National Capital Region
Transportation Planning Board

MEMORANDUM

TO: TPB Access for All Advisory Committee (AFA)
             TPB Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)
FROM: John Swanson, TPB Transportation Planner
SUBJECT: Evaluation of TPB Public Participation Activities
DATE: March 4, 2019

In September 2018, TPB staff contracted Rhodeside & Harwell, Inc. (RHI) to conduct an evaluation of the TPB's public participation activities. RHI conducted the study in the fall of 2018 based upon a review of past activities and practices, focus groups with stakeholders and participants, and an assessment of data that quantified participation in meetings and online.

The completion of such a study is particularly timely because the TPB has just completed two years of extensive outreach as part of the development of Visualize 2045, the region's new long-range transportation plan. In addition, our federal funders have indicated that such an evaluation will provide helpful documentation in anticipation of the Federal Certification Review that is scheduled for this April.

The RHI report was released on February 22. The report will be discussed with key partners and stakeholders during presentations in March to the TPB Technical Committee, the Access for All Advisory Committee, and the Citizens Advisory Committee. However, the study is largely intended to serve as an internal reference for TPB staff to use in the months ahead as we seek to enhance our ongoing public involvement processes and inform new activities, both this year and in the years to come.

Evaluation of Public Participation Activities of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

February 2019

RHODESIDE&HARWELL

Contents

All photos provided by TPB.

Executive Summary

PURPOSE

In late 2018, the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) hired a consultant, Rhodeside & Harwell, to evaluate the success of ongoing and previous public participation activities, with a focus on activities implemented in 2017 and 2018. The consultant team also evaluated the 2014 Participation Plan, which contains guiding goals and principles for such efforts.

EVALUATION PROCESS

The process for this evaluation included four steps, with contributions from both TRB staff and the consultant team.

TASK 1: DESCRIBE PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES
TPB staff provided qualitative and quantitative summaries of its efforts.

TASK 2: EVALUATE PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES
Consultant evaluated information provided as part of Task 1 and led focus group interviews, which included the following stakeholders:
- Access for All Committee
- Citizens Advisory Committee
- TPB Staff
- COG Office of Communications
- Transportation Advocates
- Representatives from TPB member jurisdictions

TASK 3: DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS
Consultants developed recommendations related to TPB's public participation efforts.

TASK 4: CREATE REPORT
The outcomes of Tasks 1-3 have been summarized in this report.

ACTIVITIES AND MATERIALS EVALUATED	
Public Participation Plan	Policy Goals, Target Constituencies
Ongoing Activities	Public Comment Opportunities (including Board meetings), Committees, Documents, Reports, and Publications, Web and Social Media
Long-Range Plan Activities (Visualize 2045)	Survey (Metroquest), Forums, Open Houses, Final Comment Opportunities, Materials and Branding
Dormant Activities	Activities which are not currently active, but which could be reinstated, if warranted, including: the Community Leadership Institute and The Region Magazine.

OVERARCHING THEMES AND OBSERVATIONS

There has been significant progress in advancing TPB's public participation activities in recent years. Focus group participants overwhelmingly stated that they were happy with the direction in which TPB was moving, most often citing activities undertaken, and materials created for, the Visualize 2045 long-range plan process.

TPB has a strong social media and web presence, as well as a significant presence in local news media. There are clear efforts to provide increased public access to board meetings, and to provide additional data to increase public awareness of transportation-related issues within the region.

However, even with a significant presence and new activities, TPB's role in the region is not as widely understood as the organization's goals intend it to be. There is a strong potential for TPB to evolve its regional role, by expanding regional coordination and outreach, and through its research efforts.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations are provided in three categories, for both short- and long- term actions.

REGARDING THE PURPOSE AND GOALS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Short-term (1-2 years)
1. Update the Participation Plan to streamline content, clarify roles and purposes, and evolve strategies to reach different constituencies.
2. Undertake a campaign to clarify the TPB's role for the general public.

Long-term (2-5 years)
3. Revisit the Participation Plan on a regular basis, through tools such as an annual survey.

REGARDING CURRENT PRACTICES AND TOOLS

Short-term (1-2 years)
4. Hire at least one additional staff member to expand TPB's communications and outreach capabilities.
5. Consider whether an expanded regional coordination role may be appropriate.
6. Improve public participation related to Board meetings and the TIP Forum.
7. Clarify the expectations and role of each Committee, particularly regarding public input and communications.
8. Evolve Committee processes and structures, including Board engagement, educational activities, and provision of outreach materials.
9. Advance social media practices to reach a broader spectrum.

10. Keep all levels of constituencies updated on long-range plan implementation progress, using successful strategies from Visualize 2045 as a guide.
11. Take a leadership role in providing regional transportation education.
12. To prepare for the next long-range plan update, conduct a survey to assess how the public felt about the Visualize 2045 branding and outreach efforts.

Long-term (2-5 years)
13. Expand the TPB's leadership role in regional transportation research.
14. Plan for ways to improve overall participation based on lessons learned, including an evaluation of what was successful in the Visualize 2045 process.

REGARDING NEW STRATEGIES, APPROACHES, AND TOOLS

Short-term (1-2 years)
15. Consider development of a series of videos to educate about the TPB in general, as well as about its ongoing and one-off activities.
16. Meet with member jurisdictions and other related groups to coordinate efforts and "grow" a group of messaging ambassadors.

Long-term (2-5 years)
17. Foster discussions about regional and local efforts to define effective transportation narratives and build an understanding of issues.
18. Make efforts to educate people about transportation issues and potential solutions from a younger age than is typical for the TPB "public."

1   Introduction

1.1 STUDY PURPOSE

In late 2018, Rhodeside & Harwell embarked on an evaluation of public participation activities conducted by and for the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) during 2017 and 2018. Rhodeside & Harwell was contracted to perform this work by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, which provides staff to the TPB. The purpose of this evaluation was to consider the success of ongoing and past activities, including whether the TPB's public participation plan and execution of its strategies are adequately reaching stakeholders who should be involved in the TPB's efforts.

Types of activities evaluated include the following:

- **Public Participation Plan**
- **Ongoing Activities**
  - Public Comment Opportunities
  - Committees
  - Documents, Reports, and Publications
  - Web and Social Media
- **Long-Range Plan Activities (Visualize 2045)**
  - Survey
  - Forums
  - Open Houses
  - Final Comment
  - Materials and Branding
- **Dormant Activities** (those which are not currently active, but which could be reinstated, if warranted)
  - Community Leadership Institute
  - The Region Magazine

1.2 METHODOLOGY

1.2.1   Task 1: Describe Participation Activities

TPB staff began the evaluation process by identifying and describing the participation activities conducted by staff in 2017 and 2018. This included identifying goals and objectives for each participation activity, providing a narrative summary and data related to these activities (e.g., meeting attendance, online engagement statistics), highlighting the staff's implementation efforts, and noting the ways that input was shared and used during the TPB's processes.

1.2.2   Task 2: Evaluate Participation Activities

The consultant team evaluated the information provided as part of Task 1 and led focus groups to gather additional input related to participation activities.

Focus groups included the following stakeholders:
- Access for All Committee
- Citizens Advisory Committee
- TPB Staff
- COG Office of Communications
- Transportation Advocates
- Staff from TPB member jurisdictions

Each focus group began with the consultants sharing information about the purpose of the study, as well as a summary of the policy goals and constituencies as described in the 2014 TPB Participation Plan. The consultants then walked through a matrix showing each of the activities being evaluated, as well as a summary of the goals and target constituencies for each activity. The discussion was then open for comments related to the success of the TPB's participation activities, and areas for improvement. One participant provided additional comments via email.
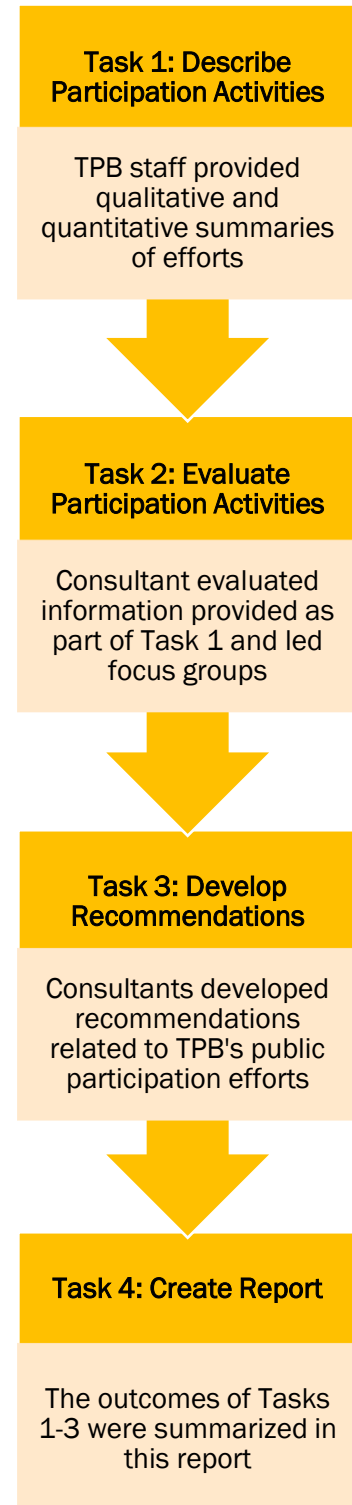
The Appendix contains a copy of the materials used during each focus group, including informational posters and a matrix for recording comments.

