

We write as members of ACPAC, representing Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, urging MWCOG in the strongest possible terms to urgently re-examine all its organizational policies and actions that directly or indirectly address global warming and the climate crisis.

Our reason for addressing this issue is straightforward:

***Global warming is happening much more rapidly and disastrously than expected.***

According to every major organization that tracks world surface temperatures, 2023 ended with temperatures in the neighborhood of 1.5° C, dramatically higher than the 1.2° C that the world faced just one year previously. These sharply elevated temperatures have continued into the new year.

While there is as yet no scientific consensus on the likely causes of this increase, the consequences for humanity, the natural world and our region could be catastrophic.

Our region directly experienced the consequences of this accelerated atmospheric heating in the summer of 2023 as unprecedentedly massive Canadian wildfires resulted in unsafe levels of atmospheric pollutants in our air for extended periods of time. And this is likely only a harbinger of conditions to come in in this and future years.

The impacts of accelerated climate change will be experienced most acutely by those in this region and elsewhere who are least advantaged and least able to to minimize the effects of climate change on themselves and in their communities.

This is a profound social and environmental injustice. Only through aggressive anticipation and action can socially just and equitable outcomes be achieved for the residents, enterprises, and communities of our region.

A number of us have previously expressed concerns that the emission reduction targets established by MWCOG in 2022 were insufficient to adequately address the crisis and at least in one case were significantly less ambitious than established by one of its local governments - Montgomery County.

Therefore, we ask that the following actions be taken:

*First*, MWCOG's emission reduction targets be strengthened this year

*Second*, MWCOG's internal policies, plans and funding reflect more aggressive mitigation and adaptation actions

*Third*, MWCOG communicates to its various stakeholders and partners the need for accelerated action on the climate crisis

*Fourth*, MWCOG's measurements, mitigation efforts, and resilience efforts concerning air quality should account for projected levels and duration of wildfire smoke in the coming years

Specifically, we ask staff and board members to prepare within 60 days recommendations to advance these four actions to ensure that the region acts on the climate crisis in ways that preserve its

quality of life for current residents and future generations, particularly those individuals, households and communities least advantaged.

We look forward to the opportunity to participate in this most important effort and eagerly await your response.

Herb, Bill and William

## **Addendum**

### **A Matter of Environmental Justice**

### **Addressing Air Pollution Hot Spots Within the MWCOG Region**

A number of communities within the MWCOG region are disproportionately impacted by air pollution from both point sources (e.g., industrial uses) and nonpoint sources (e.g., smog, wildfire smoke). The residents of these communities are overwhelmingly black or brown, economically disadvantaged, and susceptible to asthma, heart disease, a). Examples of these uses have included coal-fired power plants in DC and Alexandria, VA (now closed); a “grandfathered” non-permitted industrial chemical use in Ivy City (northeast DC); urban freeways such as Kenilworth Avenue NE and I-295 (DC Wards 7 and 8); compressed natural gas (CNG) fueling stations such as the one proposed for the Shepherd Parkway Metrobus Garage in DC’s Ward 8 (a potential source of methane leaks); and industries that process road construction products (cement and asphalt plants).

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) centers environmental justice principles at the heart of its regulatory and mitigation activities. The agency recognizes the need to minimize greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions such as CO<sub>2</sub> and methane because of their disproportionate impacts on communities of color. It also recognizes the fact that region-scale air pollution levels fail to capture the specific dangers to environmentally overburdened communities.

For this reason, we strongly recommend that MWCOG review and revise its atmospheric data gathering and pollution mitigation efforts to quickly identify and respond to point and nonpoint sources of pollution that disproportionately affects disadvantaged communities. Each identified pollution incident and related source should be captured in a database that allows monthly reporting and information sharing with the affected community (or communities) and the jurisdiction in which it is located.

Finally, the procedures and resources needed to implement MWCOC's expedited environmental justice goals and objectives should be incorporated into the environmental justice action plan that MWCOC staff will be preparing this year for ultimate adoption by the MWCOC Board.

MWCOC's Transportation Planning Board should be fully involved in this process to avoid disproportionate environmental impacts of planned transportation improvement projects on communities of color.