



National Capital Region
Transportation Planning Board

July 24, 2019

Bus Transformation Project Team
c/o NeoNiche Strategies
4501 Ford Avenue, Suite #501
Alexandria, VA, 22302

Dear Bus Transformation Project Team:

I am writing to express the views of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB), the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the national capital region, on the Bus Transformation Project and its Draft Strategy released in June 2019.

The TPB's Vision, Priorities and Aspirations for the region reflect moving towards a multi-modal, regionally interconnected transportation system that includes all MPO member jurisdictions. The system must envision a comprehensive range of options at reasonable cost that emphasize equity, safety and reliability while enhancing and supporting environmental quality and sustainability. Key to the success of the system is improved inter-jurisdictional coordination on transportation and land use planning to ensure convenient, efficient and user-friendly travel experience to all. The TPB is glad to note these elements generally formed the goals for the Bus Transformation Project led by WMATA. We also note, however, that the study area does not include member jurisdictions outside of the WMATA service area.

The TPB finds that the first three strategies described in the May 2019 Draft Strategy of the Bus Transformation Project report¹ closely align with the TPB's Vision and specifically to its Aspirational Initiatives of Expanding Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Regionwide, Moving More People on Metrorail, and Providing More Telecommuting And Other Options For Commuting. The TPB believes that several of the recommendations of the first three strategies have the potential to enhance the efficiency, convenience, affordability and attractiveness of bus travel in this region.

The TPB believes that the network of local and regional bus service operators is a regional asset representing a commitment to bus service at local and state levels and can be leveraged to make bus a more attractive and efficient mode of travel. The frequency and reliability of transit are the greatest predictors of a systems ridership. It is critical that any effort to reexamine current roles and responsibilities of bus service between local and regional providers (strategy # 4) be guided by essential principles that include: a mandate for this reexamination and participation by the highest level of leadership of all jurisdictions in the region, include all types of bus service operators, a commitment to a "no net-loss" in service for customers and resolution of all aspects of fiscal implications of changes in service responsibilities for all service providers.

The TPB understands that some of the recommendations of the Draft Strategy are already being pursued by our member jurisdictions, WMATA, and other providers of public transportation in the region. The TPB believes that several recommendations identified under strategies 1 through 3 have

¹ (1) The bus system should be customer focused and an easy-to-use option that people want to ride; (2) Prioritizing buses on major roads moves the most people in the quickest, most reliable and fiscally responsible way; and (3) Frequent, reliable and convenient bus service is fundamental to offering equitable access to opportunities and improving quality of life across the region.

the potential to secure the consensus of the region's member jurisdictions and could be implemented as expeditiously as possible.

As such, the TPB supports as the next step a systemic and comprehensive outreach to all the MPO's member jurisdictions/agencies to identify those recommendations of the first three strategies that could be developed and implemented within the existing service provision and decision-making framework and position the region to improve the outcomes of the region's bus system.

The TPB urges its member jurisdictions/agencies to commit to this regional collaboration and cooperation to identify and implement improvements within the bus services they provide, support the changes needed within the WMATA bus system, and to collaborate with the other Commuter Bus systems, such as PRTC OmniRide and MTA Commuter Bus, that operate in the region. Further advancement of the prioritization of buses on the region's freeways and major arteries, through HOV/HOT lanes, transitways, bus on shoulder, transit signal priority, queue jumps, and other measures should also be undertaken by the region.

The TPB notes that some of the ongoing regional activities the TPB implements or administers could assist the region in further exploring some of the project recommendations. TPB assistance could only be based on a mandate from its members and the provision of additional resources as needed.

- **Strategy 1, Recommendation A: Expand marketing efforts related to bus to enhance visibility of bus options and benefits.** The Commuter Connections program includes a regional mass marketing campaign focused on Travel Demand Management strategies. Additionally, the Street Smart regional campaign is focused on pedestrian and bicycle safety. Member jurisdictions have the option to leverage either or both of these consensus-driven regional marketing groups, should they choose to implement this recommendation.
- **Strategy 1, Recommendation H: Incentivize more employers to offer transit benefits.** The Commuter Connections' Employer Outreach program element is engaged in working with employers on a one-on-one basis to promote commuter benefits, including those directly related to bus. Member jurisdictions could work with this group to customize and enhance the contents of this outreach with additional/new local transit benefit program or work to develop a regional program to increase employer provided transit benefits.
- **Strategy 2, Recommendation B: Adopt consistent bus priority guidelines for corridors across the region.** As part of TPB's efforts to advance the Aspirational Initiatives (adopted as part of the region's long-range transportation plan, Visualize 2045), the TPB's FY 2020 work program envisions a work activity to develop a BRT design guidelines document. Should the members transit agencies so desire, the scope of this work activity could be expanded to examine guidelines for characteristics of priority bus services for high-use transit corridors.
- **Strategy 6, Recommendation C: Publish an annual bus performance scorecard.** The TPB's Regional Public Transportation Subcommittee publishes an annual report on the state of the region's public transportation. The Subcommittee could work with the various bus service operators to generate an agreed upon performance metric for the region's bus system as part of its annual report.

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Finally, the TPB notes that in 2018 the TPB with the participation of its member jurisdictions, undertook and completed a Bus Service Provision Study. This study offers a list of transit service and administration work activities that have the potential to offer cost savings and/or service efficiencies should two or more agencies combine their resources to accomplish the task.

In closing, the TPB generally expresses its support of the goals of the project, and appreciates the work completed by the Bus Transformation Project team. The TPB remains interested in the continuing work of this project and looks forward to the finalization of the strategy recommendations. The TPB believes that the finalization of recommendations will serve as the beginning of a more complete outreach involving all the MPO's member jurisdictions and agencies; a critical step in the development of a consensus plan of action to make bus the preferred mode of transit travel in the region. The TPB is prepared to assist the region, as best as it can, in implementing the consensus action plan.

Sincerely,



Kelly Russell
Vice Chair, National Capital Region
Transportation Planning Board