1.2.3   Task 3: Develop Recommendations

Consultants used focus group input as well as knowledge of best practices to develop recommendations related to the TPB's public participation efforts.

1.2.4   Task 4: Create Report

The consultants worked with TPB staff to summarize the outcomes of Tasks 1-3 in this report.

Task 1: Describe Participation Activities

TPB staff provided qualitative and quantitative summaries of efforts

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Task 2: Evaluate Participation Activities

Consultant evaluated information provided as part of Task 1 and led focus groups

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Task 3: Develop Recommendations

Consultants developed recommendations related to TPB's public participation efforts

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Task 4: Create Report

The outcomes of Tasks 1-3 were summarized in this report

2   Recommendations

Recommendations are based on input from focus group interviews, as well as the consultant analysis of activities and information provided by TPB staff. The recommendations are discussed under three categories, each of which contain short-term (1-2 year) and long-term (2-5 year) actions:

- Purpose and goals of public participation
- Current practices and tools
- New strategies, approaches, and tools

Where these recommendations are directly related to better-addressing one of the five Policy Goals of the 2014 Participation Plan (see box below), that is noted. The Plan, Policy Goals, and all engagement activities are summarized further in subsequent sections of this document.

Participation Policy Goals From The TPB 2014 Participation Plan

1. **Communicate effectively with appropriate audiences**. Disseminate information about programs and projects through a variety of conduits.

2. **Provide clear and open access to information and participation opportunities**. Improve access to technical and planning documents and, tailor these to be accessible to more constituencies.

3. **Gather input from diverse perspectives**. Continue to encourage participation from diverse constituencies and to provide forums for discussion.

4. **Respond meaningfully to public comment and feedback**. Provide information on how comments will be considered in the planning process.

5. **Promote a regional perspective**. Communicate how regional transportation planning plays a vital role in coordinating planning activities on many levels.

2.1 PURPOSE AND GOALS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

2.1.1 Short-term (1-2 years)

1. **Update the Participation Plan.**
   o Streamline the content in the plan, when possible.
     ▪ The existing plan provides useful information but contains a lot of text. It may be useful to make the plan more actionable by creating tables or checklists that will allow you to more quickly assess how well activities are serving the different constituencies.
   o Use Visualize 2045 successes as a model for how to improve strategies.
     ▪ Define the most successful strategies from the long-range plan and use these more often in reaching out to the public and interest groups.
   o Clarify the role of public engagement
     ▪ When are you informing versus when are you seeking public input?
     ▪ How is public input used when it is gathered? What are the feedback loops? (Goal #4)
   o Clarify tiers of public to engage and how they should be engaged (Goal #1)
     ▪ "Involved" public refers to the Advisory Committee members and "others." Should clarify who "others" includes – does that include advocates?
     ▪ Identify strategies to develop knowledge of the "informed" – community leaders, opinion leaders working at the local level.
     ▪ Magnify an appropriate role for "interested" parties, some of whom may have more knowledge of transportation issues than may be assumed.
   o Define timelines
     ▪ Plan for ways to reach out more than 1-2 weeks in advance of public open houses and forums – consider a 2-3 week minimum.

2. **Undertake a campaign to clarify the TPB's role.** (Goal #5)
   o During Visualize 2045, TPB Board members were very effective at getting the word out about meetings. Cultivate their assistance in disseminating this information as well.
   o Provide fact sheets with infographics that are easily shareable by TPB members, to non-profit orgs, or others.
     ▪ Could start with a fact sheet about "What is the TPB? What is COG? Why should you care about what we're doing?"
     ▪ Consider the need to tailor for different audiences.
   o Social media campaign
     ▪ Consider using informal polling or other interactive ways to get people involved
   o Email/mail campaign
   o Visits to transportation committees at the jurisdictional level throughout the region.

2.1.2 Long-term (2-5 years)

3. **Revisit the Participation Plan on a regular basis.**
   o The current plan calls for an annual evaluation. As a way to meet this requirement, consider conducting an annual survey to all members, committees, interested members of the general public, etc., to gauge successes and improvements needed.

2.2 CURRENT PRACTICES AND TOOLS

2.2.1 Short-term (1-2 years)

4. **Hire at least one additional communications staff member dedicated to the TPB.**

5. **Consider whether an expanded regional coordination role may be fitting.** (Goal #5)
   o Coordination is needed in the region and the TPB is a natural fit for this role. The TPB can help people stay informed and involved about local projects.
   o Help to inform public about local plans and processes so they can provide input before the plans and projects come to COG/TPB. This can help to address frustration related to the public not having influence on local projects by the time they are included in a TPB document.
   o If this is a role the TPB wants to take on, consider (as a short-term step) updating and advertising the Transportation Planning Hub.
      ▪ Ask TPB members to provide updated information.

6. **Improve public participation related to Board meetings and the TIP Forum.** (Goal #2)
   o Consider ways to streamline the public comment process at Board meetings.
      ▪ Suggesting that the public register ahead of time, and bring 65 copies of their comment, may make this process seem more onerous than it needs to be, which could deter many people from participating.
   o Allow enough time to provide access via alternative formats, if requested.
      ▪ The existing Accommodations Policy states that the TPB requires up to seven business days to process requests. However, TPB materials are release six days before each meeting, and materials for most other meetings are provided a week in advance. This makes it difficult for those requesting alternate formats to review materials prior to the meetings, for example, and thus to provide comments on those materials at the meeting.
   o For key meetings, including the TIP forum, consider returning to the practice of sending postcards or other invitations.

7. **Clarify the expectations and role of each Committee.**
   o Assess how representative CAC members are related to the "interested public" and consider ways to bring in more diverse perspectives. (Goal #3)
   o What are the expectations of each member? (e.g., Should they be reaching out to their communities?) Work with each jurisdiction regarding roles, expectations, skills needed for CAC members.

8. **Evolve Committee processes and structures.** (Goal #1)
   o Recruit a Board member to participate on the CAC, as with AFA, to provide a direct link to the TPB and elevate the input of that Committee.
   o Provide outreach materials that can be easily disseminated. Visualize 2045 flyers provide a good precedent for this.
   o Inform committee members about regional/local/state projects that are ongoing, so that they can provide comments in a timely manner.
   o Bring in local representatives to share information about projects and processes at the local level, so committee members have better information about how they can weigh in on those efforts.
   o Respond in writing to questions from committee members.

- o Bring in experts to build the base of knowledge in committees, especially at the beginning of each new Committee year.
- o At each meeting, be clear about the issues for which you are seeking input, and why.

9. **Evolve social media practices.** (Goal #2)
   - o More people have Facebook accounts than Twitter accounts but the TPB's Facebook following is much smaller. Consider ways to increase activity on Facebook – live streaming of forums, etc.
   - o Consider ways to expand into other social media venues (e.g., Instagram).
   - o To make it easier for COG and other partners to disseminate information about TPB meetings, reports, etc., provide consistent, leadership-vetted social media messaging. This could happen via a weekly email, for example.
   - o Try to reach new people to avoid a social media "echo chamber."
     - ▪ Grow the number of messaging ambassadors on social media to reach more people and new audiences. Provide messaging that indicates how the TPB's activities might be of interest to these groups.
   - o Consider ways to increase the information shared on Twitter:
     - ▪ TPB meetings are live-tweeted and this strategy has been used at other events. Continue to use this method of sharing information as events are happening.

10. **Keep all levels of constituencies updated on long-range plan implementation progress, using successful strategies from Visualize 2045 as a guide.** (Goal #2)
    - o Keep people (public, advocacy groups, etc.) engaged after long term planning processes – how are recommendations being implemented? Consider highlighting a single topic or "theme" around which to structure the fact sheets or infographics mentioned above.
    - o Use Visualize branding and report style.
    - o Keep local, state, regional committees, etc., reminded about initiatives and progress.

11. **Take a leadership role in providing regional transportation education opportunities.** (Goal #5)
    - o Hold forums beyond just during long-range plan – more than every 4 years.
    - o Bring back the Community Leadership Institute as an annual event.

12. **To prepare for the next long-range plan update, consider gauging how the public felt about the branding and outreach efforts through a survey.**
    - o It would be good to assess how the public felt about the branding and how well it caught on – could ask in surveys, via social media, etc.

2.2.2   Long-term (2-5 years)

13. **Take on even more of a regional transportation research and data leadership role.** (Goal #5)
    - o Build on the buzz that the TPB draws when releasing congestion information, etc.

14. **During the next long-range plan update, plan for ways to:**
    - o Improve outreach lead time about meetings and other comment opportunities.
    - o Hold formal public comment periods earlier in the planning process, if possible.
    - o Make it clear why participation is needed (clear for the public, TPB members, and internal stakeholders).

