

ITEM 12 - Information

June 20, 2012

Update on the Development of the TPB Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP)

Staff

Recommendation: Receive briefing on the outcomes of listening sessions and a June 2 citizen focus group conducted to assess how best to communicate proposed regional challenges and strategies to the general public. Proposed future public outreach activities for the development of the priorities plan will also be presented.

Issues: None

Background: The TPB Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP) is being developed to identify near and long term regional strategies that offer the greatest potential contributions toward addressing regional challenges.

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 300, Washington, D.C. 20002-4290 (202) 962-3310 Fax: (202) 962-3202 TDD: (202) 962-3213

Memorandum

TO: Transportation Planning Board

FROM: Ronald F. Kirby, Director
Department of Transportation Planning

SUBJECT: Update on the Development of the TPB Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP)

DATE: June 14, 2012

This memorandum provides an update on the development of the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP). The RTPP is being developed to identify regional strategies that offer the greatest potential contributions toward addressing regional challenges. This memorandum summarizes lessons learned from two recent public outreach activities: 1) listening sessions with regional stakeholders and 2) a June 2 citizen forum.

Background

RTPP Purpose

As growth in our region continues to place heavier demands on our transportation network, and as funding becomes more limited, decision-makers will be challenged to make critical improvements to roads, public transportation and pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

In response to these challenges, and at the request of the TPB's Citizens Advisory Committee, the TPB is embarking on a process to develop a Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP). The purpose of the RTPP is to identify those transportation strategies that best promote the TPB's goals for economic opportunity, transportation choices, system safety and efficiency, quality of life and environmental stewardship. Ultimately, it is envisioned that 10 to 15 strategies will be identified that the region can agree are the top priorities for addressing the most pressing regional challenges that the region faces in meeting the TPB's goals.

Schedule

The RTPP development process began in July 2011, when the TPB approved the scope of work for the RTPP. The scope of work acknowledged the importance of public support for the RTPP, and called for extensive public outreach throughout the process. In January and February 2012, TPB staff conducted a series of listening sessions with regional stakeholders representing a variety of interests throughout the region as well as citizen groups. More recently, the TPB hosted a citizen forum comprised of a

representative sample of citizens from throughout the region. These two public outreach events provided TPB staff with valuable feedback that is helping to ensure that the RTPP process and products are meaningful to the residents of the region. These two major public outreach efforts are described in greater detail below. The RTPP, expected to be complete in mid-2013, will continue to rely heavily on public input throughout the coming year.

Listening Sessions

Design and Conduct of Listening Sessions

Between January and February 2012, five regional stakeholder and citizen listening sessions were convened to provide feedback on the initial set of performance measures, challenges, and strategies. The listening sessions were also intended to provide guidance and input on framing identified challenges for the public during subsequent outreach phases.

In preparation for the listening sessions with regional stakeholders and citizen groups, TPB staff developed a list of performance measures to help identify regional challenges and measure progress toward meeting the challenges. Performance measures included things such as daily VMT per capita, job accessibility within 45 minutes, mode share, lane miles of congestion, Metro escalator availability, and bus stop accessibility.

The listening sessions included the following stakeholder and citizen groups:

- Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) - January 12
- Air and Climate Public Advisory Committee (ACPAC) - January 23
- Regional Stakeholder Group 1, which included representatives from the Coalition for Smarter Growth, Action Committee for Transit, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689, Sierra Club, Urban Land Institute, and UMD/National Center for Smart Growth
- Access for All Committee (AFA) - February 23
- Regional Stakeholder Group 2, which included representatives from the Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance, Greater Washington Board of Trade, AAA Mid-Atlantic, Suburban Maryland Transportation Alliance, DC BID Council, Buchanan Partners, and Washington Airports Task Force

Each listening session began with a presentation of possible performance measures and some example challenges based on the performance measures. When time allowed, a discussion of strategies followed this discussion.

Lessons learned

TPB staff gleaned two main lessons in moving forward with the RTPP:

First, TPB staff found that greater emphasis should be placed on the use of narrative, simple charts, and pictures to describe challenges and potential strategies to address them. Both stakeholders and citizen groups found many of the performance measures somewhat confusing. In general, listening session participants found the performance measures too technical and did not understand their significance for identifying regional challenges. It seemed clear that these performance measures would be just as confusing to the general public in future stages of the RTPP.

Second, regional disaggregation of challenges is often necessary. While some challenges are best presented at the regional level (such as air quality), other challenges are more meaningful if shown in a more locally-specific form (such as congestion and access to jobs).

Staff spent March thru May rethinking and reframing how to communicate the RTPP for the next round of public outreach.

June 2 Forum

Design and Conduct of the Forum

TPB staff conducted a citizen forum on Saturday, June 2, 2012 to test the new approach to communicating the RTPP.

The purpose of the forum was twofold. The first objective was to assess how best to communicate goals, challenges, and strategies to the general public. Additionally, the forum sought to assess whether the challenges and strategies presented were meaningful to the general public, and if there were any additional challenges or strategies that participants could suggest.

