safe, reliable, and comfortable travel for cars, trucks, and buses.

### GOAL 4: Maximize Operational Effectiveness and Safety of the Transportation System

**Incidents:** Major accidents and weather disruptions on roadways and transit systems cause severe delays and inconvenience.

**Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety:** The number of bicycle and pedestrian fatalities each year is holding steady even as the number of vehicle fatalities has declined steadily.

### GOAL 5: Enhance Environmental Quality, and Protect Natural and Cultural Resources

**Environmental Quality:** Increasing amounts of vehicle travel resulting from population and job growth could threaten the quality of our region's air and water.

**Open Space Development:** Wildlife habitat, farmland, and other open spaces are threatened by construction of new transportation facilities and residential and commercial development.

### GOAL 6: Support Inter-Regional and International Travel and Commerce

**Bottlenecks:** Bottlenecks on the highway and rail systems cause delays in inter-regional travel for both freight and passengers, hurting the region's economic competitiveness.

**Travel Time Reliability:** Travel times to and from the region's airports are becoming less reliable for people and goods movement.

**The Plan calls for maintaining the region's existing system of roadways and transit first, strengthening public confidence and ensuring fairness, and finding better, more efficient ways to move people and goods.**

The public reviewed and commented on the challenges developed through the TPB's technical work in the early listening sessions, the citizens forum in June 2012, the public opinion survey in spring 2013, and in comment periods on the draft Plan.

### **Our Three Regional Priorities**

The priorities planning process led to the identification of three regional priorities that local, state, and regional agencies should consider when developing projects, especially those that will eventually be included in the region's Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan (CLRP). The three priorities in this Plan are like building blocks, all essential in achieving our shared goals for the future. The three priorities and the

individual strategies they comprise aim to be "within reach" both financially and politically. And they aim to achieve greater efficiencies, in particular by making better use of the infrastructure already in place and by combining or packaging complementary strategies that offer mutually supportive benefits.

### **PRIORITY 1 Meet Our Existing Obligations Maintain the Transportation System We Already Have**

Meeting our existing obligations to maintain the transportation system we already have comes first among the three strategies in this Plan. Proper maintenance of our highways, bridges, and transit systems, especially Metro, is of primary importance; the success of all other strategies to improve transportation in our region relies on an existing system that functions properly and is safe.

For many years now, most transportation agencies in the region that are responsible for the upkeep of roadway facilities have had requirements and procedures in place to guarantee that adequate funds are dedicated to maintenance and preservation of the existing system before roadways are expanded or new facilities are built. Agencies also have robust systems in place to evaluate the condition of area roadways and bridges, including structural integrity, pavement condition, and time remaining before major reconstruction is needed.



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Transit agencies in the region also dedicate a significant portion of their budgets to maintenance. But a number of high-profile disruptions and accidents in recent years highlights the need for greater efforts to bring the system, especially Metrorail, into a state of good repair. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WAMTA) is pursuing such efforts through its ambitious six-year, \$5-billion Metro Forward reconstruction program. It has also proposed another multi-year effort, known as Metro 2025, to bring the system fully into a state of good repair.

New federal rules outlined in the latest surface transportation reauthorization, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century, or MAP-21, now require the region to bring its highways and transit systems into a state of good repair. The new law requires departments of transportation, transit agencies, and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) like the TPB to set performance targets for maintenance and to report regularly on progress in achieving those targets.

## PRIORITY 1 STRATEGIES

- Ensure Maintenance of the Transit System [OG1]
- Ensure Maintenance of Roads and Bridges [OG2]



LARRY LEVINE, WAMTA

## PRIORITY 2 Strengthen Public Confidence and Ensure Fairness

### Pursue Greater Accountability, Efficiency, and Accessibility

As a matter of institutional practice, we must take steps to strengthen public confidence and ensure fairness and equity throughout the region. Agencies need the public's confidence in order to make important decisions about transportation, including raising revenue. Agencies in the region should take steps to demonstrate their competence and that they are being managed effectively. This includes taking care of obvious things first, making common sense improvements, engaging citizens in the planning and decision-making process, and using technology to achieve greater efficiencies and communicate better with the public.

Ensuring greater fairness in our region means improving access to transportation services so that everyone can use the system and contribute to and benefit from the region's vibrant economy. It is especially important to ensure accessibility for traditional

## PRIORITY 2 STRATEGIES

- Ensure Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities [OG5]
- Engage and Communicate with the Public\*
- Promote System Efficiency Through Management and Operations, and the Appropriate Use of Technology\*

\* These strategies originated in public outreach during the development of the Plan. They are not described in the strategies in Chapter 3.