- Consider rethinking the TPB's open house strategy – did you reach enough people to warrant the cost? Are there alternate ways of sharing the same information (e.g., online forums, printed and emailed newsletters, etc.)?
- Provide facilitator training for forums or other small-group discussions, to ensure consistency in question delivery and knowledge about key issues.
- Make it clear that meetings such as those of Task Forces or similar groups are open to the public.
- Look for ways to include more members of the public on advisory Task Forces or other groups.
- To provide education prior to surveys (to obtain better-educated opinions), consider providing a set of information pages at the beginning of a survey, or an informational paragraph with a chart at the beginning of each question (where relevant).
- Utilize multiple survey phases – visioning, feedback on draft recommendations.
- Go out to other ongoing meetings to get input (take iPads with surveys, etc.).

2.3 NEW STRATEGIES, APPROACHES, AND TOOLS

2.3.1 Short-term (1-2 years)

1. **Consider development of a series of videos to educate about the TPB as well as ongoing and one-off activities.** (Goal #5)
   - These videos could be shared via social media, TPB News, etc.

2. **Meet with member jurisdictions and other related groups to coordinate efforts and grow a group of messaging ambassadors.** (Goal #5)
   - Coordinate directly with transportation committees in regional jurisdictions.
   - Initiate regular appearances at state and local DOT, Metro, etc., meetings.
   - Coordinate with TPB members regarding project schedules and engagement processes to reduce confusion related to overlapping planning projects in the region, and to reduce the chance of overlapping meetings.
   - Consider using these meetings to request assistance with recruitment of CAC members.

2.3.2 Long-term (2-5 years)

3. **Foster discussions about regional and local efforts to define narratives and build an understanding of issues.** (Goal #5)
   - Consider an annual conference or speaker series.

4. **Make efforts to educate people about transportation issues from a younger age.**
   - See the Urban Land Institute's UrbanPlan model for high schools as an example.

3 Summary & Observations

This section is organized by type of engagement activity. For each activity, there is a description of the activity, including the intent/objective and highlights from 2017-2018, followed by a summary of observations related to successes and potential areas for improvement. These observations are largely compiled from the focus group interviews, with additional input from the consultant team.

3.1 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

3.1.1 Summary

The 2014 Update to the TPB Participation Plan ("2014 Plan") "articulates the TPB's commitment to transparent communications and engagement with the public and relevant public agencies to support the regional transportation planning process, including the development of the Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan (CLRP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)." It specifically intends to foster inclusive public participation and access to the transportation planning process for low-income and minority populations.

The 2014 Plan identifies five Policy Goals and three Constituencies around which to develop future TPB participation activities.

Policy Goals

1. **Communicate effectively with appropriate audiences**. Disseminate information about programs and projects through a variety of conduits.
2. **Provide clear and open access to information and participation opportunities**. Improve access to technical and planning documents and, tailor these to be accessible to more constituencies.
3. **Gather input from diverse perspectives**. Continue to encourage participation from diverse constituencies and to provide forums for discussion.
4. **Respond meaningfully to public comment and feedback**. Provide information on how comments will be considered in the planning process.
5. **Promote a regional perspective**. Communicate how regional transportation planning plays a vital role in coordinating planning activities on many levels.

Constituencies

The 2014 Plan describes specific goals for reaching each of the three identified constituencies.

The **Involved Public** is both knowledgeable about transportation policy issues in general, as well as the TPB's role in the regional transportation planning process. These individuals and organizations already actively participate in the TPB process and have a fairly extensive understanding of regional transportation issues and policy. Among others, this category includes the TPB's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and the Access for All Advisory Committee (AFA).

The **Informed Public** has some knowledge of transportation policy issues but is not familiar with the TPB's role in the regional transportation planning process. They also may not be fully aware of the regional context underlying
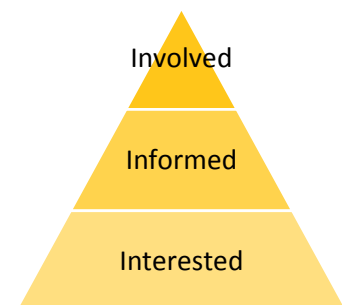
the transportation challenges experienced throughout the region. This middle tier often includes community leaders and opinion leaders who work at the local level.

The **Interested Public** has an inherent interest in transportation challenges but possesses little direct knowledge of transportation policy issues. This group, which is the largest of the three, includes the "general public," but it may also include community leaders or even elected officials who have limited exposure to transportation planning at any level.

As part of their Task 1 efforts, TPB staff determined which goal(s) each type of activity aims to address, as well as the target constituencies for each activity (TABLE 1).

TABLE 1: ACTIVITY GOALS AND TARGET CONSTITUENCIES

Type of Activity		Goals	Target Constituencies
Ongoing Activities (Continue throughout the year, each year)			
Public Comment	Formal Public Comment	3,4	Involved, informed
	Public Comment at Board Meetings	3,4	Involved, informed
	Open and Accessible Board Meetings	1,2,3,4	Involved, informed
	Meeting Announcements	1,2,5	Involved, informed
	TIP Forum	1,2,3,5	Involved, informed
Committees	Citizens Advisory Committee	1,2,3,4,5	Involved
	Access for All Advisory Committee	1,2,3,5	Involved
Documents, Reports, and Publications	TPB News	1,2,4,5	Involved, informed, interested
	Meeting materials	1,2,5	Involved, informed
Web and Social Media	Twitter	5	Involved, informed, interested
	Facebook	5	Involved, informed, interested
	TPB/COG Website	1,2,5	Involved, informed, interested
Long-Range Plan Activities / Visualize 2045			
Survey	Survey	1,3,5	Informed, interested
	Outreach and Communications	1,2,3	Involved, informed, interested
Forums	Forums	1,3,4,5	Involved, informed
	Outreach and Communications	1,2,5	Involved, informed, interested
Open Houses	Open Houses	1,2,3,5	Involved, informed
	Outreach and Communications	1,2,3	Involved, informed, interested
Final Comment	Final Comment	2,4	Involved, informed
Materials and Branding	Materials and Branding	1,2,5	Involved, informed, interested
Dormant Activities			
Community Leadership Institute		1,5	Informed, interested
The Region Magazine		5	Involved, informed

3.1.2   Observations

Successes

- Regarding the TPB's overall public participation approach, public engagement at the TPB has made significant advancements in recent years, with many people celebrating the direction in which efforts have been heading.
- There are clear efforts being made by TPB to encourage the three constituencies (Involved, Informed, Interested) to engage in the process in various ways.
- The successful outreach strategies used for the long-range planning effort (Visualize 2045) provide models for the future of the TPB's public participation efforts and demonstrate progress on achieving Policy Goals 1-3.
- Related to Policy Goals 1 and 2, the TPB and COG are considered reliable venues for gathering and disseminating information about projections and trends.

Potential Areas for Improvement and Issues to Address

- The TPB does not have a dedicated Office of Communications (although one transportation staffer is currently focused on communications), which is a constraint in terms of the amount of outreach that can be completed in-house. This may sometimes infringe on TPB's ability to achieve all five public participation Policy Goals.
- Regarding Policy Goal 5 (Promote a regional perspective), there is some confusion about COG/TPB's role in the region. The public is interested in outcomes, but the TPB does not drive these. It can be difficult to get people interested and involved in regional planning when decisions are made largely at the local or state level.
- An impediment on achieving both Policy Goals 3 and 5, as well as successfully interacting with all three constituencies, is that the TPB has a large service area, hence, it is difficult to get input from a truly representative cross-section of each group, rather than just those who are upset about potential initiatives/projects, or those who fall into the involved/informed constituencies. It is difficult to conduct outreach across three states, and this may lead to a lack of understanding about regional needs, especially outside of the Beltway.
    - For some, the Board feels more like a group of individual localities than a group working at the regional level. There may be a need for more accountability to encourage members to think/work regionally and think beyond their local focus.
- There may be a need to further clarify the role of the public (all three constituencies) in the planning process and make it clear to them why they should participate. More transparency and feedback loops related to input may be useful, and would contribute to achieving Policy Goal 4.
- Though efforts have been made to address this issue, the public (in general) does not understand the transportation planning process. Repeated conversations about the costs and timeframes related to transportation projects can derail effective discussions. This means that some constituencies (particularly informed and interested parties) require further assistance, creating a need under Policy Goal 2.

3.2 OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

3.2.1 Summary

The TPB collects comments from the public primarily in two ways. First, they offer formal comment periods for federally-required and regionally-significant documents. Second, they allow for public comment at the beginning of all Board meetings.

Formal Public Comment Periods

Objective

It should be easy to comment on regionally significant and federally required documents produced by the TPB. Accessible information should be available to help people understand comment opportunities, and the TPB should provide a response to comments so that everyone who commented is aware of, and can understand, the response.

Description

The TPB provides formal windows of time during which the public can review and comment on items on which the Board will formally act. The length of these comment periods and the specific procedures vary based on the type of item under consideration.

The TPB held three 30-day public comment periods during the development of Visualize 2045.

