
November 30, 2017

Chair Bridget Newton
Transportation Planning Board
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 N. Capitol Street, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002

Re: Long Range Plan Task Force Study

Dear Chair Newton and members of the Transportation Planning Board:

Thank you for your leadership in seeking to develop a more effective regional transportation plan through the Long Range Plan Task Force. The Task Force and staff are to be commended for working through the challenging issues involved in structuring the process, defining the study packages and performance measures, and evaluating the results.

The signatories to this letter include many groups and some individuals who have been involved with the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) for nearly three decades. We are writing to share our reaction to the Draft Results of the Technical Analysis of the 10 Initiatives and to share our recommendation for the best approaches to advance as part of a fundamentally restructured regional long range transportation plan.

The report ¹and consultant briefing demonstrates that the best solutions across all of the measures is Regional Land Use Balance (RLUB) followed by Travel Demand Management (TDM). The report also demonstrates that the Additional Northern Potomac Bridge performs worst among the ten packages in meeting regional challenges and scores poorly in the measures of effectiveness. The findings also demonstrate good performance for BRT and Transitways and Metrorail Core Capacity.

Accordingly, the Coalition for Smarter Growth and the undersigned signatories recommend that the Long Range Plan Task Force and Transportation Planning Board vote to advance the best performing scenarios – Regional Land Use Balance and key components of Travel Demand Management, along with the next best supporting transit scenarios BRT and Transitways and Metrorail Core Capacity. We

¹ ICF, Long-Range Plan Task Force: Draft Analysis Results, November 15, 2017, found at <https://www.mwcog.org/events/2017/11/15/long-range-plan-task-force/>

support additional dedicated funding for Metro. We also support addressing the bottleneck at the American Legion Bridge with priority on transit connections, and expanding the capacity of the Rosslyn Metro tunnel. We recommend against advancing the Additional Northern Potomac River Bridge due to its very poor performance as documented in this study.

Discussion of the Results

The RLUB scenario allocated just the increment of new jobs and housing growth predicted for the region in the Round 9.0 Cooperative Forecast between 2025 and 2040, and an additional 130,000 households from outside the region to achieve a 1.54 jobs/housing ratio within each jurisdiction and address the east-west jobs imbalance, with growth focused at the Activity Centers with high-capacity transit (underutilized rail stations). The TDM scenario expanded employer-based transit and vanpool benefits, increased priced parking in major activity centers, and increased telework share from 10% to 20% for office employees. However, the telework component results in a real decline in transit trips.

Despite the relatively small increment of growth reallocated across the region, RLUB performed best in meeting the identified regional challenges (verified by adding up numerical assignments to the key),² followed by TDM, with both far exceeding the scores of the other packages. TDM and RLUB also provided the greatest benefit to drivers reducing vehicle hours of delay 24% and 19% respectively.³ RLUB and TDM also performed well under the other factors of:

- **Cost:** It's much cheaper to solve transportation problems without building big transportation infrastructure.
- **Affordability:** It costs less to travel when you don't travel so far.
- **Equity:** A more balanced east-west land use pattern is far more equitable including within major jurisdictions like Fairfax and Montgomery.
- **Placemaking:** Growth around transit stations helps create good places and attract people and jobs.
- **Environment:** Wetlands and farms are not destroyed and sprawl is reduced.

RLUB and components of TDM (of which we favor parking pricing, transit benefits, and parking cashout which are complimentary to balanced land use and transit) promise to significantly improve the performance of the regional transportation network at far less cost than major transportation projects.

² See p 42 of ICF, Long-Range Plan Task Force: Draft Analysis Results, November 15, 2017, found at <https://www.mwcog.org/events/2017/11/15/long-range-plan-task-force/> We applied two separate numerical ranking systems to the “moon” symbols, and RLUB and TDM scored highest under both. In one system: High = +2, Medium = +1, Low = -1, Neutral = 0, Negative = -2. In the other, High = +3, Medium = +2, Low = +1, Neutral = 0, Negative = -3.

³ See p 43 of ICF, Long-Range Plan Task Force: Draft Analysis Results, November 15, 2017, found at <https://www.mwcog.org/events/2017/11/15/long-range-plan-task-force/>

Among the other transportation improvements tested, BRT and Transitways had the most positive effects, the fewest negative ones in meeting regional challenges, significantly improved access to transit, and relatively speaking are not that expensive. Metrorail core capacity scored well in meeting regional challenges and improving access to jobs by transit. Transit extensions greatly improve access to jobs by transit but are costly.

In terms of the road packages, the Additional Northern Bridge performed the worst overall among all 10 packages in meeting regional challenges, was one of only two scenarios that increased regional VMT and per capita VMT, ranked 6th in reducing vehicle hours of delay, and stood out for its negative impact on air and water quality and open space. Operational improvements and HOT Spot Relief performed very poorly in meeting regional challenges, marginally reducing vehicle hours of delay and increasing jobs accessible by auto at the considerable expense of increasing VMT and per capita VMT and reducing HOV and transit mode shares. The Express Travel Network ranked middle of the pack in meeting regional challenges but scored very high in Travel on Reliable Modes. It also reduced vehicle hours of delay by 11 percent, but far below the 24% reduction provided by TDM and the 19% reduction provided by RLUB.