The format of the forum utilized a public outreach model called a deliberative forum. A deliberative forum allows citizens to learn about issues, share their thoughts via small group discussions and real-time polling, and hear from their peers. TPB staff contracted with *AmericaSpeaks*, a non-profit public outreach organization that specializes in the deliberative forum format, to help develop content, assist with logistics, and facilitate the June 2 forum.

Forum participants were carefully selected to ensure a sample that was fairly representative of the region in terms of home jurisdiction, race/ethnicity, gender, and other important characteristics. A group of 50 participants was sought, and 41 people ultimately participated in the forum. Participants were provided with a \$100 stipend for their time.

The forum took place in the COG Training Center, and lasted for 5 hours. The morning was dedicated to an introduction to the RTPP, including an in-depth explanation and discussion of the regional goals and challenges using PowerPoint presentations and a printed Discussion Guide. Participants were given the opportunity to discuss the challenges, vote on how significant they thought the challenges were to achieving regional goals, and identify and vote on additional important challenges that they developed amongst themselves. The afternoon was spent on presentation, discussion and polling on strategies.

Here, the participants were encouraged to discuss pros and cons of each of six sample strategies, vote on the importance of pursuing these six strategies, and propose and vote on additional strategies that they developed.

Evaluation Results Concerning Communication of Goals, Challenges and Strategies

Because a major objective of the forum was to determine if the RTPP concepts were effectively communicated to the general public, a combination of evaluation forms, keypad polling questions, and debrief meetings with discussion facilitators were used to gather information about communication.

In response to the question, “Overall, do you feel that we are on the right track in clearly communicating regional transportation goals and challenges to the general public?”, 37% of participants answered “Yes”, an additional 55% of participants answered “Almost right, but needs a little tweaking”, and only 8% said “No: the level of detail and presentation is too confusing”.

Some specific “tweaks” that were suggested from participant evaluation forms include:

- **Use simplified goal language**
Some goal language should be simpler and less technical. For example, Goal 4, “Maximize operational effectiveness and safety of the transportation system” could be changed to “Get the most out of the existing transportation system”.
- **Use examples whenever possible to describe challenges**
A few challenges sounded vague at first, but the use of examples helped participants understand the issue at hand. For example, participants were initially confused by the concept of bottlenecks on the freight network, but responded well to a picture of the Virginia Avenue tunnel.
- **All strategies must be explained thoroughly and at the appropriate level of specificity**
Some strategies that TPB staff thought were self-evident, such as bikesharing, were not universally understood. Circumferential transit was felt to be too general; more specificity on which radial corridors would be connected would help, as for the example of the Purple Line.

Overall, the feedback was positive, and it appears that we are generally on the right track to effectively communicating the RTPP.

Next Steps

The listening sessions and forum that took place over the last several months have provided important feedback and recommendations for how best to communicate the principles and concepts of the RTPP to the public. A more comprehensive write-up of these activities and their outcomes will be included in Interim Report #2, to be presented at the July 18, 2012 meeting.

Refinement of RTPP Presentation and Materials

In the coming months, TPB staff will apply the lessons learned from the June 2 forum in preparation for future RTPP public outreach events. In refining RTPP presentations and materials, the following big picture points will be kept in mind:

- **The general public has some fresh concepts that could be included in the RTPP**
Participants identified some important new themes, including the importance of agency transparency and accountability to ensure that existing and any possible additional future funds are spent effectively.
- **Continue to emphasize the importance of articulating regional challenges to provide a context for developing strategies**
There is a tendency to bring up strategies without connecting them to regional challenges. RTPP materials and outreach tools should make it clear that strategies should be designed to respond to one or more identified challenges.
- **Suggest potential funding mechanisms along with strategies**
Likely project costs and potential funding mechanisms should be suggested for each strategy. Participants had difficulty in evaluating strategies without some information on how much they would cost and where funding might come from.
- **Be even more concise in explaining the RTPP**
Although the materials presented at the June 2 forum were an improvement over previous iterations, they are still quite lengthy. The next version of the materials ideally should be shorter and easier to understand.

Future Public Outreach Schedule

The next major RTPP public outreach event is scheduled to take place in the fall, when TPB staff hopes to utilize a web-based tool to help communicate the latest iteration of the RTPP goals, challenges, and strategies. The web-based tool will allow TPB staff to reach a larger segment of the general public, perhaps a sample of 600 individuals who represent the region, in addition to regional stakeholders and the TPB's citizen committees.

It is expected that the fall public outreach event will inform a further public outreach event in spring 2013, during which a number of public outreach tools will be utilized, possibly including another version of web-based polling, additional deliberative forums, and mobile kiosks. The purpose of these efforts would be to inform the selection of priority strategies from a longer list of strategies under discussion.

The ultimate goal of these public outreach efforts is to provide information to the TPB on priority strategies that are widely understood and could garner broad-based public support.