- The first comment period was held between December 14, 2017, and January 13, 2018. This comment period was focused on the projects being submitted for inclusion in the Air Quality Conformity Analysis of Visualize 2045 and FY 2019-2024 TIP. During this first comment period, comments were received from 166 individuals, non-profit organizations, or governmental representatives.
- The second 30-day comment period was held between January 19 and February 17, 2018. This comment period was held to include the New Hampshire Avenue Bus Rapid Transit project along with other BRT projects that Montgomery County had previously submitted. During this second comment period, comments were received from five individuals and two government representatives.
- The final comment period ran from September 7 to October 7, 2018. The original dates of this comment period were changed to give TPB staff and member agencies more time to review, consider, and respond to comments. During this final comment period, 109 comments were received from individuals, non-profit organizations, and governmental representatives.

Comments can be submitted online at www.mwcog.org/tpbcomment, by email to tpbcomment@mwcog.org, by mail, phone, or in person.

Additional comment periods included:
- Human Service Transportation Coordination Plan
- Off-cycle amendments to 2016 CLRP in April 2017 and October 2017

Board Meetings

<u>Objective</u>

It should be easy to attend TPB meetings and to comment in person on items before the Board. People should be aware that this public comment opportunity exists, and the requirements for commenting should be clear and easy to understand.

<u>Description</u>

The TPB meets on a monthly basis (except in August) on the third Wednesday of the month, from noon to 2:00 P.M. Established practices provide opportunities for the public to make verbal comments in person or to listen to the meeting proceedings remotely. The meetings are accessible to people with disabilities. The meetings are widely announced six days ahead of time.

Public comment at Board meetings

Interested members of the public are given the opportunity to make brief comments on transportation issues under consideration by the TPB. Each speaker is allowed up to three minutes to present their views. Board members have an opportunity to ask questions of the speakers, and to engage in limited discussion. Speakers are encouraged to bring written copies of their remarks (65 copies) for distribution at the meeting.

The first agenda item for every Board meeting is set aside for public comment. To comment at this meeting the public needs to sign up in advance by contacting a TPB staffer, or by signing up in person before the meeting starts.

After a person makes a comment, Board members have the chance to ask follow-up questions; however, this rarely happens.

Meeting commenters most often fall into one or more of three categories:
1) people who have identified as the public or residents of the Washington region,
2) people who have identified as representing a nonprofit or advocacy group, and/or
3) people who have identified as representing a consulting business or business interest.

Occasionally, an elected official who does not serve on the Board will also comment. Thirty-one percent (31%) of all commenters at Board meetings identify as representing the public. Sixty percent (60%) of all commenters at Board meetings identify as representing an organization, including businesses, non-profits, and advocacy groups.

Open and accessible Board meetings

The Board meeting is held at the COG offices, which are accessible by both transit and to people with disabilities. Since 2015, an audio livestream of the meeting has been available for people who are unable to attend the meeting in person. An audio recording of the Board meeting is also posted to the TPB website several hours after the meeting adjourns, and archived audio is available for each item of a Board meeting. The meeting is also live-tweeted so that people can follow along on Twitter if they are not able to attend or listen live.

Meeting announcements are sent via email, six days before the meeting. TPB members and interested members of the public can sign up to receive these announcements. The announcements are simple and straightforward and contain a link to access the agenda and meeting materials online.

Highlights From 2017-2018

- There were more comments made at Board meetings in 2017 (51) than there were in 2018 (17).
- The July 2017 meeting had more comments that the other meetings taking place that year (15 comments). These comments were mostly related to the TPB's decision to "Accept Long-Range Plan Task Force initiatives for further analysis."
- The largest number of comments in 2018 occurred in October, when the TPB approved Visualize 2045.
- Meeting attendance (those who signed in) ranged from seven to 28. Meetings in which the items under discussion have a clear impact for residents tend to have the biggest turnout, whether in person or online.
- On average, 25 people listened to Board meetings live, though month to month that number ranges from a low of 6 to a high of 60.
- The total number of listens for each archived Board meeting ranged from a low of 33 to a high of 915.
- The Board meeting announcement email list grew from 509 in January 2017 to 717 in October 2018.

Transportation Improvements Program (TIP) Forum

Description

The TIP Forum is a federally required meeting that happens every two years. TPB staff bring together representatives from each of the state DOTs and WMATA to present to the public the projects and programs that are included in the two-year TIP.

The meeting was announced via email and social media. Materials were not made available in advance of the meeting, which is held from 7 to 8 p.m. (during the regular Citizens Advisory Committee meeting), though they were made available online after the meeting.

Highlights From 2017-2018

- Facebook Live was used at a TIP Forum for the first time at the event on July 12, 2018.

3.2.2   Observations

Successes

- Board meetings allow opportunities for year-round discussion related to regional transportation issues.
- There was active participation in Board meetings during the long-range plan (Visualize 2045) process, especially from advocacy groups.
- The TPB provides many ways for interested parties to "listen in" on Board meetings, including audio streaming and archiving, and live-tweeting.

Potential Areas for Improvement and Issues to Address

- Comment periods at Board meetings can be dominated by organizations.
- Focus group participants from both standing TPB committees stated that they do not typically hear about comment opportunities outside of committee meetings, indicating there may be a need for more extensive outreach before formal public comment periods.
- While the web-accessibility of Board meetings is impressive, the TPB may need to consider innovations to allow the Board to get input from those people who are not at the meeting.
- The six-day lead time for meeting announcements does not provide much notice for attendance or requesting materials in alternate formats.
- The TIP Forum is held during the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting, and most of the people who attend the meeting are either staff or sit on the CAC. Because of this, the TIP Forum is best at getting input from the "involved" tier rather than getting "informed" or "interested" parties involved. Since the TIP Forum is not necessarily meant to be an input-gathering exercise, but can be an effective way for people to learn about activities in the region, it may be useful to consider ways to draw attendance from others in addition to CAC members. In the past, postcards were sent to announce the meeting, which led to higher attendance. (Attendance was higher at the 2016 forum, including non-CAC members.)

3.3 COMMITTEES

The TPB has two standing advisory committees: the Citizens Advisory Committee and the Access for All Advisory Committee.

3.3.1   Summary

Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)

Objective

The mission of the CAC is to 1) promote public involvement in transportation planning for the region, and 2) to provide independent, region-oriented citizen advice to the TPB on transportation plans and issues.

<u>Description</u>

The CAC is a group of 24 people (15 voting members and nine non-voting alternates) from throughout the Washington region who represent diverse viewpoints on long-term transportation policy.

The CAC meets 11 times per year. Each meeting occurs six days before the TPB meeting and coincides with the release of TPB meeting materials. At each meeting, the committee is briefed on the TPB agenda and has an opportunity to ask questions regarding the agenda. Additionally, staff work with CAC leadership to identify TPB topics that are interesting to the committee while also providing an opportunity to provide useful feedback to TPB staff.

Dinner is provided for CAC members starting at 5:30 p.m. The meeting runs from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. CAC membership is renewed annually. CAC activities are documented and shared with the TPB at every Board meeting.

Members each serve a one-year term and must either be elected by the outgoing CAC or appointed by the three incoming officers of the TPB. The outgoing CAC elects six individuals—two each from Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia—and the three TPB officers for the coming year each appoint three voting members and up to three alternate members from their respective jurisdictions. The incoming chairperson of the TPB appoints the new chairperson of the CAC. Any resident of the region can apply to serve on the CAC.

<u>Highlights From 2017-2018</u>

From January 2017 to December 2018 the CAC has actively participated in several activities related to Visualize 2045.

- In summer 2017, the CAC worked to raise awareness about the Visualize 2045 public opinion survey.
- In spring 2018, the CAC worked to raise awareness of the Visualize 2045 forums that were happening in each jurisdiction. Additionally, CAC members attended those meetings, and a separate forum was held for the CAC.
- In fall 2018, the CAC raised awareness about the Visualize 2045 Open House and attended the Open House in the District of Columbia.
- Building on a history of pushing for a more expansive approach to long-range planning, the committee supported the work of the TPB's Long-Range Plan Task Force. The CAC had a representative on the Task Force, whose members helped to identify the aspirational initiatives that were used in Visualize 2045.
- At the October 2018 CAC meeting, the committee discussed their disappointment that WMATA was considering whether to continue the Riders Advisory Council. The committee shared this disappointment with the Board, who in turn wrote a letter encouraging the WMATA Board to keep the committee. The WMATA Board concurred with this request.

Access for All Advisory Committee

<u>Objective</u>

The AFA should be a place where people representing traditionally underserved communities can work with jurisdiction staff to determine whether and how these issues might be addressed within the TPB process.

Description

The AFA advises the TPB on transportation issues, programs, policies, and services that are important to low-income and minority communities as well as people with disabilities. The committee is unique in that it is the only TPB committee that has membership representing both government agencies and the public.

The AFA meets five or six times a year to comment on TPB activities and guide the TPB's coordinated transportation planning. The AFA chair is also a member of the TPB.

The AFA has several direct products. First, the chair shares a report of each meeting at the TPB meeting. Second, the committee advises on the update to the Coordinated Human-Service Transportation Plan which is updated every 4 years.

