

**METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Jay Fisette, Chairman
Anthony Williams, Vice Chairman
Michael Knapp, Vice Chairman**

Proposed Policy Focus for 2006

February 8, 2006

Background

The members of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) envision the National Capital Region as the best place to live, work, play and learn.

COG fosters regionalism --- by promoting regional partnerships, developing best practices, applying cutting-edge technologies, and providing a forum for discussion and decision-making. The COG Board of Directors is responsible for overseeing COG's mission and implementing its work program and activities.

Policy Theme

The most challenging issues facing the metropolitan Washington region require a long-term vision and commitment to action. As a voluntary association of local governments, COG must first educate area policy officials as to the regional challenges and identify and encourage the implementation of solutions built around consensus. While COG has an impressive record of achievement using this approach, solutions are not easily reached and rarely completed in the one-year term of office of the COG Chairman.

Beginning in 2004 under the leadership of COG Board of Directors Chair Phil Mendelson, COG committed to a **three-year policy focus on growth and development**. The foundation for this policy focus is COG's adopted Strategic Plan and the goals and strategies centered on growth issues.

Goal: Promote balanced, sustainable growth and livable communities.

Strategies: Identify and disseminate best management principles, practices, and policies for sustainable growth and livable communities; establish regional consensus on principles, practices and policies for sustainable growth and livable communities; and facilitate dialogue among competing stakeholders.

The Strategic Plan and COG Work Program and Budget were linked, beginning in FY 2006, to note program activities tied to growth and development and other Strategic Plan goals such as transportation, housing, and water and environmental resources and air quality.

COG Board Chair Judith Davis continued and expanded the focus in 2005. A strengthened COG policy focus on the adopted Strategic Plan goal and strategies acknowledges that growth issues are integrated with and cut across many regional policy issues that are often addressed from a “stovepipe” perspective. A coordinated approach will also have collateral benefits in transportation, air and water quality, affordable housing, and pedestrian safety, certainly enhancing both the quality of life and the overall economic competitiveness of the metropolitan Washington region.

The adopted policy focus embraces partnerships with organizations and stakeholders with varied perspectives on this issue. The policy focus also acknowledges that there is no “one size fits all” approach to balanced, sustainable growth, and that COG’s efforts in this area will address the needs of core, inner suburban and outer suburban jurisdictions. However, COG believes that sharing information, challenging past assumptions, and educating public officials on best practices and new growth and development tools holds great promise for the balanced, sustainable growth and livable communities we seek.

Policy Focus Initiatives for 2006

Metro Dedicated Funding

The COG Board established a Joint Coordinating Committee in January 2006 to monitor and advocate for local, state and federal legislation to establish dedicated funding for Metro. Projected population and job growth will require additional sustained investment in Metro. The COG Board will continue to press this issue with appropriate local, state and federal officials, as well as with representatives of business and civic organizations during the critical period in which the Maryland and Virginia legislatures are in session. The COG Board will be updated on outcomes in May 2006 and recommendations for additional advocacy and outreach.

Accessibility and Mobility Study

The TPB recognized several years ago that the region’s long-range transportation plan was falling short of its transportation vision, which called for promoting activity centers, increasing transit use and reducing driving. The TPB responded in 2000 by initiating a new study to investigate alternative growth and transportation scenarios that might better meet the transportation vision and examine the impact on jobs, housing, mobility and air quality. Alternative scenarios are likely to be the focus of Reality Check follow up efforts, and will be used to frame the consequences of growth as projected in COG’s cooperative forecasts. COG will continue to identify the impact of alternative growth scenarios through this effort and apply lessons from the scenarios in a real world environment.

Round 7 Regional Activity Centers Maps

The COG Board adopted a series of regional activity centers maps in 2002. The activity centers maps were developed to serve as a tool for linking land use and transportation planning. COG developed five typologies of activity centers to better capture the diversity of centers found in urban, suburban, rural and transitional areas. COG will update the regional activity centers maps using the adopted Round 7.0 cooperative forecasts to help encourage land use and transportation policies that promote more concentrated regional growth patterns and trends.

Transportation-Land Use Incentives

The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) responsible for directing the continuing transportation planning process carried on cooperatively by the states and local communities in the National Capital Region. The TPB is housed in and staffed by COG, and also serves as the transportation policy committee of COG. Additional transportation funding anticipated following the enactment of the transportation reauthorization legislation presents the National Capital Region with an opportunity to explore new strategies to promote better coordination of transportation, land use and related environmental issues through funding incentives. The COG Board and TPB will be asked to explore and adopt funding incentives and associated criteria for promising projects furthering these inter-related concerns.

