

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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November 18, 2009

Mr. David J. Robertson
Executive Director
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Mr. Robertson:

In your letter of October 20, 2009, you requested comments from the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) on the draft report “REGION FORWARD -- Greater Washington 2050: COG’s Vision for the National Capital Region in the Twenty-First Century,” approved for public release and comment by the COG Board of Directors on October 14th. The TPB welcomes the opportunity to receive a briefing and provide comments on this report.

The TPB greatly appreciates the time and effort devoted by the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition Membership to developing a new, comprehensive regional vision for the Washington region, and pledges its support for future efforts to advance the shared regional goals that have been identified. The TPB particularly appreciates the effort to integrate goals from the nine individual sectors, including transportation, into the four broad categories of accessibility, sustainability, prosperity and livability. In addition to recognizing the critical linkages between such sectors as land use, transportation, and housing, the focus on these four categories (and on sustainability and livability in particular) lays the groundwork for the Washington region to take advantage of new legislative and inter-agency initiatives at the federal level, such as the new Partnership for Sustainable Communities formed earlier this year between the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The TPB has become very much aware of the importance of these linkages through several years of experience in pursuing the goals of the 1998 TPB Vision through its Transportation and Land Use Connections (TLC) program.

The TPB requests that the final version of the Greater Washington 2050 report incorporate the following three additional points:

- In addition to expanding transit and walkability options, roads are an essential component of a functional regional transportation system. Increased capacity and additional support for maintenance, management, and operations are needed to accommodate the region’s growth and economic vibrancy.

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- Recognize and respect the geographic diversity of the region which offers residences and business opportunities for rural, suburban, and urban locational choices. Establishing metrics, trends and targets should be realistic and reflective of our geographic diversity.
- Promote accessibility of passengers and cargo to the region's airports.

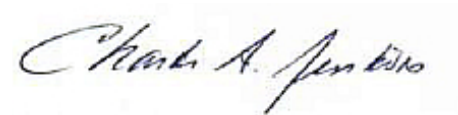
With respect to the six specific questions that you asked be considered in commenting on the draft report and recommendations, the TPB offers the following observations:

- While the nine goals are very appropriate for the individual sectors they address, greater emphasis might be placed on the linkages between these goals by relating them more explicitly to the four overarching categories of accessibility, sustainability, prosperity and livability.
- With regard to the use of "targets and indicators", the TPB recommends:
 - a few, well-defined and understandable indicators (quality rather than quantity);
 - directions and priorities rather than hard numerical targets; incentives rather than disincentives; and expanded benefit cost analysis that can capture a full array of benefits and costs associated with alternative policies.
- A baseline analysis on targets and indicators should be conducted and updated regularly, as is currently being done, for example, for greenhouse gas emissions.
- The survey of public opinion conducted under the Greater Washington 2050 effort provided some statistically significant information at both jurisdictional and regional levels on public perceptions of regional performance and priorities. Repeating this survey every three years or so would provide an excellent means of tracking progress on regional priorities as seen by the general public.
- Continued outreach to local governments and other public and private organizations on the results of this work and continuing efforts would help promote and inform an ongoing public dialogue on key regional policy issues and concerns.
- Greater accountability and transparency in the process can best be provided by periodic updates of the public opinion survey and other indicators of regional performance. Data currently being collected through ongoing programs at COG (such as the TPB's triennial freeway congestion survey) and state and local governments provides an existing resource which could be tapped at relatively low cost for this purpose.

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Thank you for providing a briefing to the TPB on the Greater Washington 2050 report, and for the opportunity to provide comments. The TPB looks forward to participating in continuing efforts to advance the shared regional goals identified in the report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charles A. Jenkins". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Charles Jenkins
Chairman
National Capital Region
Transportation Planning Board