Highlights From 2017-2018

- The AFA had a representative on the Long-Range Plan Task Force, whose members helped to identify the aspirational initiatives that were used in Visualize 2045.
- The committee participated in a focus group to discuss Visualize 2045.
- The Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan was approved by the Board in December 2018. This plan was developed with regular input from the AFA.

3.3.2   Observations

Successes

- Both the CAC and AFA provide an opportunity for participants to give input directly to, and receive input directly from, the TPB.
- The CAC was involved in outreach related to Visualize 2045 forums and other events.
- AFA committee members find COG staff to be very helpful and receptive (e.g., with quick and appropriate responses to members who have sight and/or have mobility issues, making it easier for them to participate).
- Having a Board member chair the AFA raises their profile and provides a way to get comments directly to the Board.

Potential Areas for Improvement and Issues to Address

- There is some confusion from committee members related to their role. There is a need to have clearly-defined roles for each committee, including a clarification of whether it is expected that members should be engaging with the communities they represent to share and gather information related to TPB activities.
- Because of the size of the TPB service area, and the self-selection involved in participating in a committee, it is difficult to get a truly representative group to participate in both the AFA and the CAC. Depending on the TPB's goals for each committee, there may be a need for a greater cross-section of citizens, including general members of the public as well as those who are already participate in planning processes as advocates and transportation professionals
- As noted by participants, it can be difficult for CAC members to know how to bring their feedback in the most effective way, especially when the long-range plan and other processes

are often dealing with projects and plans that have been already developed by other jurisdictions.

- While the committees can submit comments to the TPB via a monthly report, there is often no response to comments made.
- There is frustration from committee members that there is no way to provide useful comments on projects at the local level by the time they make it into TPB's plans.
- There are not many attendees from the public at committee meetings. It is unclear whether that is due to a lack of interest or a lack of knowledge about the meetings.

3.4 DOCUMENTS, REPORTS, AND PUBLICATIONS

3.4.1 Summary

TPB News

Objective

To share information about the TPB's various work products, explain the TPB's process, and provide information about what is happening at the TPB.

Description

TPB news is a bi-weekly, online publication designed to provide brief, timely summaries of recent TPB action, research, analysis, outreach, and planning in the Washington region. TPB News articles are primarily used as informational items for the public; they help staff by explaining complex ideas in a simple way. The COG Office of Communications often uses these articles to pitch stories to reporters; however, this is not the primary objective of this form of media. In addition, staff maintains a blog-style page featuring past articles of TPB News, which provides a useful reference.

Highlights From 2017-2018

- The number of newsletter recipients grew from 1,078 to 1,314 between January 2017 and October 2018.

Meeting Materials

Objective

To ensure that meeting materials are prepared and available in a way that is accessible to the public and other stakeholders.

Description

Meeting materials include very technical memos, documents related to federal requirements, and presentations. While many required documents must be technical in nature, TPB staff are asked to create presentations and memos that are easy for non-transportation professionals to understand. When possible, communications staff will review these materials, but it is not always possible to do so. Meeting materials are posted to the meeting page six days before the Board meeting and are offered in hard-copy to the CAC.

Highlights From 2017-2018

- Staff released a formatted draft of Visualize 2045 with the Board prior to a Board vote. (Historically, formatted documents of the long-range plan were not available until after the plan was approved.)

3.4.2   Observations

Successes

- There is an overall sentiment that TPB News is a useful way to share TPB information as well as information about other projects in the region.

Potential Areas for Improvement and Issues to Address

- TPB program staff and those staffing committees and subcommittees could use TPB News articles more often and remind committee members about them.
- While most information shared in TPB News is written in a non-technical format, some focus group participants stated that they find it inaccessible and/or too dense, which may make it difficult to maintain subscriber interest.
- The outreach approach for efforts not related to long-range plans or other planning efforts is ad hoc; staff could benefit from a strategy for consistent communications.

3.5 WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

3.5.1   Summary

Website

Objective

To provide a place for people to go to find information about COG and the TPB. The website is intended to be simple to use and to provide simple navigation, so people can find what they are looking for.

Description

The COG/TPB website was redesigned in 2016 to have a more attractive and appealing look and feel than it has had in the past. The update provided the capability to have standalone pages (such as the Visualize2045.org page) and features such as the calendar, meeting pages, and news items. In addition to functioning as an email newsletter, TPB News (described further in Section 3.4) also functions as a standalone website (http://www.tpbne.ws/) linked from www.mwcog.org/tpb/. Transportation Planning Hub (www.transportationplanninghub.org/) is a useful resource for regional projects, though it is not clear how often it is updated or how people learn about it from the TPB website.

Highlights From 2017-2018
- From January 1, 2017, to November 5, 2018, there were 781,930 total pageviews on the COG website, including 623,349 unique pageviews.
- The largest number of pageviews per month (65,709) occurred in April 2017 (FIGURE 1). This can likely be at least partially attributed to a popular COG news piece about emergency preparation, which drew over 25,000 pageviews. The TPB page on the COG website drew 11,388 pageviews and Visualize 2045 pages drew 18,487 views (TABLE 2).

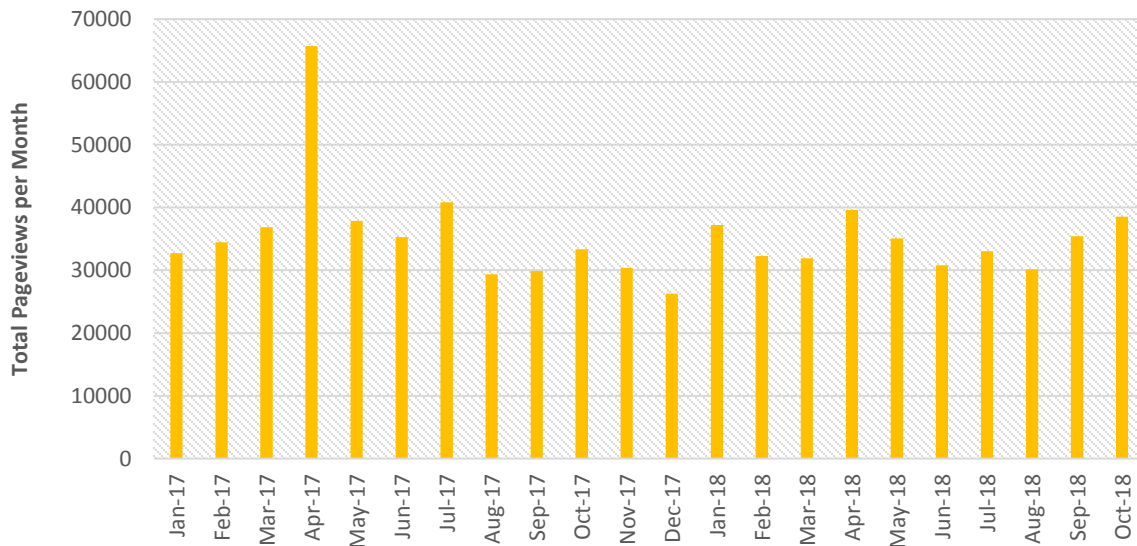FIGURE 1: TOTAL PAGEVIEWS BY MONTH

TABLE 2: TOTAL PAGEVIEWS BY PAGE VISITED

MWCOG Website Page Visited (TPB-specific pages are listed in bold)	Number of Pageviews (Jan 1, 2017-Nov 5, 2018)
www.mwcog.org/	71,143
www.mwcog.org/newsroom/2017/04/24/full-scale-exercise-focused-on-preparing-for-complex-terror-attacks-to-include-national-capital-region-first-responders-emergency-managers/	25,124
www.mwcog.org/environment/planning-areas/air-quality/air-quality-forecast/	22,111
www.mwcog.org/about-us/human-resources/job-listings/	18,437
www.mwcog.org/purchasing-and-bids/cog-bids-and-rfps/	14,173
www.mwcog.org/about-us/staff/	11,788
www.mwcog.org/tpb/	**11,388**
www.mwcog.org/visualize2045/	**9,680**
www.mwcog.org/visualize2045/participate/	**8,807**
www.mwcog.org/about-us/cog-and-our-region/	8,470

Twitter

<u>Objective</u>

To broadly share information about the TPB's work and its processes.

<u>Description</u>

The TPB's Twitter account (@NatCapRegTPB) shares information to members, reporters, and people interested in transportation planning. The account also provides a way for others to share TPB content to their networks. By reaching reporters, the TPB can extend its reach and provide information for local and regional news articles.

For those who are unable to attend TPB meetings in person, Twitter has also been a valuable supplement to the Board meeting audio, providing highlights in writing to those following along. Twitter has also been helpful in spreading the word about opportunities for the public to subscribe and be involved with the TPB's planning and decision-making processes.

<u>Highlights From 2017-2018</u>

- Twitter helped spread the word about the public opinion survey for Visualize 2045.
- As of February 8, 2019, there were 1,156 Twitter users following @NatCapRegTPB.

Facebook

<u>Objective</u>

To share the TPB's work with a wider audience.

