

A legacy of regional cooperation, a commitment to a vibrant future

Date: April 2, 2007

To: Members, COG Board of Directors

From: Paul DesJardin
Chief of Housing and Planning

Subject: Updating the Regional Activity Centers and Clusters Maps and Proposed Policy Applications of Round 7.0 Regional Activity Centers and Clusters

District of Columbia
Bladensburg*
Bowie
College Park
Frederick
Frederick County
Gaithersburg
Greenbelt
Montgomery County
Prince George's County
Rockville
Takoma Park
Alexandria
Arlington County
Fairfax
Fairfax County
Falls Church
Loudoun County
Manassas
Manassas Park
Prince William County

*Adjunct member

During their March 14, 2007 meeting, the Metropolitan Development Policy Committee approved the Round 7 updates to the Regional Activity Centers and Clusters maps and data. This memorandum describes the process for updating the maps and recommends potential policy applications for their use as a tool to linking land use and transportation.

Background

In 1998, the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) adopted its transportation "Vision" for the Washington region. As part of its Transportation "Vision", the TPB also adopted a series of goals, objectives and strategies, including the following objective seeking better interjurisdictional coordination of transportation and land use planning:

"...A composite general land use and transportation map of the region that identifies the key elements needed for regional transportation planning – regional activity centers, principal transportation corridors and facilities, and designated green space."

The Planning Directors Technical Advisory Committee completed the initial map of Activity Centers in 1999 and, under the direction of a joint work group composed of COG Board and TPB members, worked to define the "regional" nature of the maps.

In 2002, the COG Board of Directors and the TPB approved the final Regional Activity Centers and Clusters maps based on the Round 6.1 Cooperative Forecasts. The 58 Regional Activity Centers contained slightly more than half of the region's current and future employment, but only about 10 percent of the region's households. The Regional Activity Clusters were developed to portray a more stylized, conceptual depiction of development in the transportation corridors, much like the maps prepared for the Northern Virginia 2020 Plan. These Regional Activity Centers and Clusters contained nearly 70 percent of the region's current and future jobs and approximately 31 percent of the region's current and projected households.

In approving the maps of Regional Activity Centers and Clusters, the COG Board and the TPB also approved Resolution R13-02 which recommended that COG review and amend the regional activity centers maps following the adoption by the COG Board of each major round of its cooperative forecasts, i.e., Round 7.0, Round 8.0, etc. In October 2005, the COG Board of Directors approved the Round 7.0 Cooperative Forecasts, and in April 2006, the COG Board approved a work plan for preparing updates to the Regional Activity Centers maps based upon the Round 7.0 Cooperative Forecasts.

Updating the Regional Activity Centers and Clusters

In working to update the Regional Activity Centers and Clusters, Planning Directors Technical Advisory committee (PDTAC) and Metropolitan Development Policy Committee (MDPC) members unanimously agreed to use the criteria established in 2002 to evaluate the Round 7.0 Cooperative Forecasts:

- *DC Core - Primary focal point of Metropolitan Washington. Comprises major centers within the District of Columbia. Contains the major governmental, cultural and tourism activities of the region, as well as significant business and commercial activity. Center of the region's transit system. Pedestrian-oriented sidewalk network with an organized street grid / block configuration.*
- *Mixed Use Centers - Generally urban in character, areas up to two square miles (1,280 acres) that contain either a dense mix of retail, employment, and residential activity or significant levels of employment and housing. Accessible by transit or commuter rail and by major highways. Employment Criteria: Greater than 15,000 jobs and greater than 25 jobs / acre in 2025. Residential Criteria: Greater than 10 units per acre.*
- *Employment Centers - Higher-density areas up to 3.5 square miles (2,240 acres) that contain significant concentrations of employment. Generally urban or becoming more urban in character. Employment Criteria: Greater than 20,000 jobs and greater than 30 jobs/acre in 2025.*
- *Suburban Employment Centers - More-dispersed, lower-density areas, less than 6 square miles (3,840 acres). Employment Criteria: Greater than 15,000 jobs and greater than 10 jobs/acre in 2025.*
- *Emerging Employment Centers – Rapidly developing "campus-style" suburban employment areas less than 6 square miles (3,840 acres) in total area. Employment Criteria: Greater than 15,000 jobs in 2025, and greater than 50 percent job growth between 2000 and 2025 OR less than 50 percent commercial buildout in 2025.*

Round 7 Regional Activity Centers and Clusters Findings

By applying these criteria to the new Round 7.0 Cooperative Forecasts, PDTAC members identified 3 new Regional Activity Centers:

- “Konterra” – a “Suburban Employment Center” in Prince George’s County
- “Woodbridge” – an “Emerging Employment Center” in Prince William County
- “Gainesville” – an “Emerging Employment Center” in Prince William County

Several jurisdictions made minor technical revisions to the boundaries of their existing Activity Centers to more accurately reflect local land use plans or to coincide with the boundaries of COG/TPB Traffic Analysis Zones.