Policy Coordination

COG is comprised of three independent policy boards with discrete, yet inter-dependent roles. The COG Board has responsibility for a broad range of regional policies and programs, including land use, growth and development. The TPB is the MPO for the National Capital Region and is responsible for developing the region's long range transportation plan. The TPB serves as the transportation policy committee for COG. The Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee (MWAQC) is the interstate planning body responsible for developing the region's air quality plan. COG Board Chair Jay Fiset will convene periodic policy coordination briefings among the three independent policy boards in 2006 and will request that the COG Board's policy advisory committees and the National Capital Region Emergency Preparedness Council review work program activities underway and planned to explore opportunities for enhanced linkage with the policy focus on growth and development. For example, the Human Services Policy Committee may wish to consider how health and obesity concerns may be addressed by land use and transportation policies that promote walking and bicycling.

Additional Program Initiatives

Comprehensive Planning – Environmental Linkages

Chesapeake Bay and Anacostia River restoration are critical to sound environmental stewardship and wise use of land. A major area of analysis being explored by the federal-state Chesapeake Bay Program are the implications of population and economic growth on the achievability and sustainability of Bay restoration policies by 2035. The COG Board's Chesapeake Bay Policy Committee and Water Resources Policy Committee will be asked to examine Chesapeake Bay policies and programs as they relate to the focus on growth and development. In addition, COG's Anacostia Watershed Restoration Committee, which is currently examining its program focus and governance structure, will be asked to identify opportunities to tie its program activities to land use issues in the Anacostia River watershed. The Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee (MWAQC) is developing two new regional air quality plans for ozone and small particles that must demonstrate compliance with federal health standards by 2010; MWAQC is asked to consider potential impacts on growth of new air quality measures.

Sister City – Region

Sister Cities International promotes partnerships between communities in the United States and similar jurisdictions abroad. Sister Cities will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2006 and hold its conference in Washington, DC in July. COG has been asked to help showcase regional and local best practices for conference delegates. In addition, COG will explore a international partnership with the Greater Washington Initiative (GWI) to strengthen the public sector focus of GWI's trade missions.

Reality Check

The Reality Check on Growth exercise held February 2005 was grounded in COG's cooperative forecasts of growth. At the Greater Washington Board of Trade's February 2006 Potomac Conference, it is anticipated that participants will call for the creation of Envision Greater Washington, linking the public, business and civic sectors in a multi-year, multi-sector effort to influence thinking and action on long-term growth opportunities. COG will continue to be active in this effort to ensure that the interests of the public sector are fully represented and that any new initiative builds on COG's policy focus on growth and development.

Economic Impact of Arts and Culture

The Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington commissioned a study on the economic impact of the arts and culture in the National Capital Region in 2001. That study demonstrated that arts and culture organizations employ thousands of workers, attract tens of thousands of visitors to the region and generate millions of dollars of tax and private sector revenue. COG will partner with the Cultural Alliance and other business and civic organizations to update the study and identify how arts and culture organizations can be a catalyst for community re-development.

Cross-cutting Programs

COG has ongoing programs in the areas of pedestrian safety and energy sustainability that have clear ties to the focus on growth and development. Program committees and staff will be asked to identify a select number of program opportunities or measures to help advance the focus on growth and development. For example, linking COG's forecasts of growth to better anticipate the demand for energy resources and promoting public health by integrating walking and bicycling concerns into land use policies.

Workforce Housing Outreach

COG's Washington Area Housing Partnership published its Affordable Housing Toolkit in late 2005, which identified innovative approaches to workforce housing production, preservation and rehabilitation. COG and the Partnership to undertake an aggressive outreach program in 2006 to ensure that key public officials and business and civic leaders are able to apply promising tools in local communities.

Building Security Standards and Impact

COG and the National Capital Planning Commission and the Greater Washington Board of Trade collaborated in 2004 on a conference to begin to examine the impact of new federal security standards on development policies and practices. More stringent building standards were incorporated into the recent Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) actions approved by Congress and the President in 2005. COG will partner with the National Capital

Region Emergency Preparedness Council and key stakeholder agencies and organizations to review the impact of both U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and non-DOD federal agency security standards on local development policies and practices and help identify performance standards that achieve security goals without compromising local policies that promote more integrated, walkable communities.

COG Administrative Initiatives

State and Federal Outreach

COG is an association of more than 250 local, state and federal officials in the National Capital Region; however, much of COG's work is focused on local governments. Increasingly, state and federal officials have a significant opportunity to help address regional challenges, such as the need for dedicated funding for Metro. COG will examine new policies and organizational steps to strengthen outreach to state and federal officials. For example, COG may consider hosting a special meeting or event for the congressional delegation and the COG Board and other COG leaders, as well as developing a legislative agenda in advance of the sessions of the Maryland and Virginia legislatures and the Council of the District of Columbia.

50th Anniversary Observance

COG was founded in 1957 and will mark its 50th anniversary in 2007. COG will establish a 50th anniversary planning committee to identify appropriate events and products associated with this milestone, including a fundraising plan and opportunities for public sector, business and civic input.