<u>Description</u>

More people have Facebook accounts than have Twitter accounts, so Facebook should allow the TPB to reach a more diverse and older demographic and more of a general audience. Through the Facebook platform, the TPB has shared TPB News articles and information about ways to get involved.

<u>Highlights From 2017-2018</u>

- Used Facebook Live to stream two events in 2018 – a Visualize 2045 forum on May 1 and the TIP Forum on July 12.
- As of February 8, 2019, there were 400 users following @NatCapRegTPB.

3.5.2   Observations

Successes

- Media relations seem to be largely successful, with several TPB News stories gaining traction via local outlets. Stories with coverage on WTOP and in the Washington Post generate a lot of hits on the website.

- Analysis of topics of public concern (e.g., congestion related to large events, weather) is interesting to all three constituencies and draws media coverage.
- Use of interactive GIS story maps sets a good precedent for visual information-sharing.
- Facebook use allows for both reaching a broad range of people and targeting specific audiences.
- COG and the TPB have begun to improve the website:
  - Have done testing to allow shift of website content management to staff.
  - Have recently improved the website search tool.

Potential Areas for Improvement and Issues to Address

- While the media does cover stories from TPB News, that coverage does not necessarily lead to a better understanding and recognition of COG/TPB's work.
- People do not know where to go on the website when they need information, and there is a need to be clearer about which staff to contact.
- A TPB Vimeo channel exists, but it is underutilized.
- The website can be difficult to navigate. (This is being addressed.)
- Web pages are difficult for staff to update. (This is being addressed.)
- In order to make it easier for COG and other partners to disseminate TPB information in a timely fashion, there is a need for consistent, accessible social media messaging that is leadership-vetted.
- The congestion dashboard on the website is useful, but the TPB is no longer the only source of data for this information. The TPB could improve and expand on data provided (as well as outreach efforts around it).
- Social media (and targeting) can lead to an echo chamber. There is a need to ensure that new "interested" parties are getting involved in the conversation.
- Facebook has more users, but the TPB has more followers on Twitter. This is made more difficult due to the algorithms involved with growing Facebook followers.

3.6 LONG-RANGE PLANNING: VISUALIZE 2045

3.6.1 Summary

The Phase I Outreach, which was conducted in 2017, was designed to "cast a wide net" and obtain input from many people about high-level concerns and interests. The primary activity of Phase 1 was a public input survey.

Survey

Objective

The survey aimed to gather information on general attitudes and opinions about transportation in the region. The overall purpose was to inform ongoing discussions among decision-makers, planners, and stakeholders throughout the development of Visualize 2045 and for future planning efforts. In addition, the survey was used as an engagement tool that encouraged participants to consider regional transportation issues while broadly informing them about the TPB.

<u>Description</u>

The Visualize 2045 Public Input Survey was open for eight weeks, from June 17 to August 21, 2017. The survey used MetroQuest public engagement software. This simple, fun, and interactive online survey tool asked respondents about:
- Daily travel behaviors and patterns
- Key issues related to reliability, affordability, travel time, travel options, and safety
- Suggestions for transportation projects or other improvements
- Sociodemographic characteristics

Two different methodologies were used to gather responses to the public input survey:
- Random Sample. The random sample approach used a probability-based random sample of adults residing in households located within local jurisdictions comprising the TPB Planning Area. Households were selected to participate in the survey using an address-based sampling method and randomly selected households were invited by mail to complete the survey using a web link and a unique PIN provided in the invitation letter. A $15 gift card incentive was provided upon completion.
- Open survey. The open survey was available to any member of the public who wanted to participate. Unlike the random sample survey, which was designed to capture a geographically-representative cross-section of the region, the open survey was not intended to be statistically representative of any sociodemographic factor. To generate a wide response to the open survey, a multifaceted public outreach strategy was developed to reach a broad cross-section of the region's population.

The random sample and open surveys were conducted concurrently and used the same web-based MetroQuest tool and survey questionnaire.

Staff developed a comprehensive outreach plan to encourage widespread participation. The plan included both digital and in-the-field elements falling into the four main categories that follow. These activities took place between mid-June and mid-August. To assist in executing these efforts, TPB staff contracted the services of WBA Research and Remline Strategic Communications.

"Live-Surveying" Events

To ensure that anyone could participate in the open survey, regardless of access to the internet, staff planned in-person, "live-surveying" events. Survey interviewers with tablet computers were available at events so people could take the survey in-person. Interviewers approached potential participants with information about the survey.

To identify events, staff drew on suggestions from the TPB, its Technical Committee, and its Citizens Advisory Committee members. In choosing the locations for 15 events, staff focused on achieving a geographic and demographic balance that would be reflective of the region's diversity.

Digital Outreach and Promotion

Staff determined that outreach for a web-based survey required an online strategy to reach people already engaged with the TPB as well as those not already involved.

- The Visualize 2045 website was the main conduit to the survey. In addition to taking the survey, people who visited Visualize2045.org could learn more about the plan, sign up for email updates, leave comments, and get social media and news highlights.

- TPB and COG newsletters broadcasted information about the survey. Staff created a dedicated Visualize 2045 email list to provide updates to existing TPB distribution lists (approx. 1200 subscribers). The newsletter was sent out roughly every 1-2 weeks to promote the survey, report on outreach, and reinforce key messages. Links and information about the survey were also included in TPB News and COG Connections.
- Social media provided an effective way to create buzz, keep putting messages in front of people, and encourage conversation.
  - Using the TPB Twitter account, staff sent out 351 messages, which together had 64,438 impressions (i.e., appeared in a Twitter user's list of tweets). These messages were also re-tweeted, further amplifying their effectiveness.
  - Targeted advertising on Twitter and Facebook reached non-TPB audiences. For the final week of the survey, the TPB purchased boosted or promoted messages for the entire metropolitan area. These posts were shared beyond the TPB's regular followers.
    Twitter advertisements yielded 67,800 impressions while the boosted Facebook post reached 1,770 people, 166 of whom liked, shared, or clicked on the post.
- Media outreach and ad buys reached non-TPB audiences with a focus on hard-to-reach groups. These included buys in El Pregonero, El Tiempo, Washington Informer, and The Afro-American. COG press releases helped generate coverage by local media outlets including, Frederick News Post, WHAG, Greenbelt News Review, and Greater Greater Washington.

Visualize 2045 "Ambassadors"

Staff leveraged existing TPB networks and stakeholder groups to help spread the word about the survey. This included the TPB itself as well as the TPB Technical Committee, CAC, AFA, and the COG Public Information Officers (PIOs) Committee. Members of these "ambassador" groups were encouraged to share the survey information with constituents, colleagues, friends, family, and networks.

Ambassadors also received kits which included:
- Text for e-blasts, newsletters, and web pages
- Pre-packaged social media messages and graphics
- Information cards to distribute
- FAQs and talking points

Additional Targeted Outreach

One of the goals of this outreach was to reach people from all walks of life and those who were not presently engaged in TPB activities, including hard-to-reach populations. Staff developed postcards that encouraged residents to take the survey at home, and handed out the postcards at Metro stations and events, helping to spread the survey's reach.

Highlights From 2017-2018

- In total, there were 755 respondents in the random sample and 5,460 respondents to the open survey, for a total of 6,215 respondents.
- The ambassadors proved to be an effective way to increase public awareness about the survey. Member jurisdictions and agencies Tweeted about the survey from their official Twitter accounts. Collectively they reached more than 24,550 followers. Advocacy and other stakeholder groups also tweeted using the hashtag #VIZ2045.

- Findings from the survey were incorporated into the final documentation for Visualize 2045.
  - Concerns about the reliability of transportation dominated the input received in the public input survey. The survey asked respondents to select two factors, out of a list of five, that have the greatest influence on their daily decisions about how, when, and where to travel. Reliability stood out as the most important factor for 65% of all random-sample respondents, which placed it far ahead of other identified factors. Travel time was the second-most important factor, selected by 45% of random-sample respondents. The final plan document emphasized actions (e.g., new projects and performance analyses) that were being taken to improve reliability.

Forums

Objective

The forums were intended to tease out reactions to the seven aspirational initiatives that the TPB identified at the end of 2017. The sessions were designed to provide qualitative input to help the TPB and staff better understand the underlying motivations, hopes, and concerns of residents. The feedback elicited from the forums was summarized in the long-range plan documentation. In addition to providing this focused input, the events served to raise public awareness of the TPB and the regional planning process.

Description

During April and May 2018, 12 forums were conducted: nine evening sessions in the TPB's member jurisdictions, special sessions for the Access for All Advisory Committee and the Citizens Advisory Committee, and a virtual session conducted as a webinar. The forums obtained qualitative input in a focus-group setting.

At the forums, participants were asked in small group discussions to visualize each of the TPB's seven endorsed initiatives and discuss how they might be implemented. Participants were encouraged to think about the initiatives not just as long-term strategies but as opportunities for small, incremental improvements— things that can make a difference in people's lives in the short-term, while giving them increased confidence in the future. In addition, participants were polled using "Poll Everywhere" software, and had the chance to provide comments using sticky notes before the forums began.