In Arlington County, the Ballston and Virginia Square Regional Activity Centers were combined into one Center, as were the Clarendon and Courthouse Regional Activity Centers.

The Round 7.0 Regional Activity Centers contain approximately 54 percent of the region’s current employment and 55 percent of future jobs. In addition, the Centers capture approximately 58 percent of all new jobs between now and 2030. These shares compare favorably to the employment contained in the Round 6.1 Regional Activity Centers: approximately 55 percent of jobs and approximately 59 percent of all new jobs were contained in the Round 6.1 Activity Centers.

The Downtown Washington Activity Center had the highest concentration of jobs in 2030 with about 438,000 jobs. This translates to a gross job density of 163.2 jobs per acre. The Tysons Corner Activity Center in Fairfax County, Virginia had the second highest concentration of jobs with 143,000 for the year 2030. This translates to a gross job density of 59.3 jobs per acre.

The Regional Activity Centers contain 13 percent of the region's existing households and nearly 16 percent of future households – a significant increase when compared to the Round 6.1 Forecasts which contained only about 10 percent of the region's households. In addition, nearly 25 percent of all new households are located in Activity Centers.

The Downtown Washington Activity Center also had the highest concentration of households in 2030 with 50,289 in 2030. The Tyson Corner Activity Center also had the second highest concentration of households with 17,589 for the year 2030.

Six Regional Activity Cluster areas were created and/or modified as a result of the identification of new Regional Activity Centers. These Activity Clusters include:

1. **Gainesville Area**—consists of the area including and adjacent to the newly identified Gainesville Regional Activity Center.
2. **Potomac Mills/Woodbridge Area**—consists of the areas including and adjacent to the new Woodbridge Regional Activity Center and the existing Potomac Mills Activity Cluster.
3. **Urbana Area**—formed from southern portion of the existing Frederick Area Activity Cluster. The Urbana Area was separated from the Frederick Area because the two areas were not geographically contiguous.
4. **White Oak** – the White Oak portion of the existing Greenbelt/College Park/White Oak Area Activity Cluster.
5. **Greenbelt/College Park Area**—consists of the Greenbelt and College Park portions of the existing Greenbelt/College Park/White Oak Area Cluster.
6. **Konterra / Route 1** – consists of the new Konterra Regional Activity Center and the existing Route 1 Activity Center.

COG Staff, with the approval of the PDTAC, made several minor technical revisions to the Activity Cluster boundaries to reflect boundary changes in existing Regional Activity Centers or to correct inaccurately drawn Activity Cluster boundaries.

The Round 7.0 Activity Clusters contain approximately 71.5 percent of the region's current employment and 71.7 percent of 2030 employment. In addition, the Clusters capture approximately 72.3 percent of all the new jobs forecast between now and 2030. The Round 6.2 Regional Activity Clusters captured 68.7 percent of jobs and 76.5 percent of all new jobs forecasted between 2000 and 2025.

The Activity Clusters also contain almost 40 percent of the region's existing households and more than 42 percent of future households in 2030 – a significant increase when compared to the Round 6.2 Cluster totals, which contained only about 31 percent of the region's households in 2000. In addition, nearly 50 percent of all new households added between now and 2030 will be located in Activity Clusters.

The Downtown Washington Activity Cluster had the highest concentration of jobs in 2030 with about 750,000 jobs. The Pentagon/Reagan Airport/Alexandria Area in Virginia had the second highest concentration of jobs with 203,182 for the year 2030.

The Downtown Washington Activity Cluster also had the highest concentration of households in 2030 with 193,359 in 2030. The Pentagon/Reagan Airport/Alexandria Area Activity Cluster had the second highest concentration of households with 64,067 for the year 2030.

How Have the Regional Activity Centers and Clusters Been Used Previously and How Could the New Round 7.0 Centers and Clusters Be Used As a Tool to Guide Regional Growth?