## PRIORITY 3 STRATEGIES

- Improve Access to Transit Stops and Stations [NT1]
- Alleviate Roadway Bottlenecks [NT2]
- Support and Promote Electric Vehicles [NT3]
- Promote Commute Alternatives [NT4]
- Expand Pedestrian Infrastructure [NT5]
- Expand Bicycle Infrastructure [NT6]
- Apply Priority Bus Treatments [OG3]
- Increase Roadway Efficiency [OG4]
- Update and Enforce Traffic Laws [OG6]
- More Capacity on the Existing Transit System [LT1]
- Concentrated Growth in Activity Centers [LT2]
- Enhanced Circulation within Activity Centers [LT3]
- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) & Other Cost-Effective Transit Alternatives [LT4]
- Express Toll Lanes [LT5]

disadvantaged groups—persons with disabilities, low incomes, and limited English proficiency. Efforts to improve paratransit services, limit the negative effects of increases in transit fares, and provide important transit system information in multiple languages and formats all improve accessibility for traditionally disadvantaged groups. A number of other strategies in the Plan that reduce auto-dependency and expand transportation choice also greatly benefit these groups. Committing to providing more and better travel options and greater accessibility for everyone in our region is an essential step as we move forward both in maintaining our existing system and in developing new projects and programs to improve our transportation system.

### PRIORITY 3 Move More People More Efficiently

#### Alleviate Congestion and Crowding, and Accommodate Future Growth

The region's economy and quality of life depend on the ability of our transportation system to move more people and goods, and to move them more efficiently. Priority Three focuses on the more technical aspects of transportation planning, decision-making, and investment—how to alleviate congestion and crowding on the existing system now, and how to accommodate growth in travel in the future.

This priority calls for:

- **A mix of supply- and demand-side strategies.** Expanding roadway and transit capacity goes a long way in alleviating congestion on the existing transportation system, but doing so can often be more expensive and less cost-effective than efforts to manage demand.
- **A multimodal approach.** Offering a wider variety of travel modes, and focusing attention on modes that can move more people at lower cost, is key to moving more people more efficiently. Making such options available to more people also takes pressure off currently crowded systems, especially the roadway network and the core of the transit system, and alleviates demand for expensive new infrastructure. Providing travelers with more options also results in an increase in quality of life, as they are more likely to be able to choose a mode that best suits their individual needs. Not all projects with a given mode deserve equal attention, however; some investments or projects support more regional goals and offer greater benefit relative to their costs than others.
- **A focus on concentrating future growth in mixed-use Activity Centers.** Land-use is a critical component in more effectively managing demand on our region's transportation system.



Concentrating growth in mixed-use Activity Centers can help make more effective use of existing facilities, and can improve socioeconomic imbalance in the region by supporting job growth and commercial activity in areas that currently lack it. These land-use principles are central tenets of *Region Forward* and the *TPB Vision*.

Together, the strategies outlined in Priority Three represent a shift in focus away from large-scale supply-side investments of the past to smarter, more strategic approaches to alleviating congestion and crowding, and to accommodating future growth.

### **Next Steps: Implementing Regional Priorities**

#### ***Thinking Regionally, Acting Locally***

Implementation of specific projects and programs is the responsibility of local, state, and regional agencies in the Washington region. These agencies are also responsible for conceiving and developing such initiatives. The purpose of the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan is to inform that project development process, by encouraging local, state, and regional leaders to consider regional needs in identifying projects to advance to implementation. Elected leaders and transportation officials who sit on the TPB should return to the jurisdictions, bodies, and agencies they represent and share the priorities and principles laid out in this Plan as a resource to use in developing projects.

**The Priorities Plan serves as a policy guide to assist local, state, and regional leaders in “thinking regionally and acting locally”—that is, in considering regional needs when identifying local transportation improvements to advance to implementation.**





**Pursuing the priorities and strategies outlined in this Plan will lead to greater economic vitality and a higher quality of life in the Washington region.**

### ***Updating the Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan (CLRP)***

Locally-developed projects and programs that are deemed to be “regionally significant” must be included in the Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan (CLRP). The CLRP includes all projects and programs that the region can afford to build, maintain, and operate with revenues that are reasonably expected to be available in the future.

When projects developed at the local, state, or regional level have enough specificity and are reasonably expected to be funded, they will come to the TPB for inclusion in the CLRP. Because the CLRP is a “check point” in the implementation process, updating it provides a clear opportunity to consider the priorities outlined in this Plan in making decisions about what projects and programs to advance, or what projects or programs already in the plan might need to be changed or removed in order to bring the region closer to achieving its goals.

As agencies submit projects and programs for inclusion in the CLRP, the TPB will have an opportunity to review, assess, and discuss the relationship of those submissions to the priorities in this Plan. The public will also have opportunities throughout the update process to comment on how well any of the submissions support regional priorities.

In the future, the TPB will work collaboratively with the region’s jurisdictions to develop a process by which each jurisdiction will describe—in a formal letter or other documentation—the ways in which the projects and programs they submit for inclusion in the CLRP address the priorities in this Plan. In advance of each four-year update to the CLRP, the TPB will revisit and update the Priorities Plan to reflect changes planned for the region, including new projects in the CLRP, new land-use developments and forecasts, and new challenges that will emerge as policy and political issues change over time.

### **Conclusion**

Pursuing the priorities and strategies outlined in this Plan will lead to greater economic vitality and a higher quality of life in the Washington region. Maintaining the existing system first, strengthening public confidence and ensuring fairness, and finding better, more efficient ways to move people throughout the region will move us toward achieving our shared goals for the future.