Findings from the forums were summarized in the Visualize 2045 document and in Appendix I on Phase 2 outreach. Specific findings were provided for each of the seven initiatives. These forums provided an opportunity for the public to weigh in on the aspirational element of Visualize 2045. Since these are ideas that have yet to be implemented, this input may help make the case for projects, programs, and policies that could end up in future plans.

Digital Outreach and Promotion

To promote the forums in the spring of 2018, TPB staff posted the dates and locations on Visualize2045.org, sent email blasts to the Visualize 2045 distribution list, and posted forum information and reminders on the TPB Facebook and Twitter accounts. The TPB also leveraged contacts among elected officials and jurisdiction staff, as well as members of the CAC and AFA, to help promote the forums and the opportunity to participate.

The project consultants developed distribution lists for each forum using website research. In total, consultant staff pulled together over 3,500 email addresses to send English and Spanish forum flyers to in each of the nine evening forums. Typical recipients included, but were not limited to:

- County and City leadership (mayors, clerks, council members) and department staff (Aging, Disability, Communications, Planning, Transportation, Social Services, etc.)
- Community, homeowner, and civic associations
- Advocacy and special interest groups (transportation, environmental, disability, aging, racial, cultural, social, ped/bike, etc.)
- Community and social institutions (libraries, senior centers, community centers, YMCAs, large churches, food pantries, etc.)
- Economic and business development group/departments
- Local news/media

Emails were sent 1-2 weeks ahead of each forum and again 1-3 days prior to the events as a reminder. The messages asked each recipient to forward the forum flyer and information to their distribution lists, post the event on their website, calendar, and/or social media accounts, and to print and post the flyers in their community hubs/places of business to help promote the events.

In addition, staff sent "Ambassador Kits" to the TPB, Technical Committee, and Citizens Advisory Committee members which provided ready-to-use messages – sample emails, tweets, etc. -- that could be easily tailored and forwarded to organizations and individuals who may have been interested in attending or knowing about the forums.

Highlights From 2017-2018

- A list of more than 3,500 email addresses was used to send announcements.
- Seventeen Visualize 2045 email blasts (sent between 6/28/2017 and 10/18/2018) reached an average of 1517 people, with an average open rate of 29% and click-through rate of 13%.
- More than 300 people attended the 12 sessions. Over the course of a typical forum, three rounds of discussions were held at four tables. Some forums that were less well-attended featured fewer discussions and/or tables. Nonetheless, notes from all the sessions indicate that more than 120 separate discussions were held.
- Staff generally felt the most effective outreach occurred when TPB Board members or member staff helped to get the word out.

Open houses

Objective

To wrap up outreach activities for Visualize 2045, the TPB held three open houses in September 2018 as part of the final public comment period for the plan. The purpose of the open houses was to provide an unstructured opportunity for residents to learn about the contents of the plan. The sessions were also a useful way for TPB staff, elected officials, and jurisdiction staff to observe and better understand how residents felt about the ideas and contents in the draft plan.

Description

Hosted in Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia, the open houses featured display Boards with content derived from the draft elements of the plan. Subject-matter experts from the TPB staff

and the TPB's member governments were on-hand at the open houses to talk with the region's residents in informal, one-on-one conversations. Some participants came to discuss specific projects, while others wanted to learn about the plan's regional analysis and forecasts. Still other attendees came to share their ideas about emerging challenges and future planning activities.

The events did not include any presentations, so attendees had the chance to arrive at any time to informally chat with staff and other attendees. Most attendees were already knowledgeable or active in transportation planning process.

Digital Outreach and Promotion

Working with consultants, the Visualize 2045 public participation team posted the dates and locations on the visualize2045.org website, sent email blasts to the Visualize 2045 distribution list, and posted forum information and reminders on the TPB Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Highlights From 2017-2018

- The sessions in Maryland and Virginia were surprisingly well attended. In total, more than 100 people attended these events.

Comment periods

Objective

Public comment periods provide opportunities for residents to submit comments for the record before the plan was finalized.

Description

As described earlier, three 30-day public comment periods were held: 1) December 14, 2017 to January 13, 2018; 2) January 19 to February 17, 2018; and 3) September 7 to October 7, 2018. The first and second periods requested comments on projects that were submitted for inclusion in the Constrained Element of Visualize 2045, while the third period was the final comment period prior to approval of the plan.

The materials were posted in draft form. Residents could submit comments through an online form, by email, by phone, by mail, or in person.

The comments were summarized in memos in which they were grouped thematically. The memos included staff responses. The TPB voted to "accept" this memo.

Digital Outreach and Promotion

Notices about the comment periods were sent out via email to the public distribution list. Announcements about comment periods were places in the Washington Post, Washington Hispanic, The Afro-American, and on social media accounts.

Highlights From 2017-2018

- 280 comments were received. Most comments focused on bike/ped concerns, which indicates a high level of interest and mobilization within that community.

Materials and branding

<u>Objective</u>

The TPB set out to make the long-range plan more accessible to the public.

<u>Description</u>

The plan was given a logo and a recognizable name —"Visualize 2045"— instead of simply calling it the "CLRP." The TPB established a clear and public-friendly narrative for the document and other supporting pieces.

The main plan document is written in a friendly tone in plain language. It was intended to minimize jargon by explaining transportation concepts and technical language. For the seven initiatives, there was an interactive presentation and brochure that was mostly used for the forums but also helped explain the aspirational element of the plan.

<u>Highlights From 2017-2018</u>

- Visualize 2045 branding (including the website, hashtag, etc.) had clear benefits related to accessibility of the planning process.

3.6.2   Observations

Successes

- Visualize 2045 was a leap forward for TPB public participation, with a diverse portfolio of both in-person and electronic strategies. Focus group quotes:
  - o "TPB staff did their best work ever in terms of public outreach, branding, and clarity in their Visualize 2045 outreach."
  - o "Visualize 2045 was state of the art for process and product."
- Website was very effective – useful, easy to use.
- The Visualize process found ideas around which to build consensus (i.e., the seven aspirational initiatives).
- The document is useful for reinforcing regional thinking. The seven aspirational initiatives were much more accessible than what is usually produced.
- The change in the schedule for development of the long-range plan, with updates every four years instead of every year, allows more time to engage people at each update.
- The process drew media attention and involved successful coordination with partner agency communications staff and other ambassadors.
- The process was responsive (e.g., it introduced new measure related to reliability in response to public comments).
- People liked that they could see comments that came in online.
- Survey
  - o The survey received lots of responses and was heavily promoted.
  - o The outreach conducted at farmers markets, etc., was effective. Survey-takers with tablets brought people into the booth and did not wait for people to approach them.
  - o The survey was better at obtaining a random sample of public opinion (vs. public comment periods).

- Forums and Open Houses
  - Local forums were well-attended, with more local meetings, in dense areas.
  - Drew significant coverage in local media, especially from local jurisdictions for meetings in those jurisdictions.
  - Polling at events provided an opportunity to provide immediate feedback and assess consistency in responses (which were mostly consistent related to initiative priorities).
  - Some forums were held in locations comfortable for people who don't usually get out to meetings (e.g., senior centers).
  - Forums included a presentation in the beginning, prior to discussions, which helped to explain the process.
  - Meetings with the best attendance had involved local ambassadors who posted on FB, etc.
- Branding (Visualize 2045 versus Constrained Long-Range Plan) made the document more understandable and easier to share.
- The document was visually engaging and explained concepts in a way people could understand, with less technical language.

Potential Areas for Improvement and Issues to Address

- The long-range plan horizon is long (20-40 years). Since 5-10-year planning activities might resonate more with the community, think about ways to connect people with local projects that operate on that scale.
- Transparency and continued communication: Participants would like to see what influence the input had on the process, including the seven initiatives. Need clarity about how aspirational initiatives will inform the future of the long-range plan (e.g., there was some frustration that endorsed priorities are not resulting in fundamental changes).
- Need consistent and clear messaging related to what the TPB needs/wants from the public at each stage.
- Need to engage advocates while also building input from and knowledge of "interested" parties.
- Need to convince people to care about issues long in the future – difficult task.
- There is no associated funding for implementing aspirational initiatives, and it is difficult to convince people to "think big" without discussing options for funding.
- Need to make sure that TPB members know about and champion the long-range plan and other efforts, especially considering the difference that TPB member involvement can make for public participation.
- There is a perception that the Long-Range Plan Task Force meetings were closed to the public, though that is incorrect. To improve transparency, it may be useful to consider expanding notice related to those meetings in the future.
- The Long-Range Plan Task Force included only two members of the public (i.e., representatives from the CAC and the AFA committees).
- For future surveys, consider ways to provide education prior to the survey (to obtain better-educated opinions) as well as real-time results.
- Some forums and open houses were well-attended, but others did not have high participation.
- For the forums, some focus group participants felt that facilitators were inconsistent in their strategies, and that a few questions were sometimes leading.