The Regional Activity Centers and Clusters have been used extensively as a technical and policy tool to analyze the likely effects of growth and change in the region. The most notable applications include the following:

1. ***TPB Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study*** – *The region’s planning directors used the Regional Activity Clusters as the basis for reallocating future household and job growth for each of the 5 alternative land use scenarios.*
2. ***Development of COG’s Round 7.0 Cooperative Forecasts*** – *To address the imbalance between forecast jobs and households in the initial Round 7.0 Cooperative Forecasts, the region’s planning directors and the Metropolitan Development Policy Committee added nearly 120,000 additional households in 2025 and 2030. This increase was nearly two-thirds of the additional households assumed under the “More Households” scenario of the TPB Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study and was largely concentrated in the Regional Activity Clusters.*
3. ***TPB Activity Cluster Analysis of the Constrained Long-Range Plan*** - *TPB staff has used the Regional Activity Clusters used to identify how transportation projects / proposals support the regional core and regional activity centers, as stated in Goal 2, Strategy 4 of the TPB Vision: “...Give high priority to regional planning and funding for transportation facilities that serve the regional core and regional activity centers, including expanded rail service and transit centers where passengers can switch easily from one transportation mode to another.”*
4. ***Reality Check on Growth Event*** - *Reality Check event participants were directed to use COG’s Regional Activity Centers and Clusters as priority areas for allocating household and job growth.*
5. ***Cooperative Forecast Analysis*** - *As an element in the approval of each update to the Cooperative Forecasts, COG staff calculates employment, population and household growth in the Regional Activity Clusters. The relative shares of growth captured in the Clusters are compared to prior Rounds to determine the extent to which future growth is or is not being more concentrated.*
6. ***COG Annual Commercial Construction Indicators Report*** – *COG staff annually tabulates a summary of the number of commercial construction projects, square footage, and estimated construction cost for the Regional Activity Clusters*
7. ***WMATA Regional Activity Centers Demonstration Project*** – *WMATA staff utilized the Regional Activity Centers to demonstrate how low-cost transit improvements and demand management policies could offer alternatives to single-occupant vehicles and increase mobility in Centers throughout the region.*

While the Regional Activity Centers and Clusters are clearly *descriptive* of the future growth anticipated in the region, a more important question concerns whether or not the Centers and Clusters would or could be used as a *prescriptive* tool to guide future residential and commercial growth. The TPB Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study (RMAS) land use and transportation scenarios have demonstrated the positive benefits which would result from alternative future land use growth patterns. To that end, COG staff has identified 3 potential policy uses for the Centers and Clusters:

- (1) **Increasing the Share of Future Employment in the Regional Activity Centers and Clusters.**

By 2030, the Regional Activity Centers are forecast to capture approximately 2.34 million jobs, or 55 percent of all jobs in the region, while the Regional Activity Center Clusters are anticipated to contain 71 percent of the region's jobs. An initial regional policy goal would be to increase the number and share of jobs forecast to be located within the boundaries of the Activity Centers and Clusters.

(2) Concentrating Residential Growth in the Regional Activity Centers

Excluding the Mixed-Use Centers, the Regional Activity Centers are defined in terms of concentrations of employment. By 2030, the Regional Activity Centers are forecast to capture approximately 398,000 households or 16 percent of all households, while the Regional Activity Center Clusters are to capture 42 percent of all households. A regional policy goal should be to increase efforts to concentrate more housing in the Regional Activity Centers and Clusters.

(3) Concentrating Growth in Transit Station and Commuter Rail Station Areas

The Regional Activity Centers and Clusters contain 62 Metrorail Stations, 8 Maryland Commuter Rail (MARC) stations, and 7 Virginia Railway Express (VRE) stations. However, within the COG member jurisdictions, there are 24 Metrorail stations, 12 MARC, and 8 VRE stations that are NOT located within Activity Center or Cluster boundaries. A local and regional policy goal could be, wherever possible, to continue to increase development in these "underutilized" station areas.

As a first step towards implementation, the MDPC and COG Board would need to adopt any or all of the goals identified above. The second phase in implementation would be to identify specific regional and local numeric targets for each of the goals. For example: if the region were to commit to a goal of doubling the share of households in the Centers (to 33 percent or one-third of all households), 9 of every 10 new households currently foreseen in the region between 2005 and 2030 (or more than 599,000 new households) would need to be located within a Regional Activity Center for a 2030 total of more than 835,000 households located in the Activity Centers.