The Results Reconfirm Past Studies

The findings for RLUB and TDM (including parking pricing) echo those found in a series of scenario studies including *Connect Greater Washington* by WMATA, *What Would it Take* by COG/TPB, and *A Network of Livable Communities* by Environmental Defense Fund, Chesapeake Bay Foundation and others. Even the second round of the *Aspirations Scenario* by the TPB showed the most significant benefit came from the land use changes and BRT running on the toll network. Elsewhere in the U.S., scenario analyses have confirmed the better performance provided by regional transit and transit-oriented development including the Sacramento Blueprint, Envision Utah, and Portland Metro 2040. Therefore, the TPB's long-range plan analysis is just the latest to confirm the benefits of Regional Land Use Balance, transit and TDM (particularly parking pricing). A combination of these measures could be particularly effective – for example, combining RLUB, TDM, and BRT & Transitways, potentially adding to this, Metro Core Capacity.

Regarding the Additional Northern Potomac Bridge

The Additional Northern Potomac Bridge was pitched as a “game-changing” investment, but the study results demonstrate that it is not. It performed worst in meeting the regional challenges, increased regional VMT and per capita VMT, ranked 6th in reducing vehicle hours of delay, and was among the scenarios that move the needle very little on the remaining measures. This almost precisely mirrors the findings in the recent Northern Virginia Transaction Plan analysis which showed that the Northern Virginia network performed about the same with and without the bridge.⁴ In that case as well, other

⁴ See Technical Advisory Committee, April 19, 2017, “Transaction Baseline Analysis,” Bridge Sensitivity Analysis,

scenarios including compact land use performed as well or better than the bridge, and the bridge would actually add traffic to area roads rather than reduce it -- because the demand is induced or self-generated rather than serving existing trips.

The bridge stands out from all of the other scenarios for having the largest negative impact on air and water quality and open space, receiving negative ratings in those categories. This isn't surprising given that it would directly impact the drinking water intakes for most of the region's population, potentially impair the Piedmont groundwater aquifer which serves as the sole source of drinking water in rural Montgomery County, create development pressure in the nationally recognized Agricultural Reserve, and increase vehicle miles traveled. It's also very possible that the study by TPB understates the potential for the bridge to significantly worsen the east-west jobs/housing imbalance and undermine transit-oriented development.

Proponents of the Northern Potomac Bridge have asked for additional information and measures of performance beyond that agreed to in the development of the TPB's long range plan study. Doing so would go beyond the scope of the current study and beyond what is being allowed for the other scenarios. Moreover, existing studies have examined the issues raised about the American Legion Bridge and trips that might or might not be served by a new northern bridge. According to the [2015 VDOT Potomac River Crossings Study of travel origins and destinations](#) the location of overwhelming demand for river crossings today and in 2040 is at the American Legion Bridge.⁵ These findings are confirmed by recent data from the TPB⁶ showing that very few commuting trips in the D.C. Metropolitan region and the outer suburbs are the "U-shaped" trips that might use a new outer Potomac crossing. Specifically, about 95% of the commuter trips originating from Fairfax, Montgomery, and Frederick counties are made by people who live and work within the same jurisdiction or who are commuting radially. Not surprisingly, the Northern Virginia Transaction Plan Analysis showed that two outer bridges (a northern and a southern bridge) offered only "modest" reductions in person hours of travel, hours of delay, and transit crowding relative to the scenario that did not include the bridges (reductions of 1.7%, 4.2%, and 1.4%, respectively).⁷

Archived at <http://www.thenovaauthority.org/about/committees/document-archives/tac-document-archives/> (slide #46 in presentation in "Documents" for April 19, 2017 meeting date).

⁵ The 2015 VDOT Potomac River Crossings study showed that the greatest needs are at the American Legion Bridge and Rosslyn Metro Tunnel, www.ctb.virginia.gov/resources/2015/july/pres/PotomacRiverStudy.pdf

⁶ See NCRTPB Long-Range Plan Task Force, May 17, 2017, "Key Drivers of Future Transportation System Performance Challenges; Land Use and Commuting Patterns." Available at [https://www.mwcog.org/file.aspx?&A=Y7Qzp1lppHBk0R%2b9HMclQfDUF%2f8Snv22r%2f3AG1Ukcf0%3d slides 22-24](https://www.mwcog.org/file.aspx?&A=Y7Qzp1lppHBk0R%2b9HMclQfDUF%2f8Snv22r%2f3AG1Ukcf0%3d%20slides%2022-24).

⁷ See Technical Advisory Committee, April 19, 2017, "Transaction Baseline Analysis," Bridge Sensitivity Analysis, Archived at <http://www.thenovaauthority.org/about/committees/document-archives/tac-document-archives/> (slide #46 in presentation in "Documents" for April 19, 2017 meeting date).

Recommendations:

We recommend that the Long Range Plan Task Force and Transportation Planning Board vote to advance the best performing scenarios – Regional Land Use Balance and Travel Demand Management (with a focus on parking pricing, transit benefits, and parking cashout, which are complimentary to balanced land use and transit), along with the next best supporting transit scenarios BRT and Transitways and Metrorail Core Capacity. In doing so, we also reiterate our support for first providing the additional dedicated funding Metro requires to restore the system to a state of good repair and close the operational funding gap. We also recommend two specific projects as identified in the 2015 VDOT study and by others – addressing the bottleneck at the American Legion Bridge with priority on transit connections and expanding the capacity of the Rosslyn Metro tunnel.

We recommend strongly against advancing the Additional Northern Potomac River Bridge due to its very poor performance as documented in this study. It performed the worst overall in meeting regional challenges, was one of only two scenarios that increased regional VMT and per capita VMT, and ranked 6th in reducing vehicle hours of delay. The bridge stands out from all of the other scenarios for having the largest negative impact on air and water quality and open space, receiving negative ratings in those categories.

Sincerely,



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