- Meetings in neighborhoods are useful for drawing participation from people who might not otherwise travel to a meeting. However, it's hard to get regional insight rather than local when having meetings in neighborhoods.
- Need to clarify concurrent planning processes. Seemingly redundant efforts create confusion (e.g., Visualize 2045 vs other long-term efforts in the region).
- It would be useful to know how the public felt about the branding and how it caught on (e.g., this could be asked in surveys, etc.)

3.7 COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE (DORMANT)

3.7.1 Summary

Objective

To engage members of the informed and interested public who have not been extensively involved in the regional transportation planning process.

Description

The Community Leadership Institute (CLI) is an educational program that encourages successful community leaders to get involved in transportation-related decision-making at all levels. Over the course of three workshops, participants learn how, where, and when transportation decisions are made in the region.

The CLI process shares information about the various planning processes at the state, regional, and local levels. CLI participants learn to be regional transportation leaders by connecting the interests of their local communities, constituencies, and elected officials with the planning issues facing the entire metropolitan Washington region. By reviewing case studies and participating in interactive group activities, participants also learn about the relationship between land use, jobs, housing, and transportation, and the implications of growth in the region.

The last CLI was held in the fall of 2015. The program was put on hold so that staff could focus resources on planning for and leading outreach related to Visualize 2045.

3.7.2 Observations Regarding the Potential to Revive Activity

- Focus group feedback indicates that this is a useful tool that provides exposure to the TPB's activities through charrettes, games to discuss trade-offs.
- Board members and members of the public have expressed interest in bringing the CLI back. With the approval of Visualize 2045, 2019 may be an ideal time to update the program and prepare to re-launch.

3.8 THE REGION MAGAZINE (DORMANT)

3.8.1 Summary

Objective

To highlight TPB activities from the previous year.

<u>Description</u>

The Region was an annual glossy magazine that summarized TPB activities. The magazine was formatted by a professional designer and included lots of graphic elements. Copies of the magazine were distributed to current and past members of the Board, as well as people who participate in the TPB process. The magazine was also sent to libraries in the region and to anyone who expressed interest.

The magazine started as a COG-wide quarterly publication. Over time it became the annual TPB publication. The Region has not been published in more than two years, primarily because of staffing limitations. One of the final issues covered the 50th anniversary of the TPB.

3.8.2 Observations Regarding the Potential to Revive Activity

- Though it was a topic of discussion at focus groups, there did not seem to be a lot of interest in potentially reviving The Region Magazine. This may be due to a lack of awareness about the product.

4 Appendix

- Informational posters from focus groups.
- Matrix used for recording focus group comments.
- Tracking Dashboard (forthcoming).

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Evaluate public participation activities conducted for the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) during 2017 and 2018.

POLICY GOALS

From the 2014 Update to the Participation Plan for the National Capital Transportation Planning Board, Chapter 3

1. Communicate effectively with appropriate audiences. Disseminate information about programs and projects through a variety of conduits.

2. Provide clear and open access to information and participation opportunities. Improve access to technical and planning documents and, tailor these to be accessible to more constituencies.

3. Gather input from diverse perspectives. Continue to encourage participation from diverse constituencies and to provide forums for discussion.

4. Respond meaningfully to public comment and feedback. Provide information on how comments will be considered in the planning process.

5. Promote a regional perspective. Communicate how regional transportation planning plays a vital role in coordinating planning activities on many levels.

CONSTITUENCIES

From the 2014 Update to the Participation Plan for the National Capital Transportation Planning Board, Chapter 4

Involved Public

- Knowledgeable about transportation policy issues.
- Includes the TPB's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and the Access for All Advisory Committee (AFA).

Informed Public

- Has some knowledge of transportation policy issues, but is not familiar with the TPB's role in the regional transportation planning process.
- Often includes community and opinion leaders who work at the local level.

Interested Public

- Has an inherent interest in transportation challenges but has little direct knowledge of policy issues.
- Includes the "general public" and community leaders who have limited exposure to transportation planning.
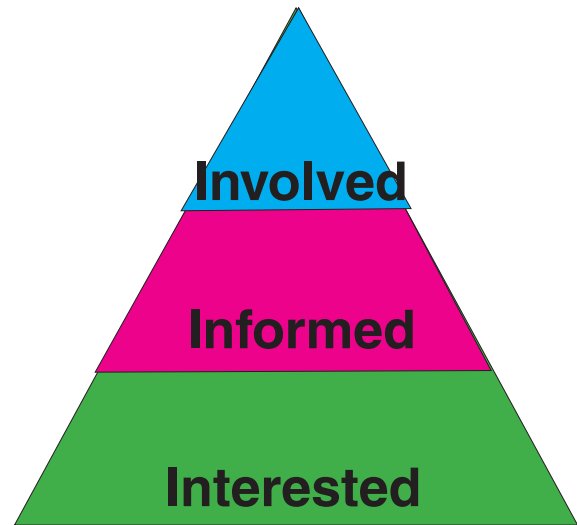
ONGOING ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITIES	GOALS	CONSTITUENCIES	OBJECTIVES	HOW SUCCESSFUL DO YOU THINK THIS APPROACH HAS BEEN?	ANY POTENTIAL AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT OR ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES?
Public Comment — Formal Public Comment	3,4	Involved, informed	• Should be easy to comment on regionally significant and federally required documents produced by the TPB. • Provide information to help people understand comment opportunities. • Provide a response to comments so that everyone who commented is aware of and can understand the response.		
Public Comment at Board Meetings	3,4	Involved, informed	• Should be easy to comment in person at TPB meetings. • People should be aware that this public comment opportunity exists. • Requirements for commenting should be clear and easy to understand.		
Open and Accessible Board Meetings	1,2,3,4	Involved, informed	• Should be easy to know when a TPB meeting is scheduled. • Meetings should be held in a location that is accessible via a variety of transportation modes, including bus and Metrorail. • Meeting materials should be provided in advance to inform the public. • Should be options for people to follow the meeting even if they cannot be there in person.		
Meeting Announcements	1,2,5	Involved, informed	• Provide adequate notice about meetings and provide the opportunity for people to review the agenda in advance.		
TIP Forum	1,2,3,5	Involved, informed	• Make the public aware that the TIP Forum is happening. • Provide materials with enough time for the public to process and understand them. • Hold the meeting in a place where people are able to attend and submit feedback.		
Committees — Citizens Advisory Committee	1,2,3,4,5	Involved	• Should allow involved members of the public to meet with people from across the region to learn about and discuss transportation planning and TPB activities.		
Access for All Advisory Committee	1,2,3,5	Involved			
Documents, Reports, and Publications — TPB News	1,2,4,5	Involved, informed, interested	• Share information about the TPB's various work products, explain the TPB's process, and provide information about what is happening at the TPB.		
Meeting materials	1,2,5	Involved, informed	• Ensure that meeting materials are prepared and available in a way that is accessible to the public and other stakeholders.		
Web and Social Media — Twitter		Involved, informed, interested	• Share information about the TPB's work and its processes.		
Facebook		Involved, informed, interested	• Share the TPB's work with a wider audience.		
TPB/COG Website	1,2,5	Involved, informed, interested	• Provide a place for people to go to find information about COG and the TPB. • Should be simple to use, with easy navigation.		
Outreach and Training					

VISUALIZE 2045 ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITIES	GOALS	CONSTITUENCIES	OBJECTIVES	HOW SUCCESSFUL DO YOU THINK THIS APPROACH WAS?	ANY POTENTIAL AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT OR ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES?
Survey	1,3,5	Informed, interested	• Gather general attitudes and opinions about transportation in the region to inform ongoing discussions throughout the development of Visualize 2045 and for future planning efforts. • Encourage people to think about regional transportation. • Broadly inform people about the TPB.		
Outreach and Communications	1,2,3	Involved, informed, interested	• To promote and spread the word about the survey. • To gather as many responses as possible to the open survey. • To spread the word about Visualize 2045.		
Forums	1,3,4,5	Involved, informed	• To tease out reactions to the seven aspirational initiatives that the TPB identified at the end of 2017. • Provide qualitative input to help the TPB and staff better understand the underlying motivations, hopes, and concerns of residents. (The feedback elicited from the forums was summarized in the long-range plan documentation.) • Raise public awareness of the TPB and the regional planning process.		
Outreach and Communications	1,2,5	Involved, informed, interested	• Encourage people to attend and participate in the forums. • Spread the word about the seven initiatives.		
Open Houses	1,2,3,5	Involved, informed	• Provide an unstructured opportunity for residents to learn about the contents of the plan. • Observe and better understand how residents will react to the ideas and contents in the draft plan, to help the TPB and its staff position itself for future planning activities and outreach efforts.		
Outreach and Communications	1,2,3	Involved, informed, interested	• Inform people about the open houses and encourage participation.		
Final Comment	2,4	Involved, informed	• Provide an opportunity for residents to submit comments for the record before the plan is finalized.		
Materials and Branding					

DORMANT ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITIES	GOALS	CONSTITUENCIES	OBJECTIVES	HOW SUCCESSFUL DO YOU THINK THIS APPROACH WAS?	WOULD YOU LIKE TPB TO CONSIDER BRINGING THIS ACTIVITY BACK?
Community Leadership Institute					
The Region Magazine					