

# REGION UNITED

## Metropolitan Washington Planning Framework for 2030

**Advancing Equity, Transportation,  
Housing, and Climate Goals**



UPDATED: December 2022



Metropolitan Washington  
**Council of Governments**

## **Region United: Metropolitan Washington Planning Framework for 2030**

First published: March 9, 2022

Second edition: December 2, 2022 (including Equity Emphasis Areas update and 2020 climate goal achievement)

### **ABOUT COG**

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is an independent, nonprofit association that brings area leaders together to address major regional issues in the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia. COG's membership is comprised of 300 elected officials from 24 local governments, the Maryland and Virginia state legislatures, and U.S. Congress.

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Design: Blue House Design

Interior collage photos: Brookville Bus Depot/Montgomery County Office of Public Information; The Residences at St. Elizabeths East/Flaherty & Collins Properties for the District of Columbia; New Carrollton/Prince George's County; HQ2 in Arlington County/Amazon; Embark Richmond Highway/Rhodeside & Harwell for the Fairfax County Department of Planning and Development

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# Pulling priorities together, putting them in action



**M**ajor progress has been made since 2010 when the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) and its member governments endorsed *Region Forward*, our vision for a more prosperous, accessible, livable, and sustainable future. Officials from across the region have increasingly guided growth into mixed-use developments. Significant investments have been made in public transit as well as bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Air quality has improved dramatically.

But it's also clear that our region needs to take collaboration to the next level to address a variety of interconnected and urgent challenges more effectively, including housing supply and affordability, transportation accessibility and mobility, climate change—as well as long-persisting racial inequities. And while these issues are daunting, there's also growing consensus: **if the challenges are interconnected, so are the solutions.**

To address these challenges and prepare for the additional growth that we know is coming, my counterparts and I on the COG Board of Directors are sharpening the focus set in *Region Forward* by endorsing planning priorities for the next decade related to equity, transit and land use, housing, and climate. And now comes the most important part—we are pulling these priorities together and putting them in action through *Region United: Metropolitan Washington Planning Framework for 2030*. This framework will help advance our goals by:

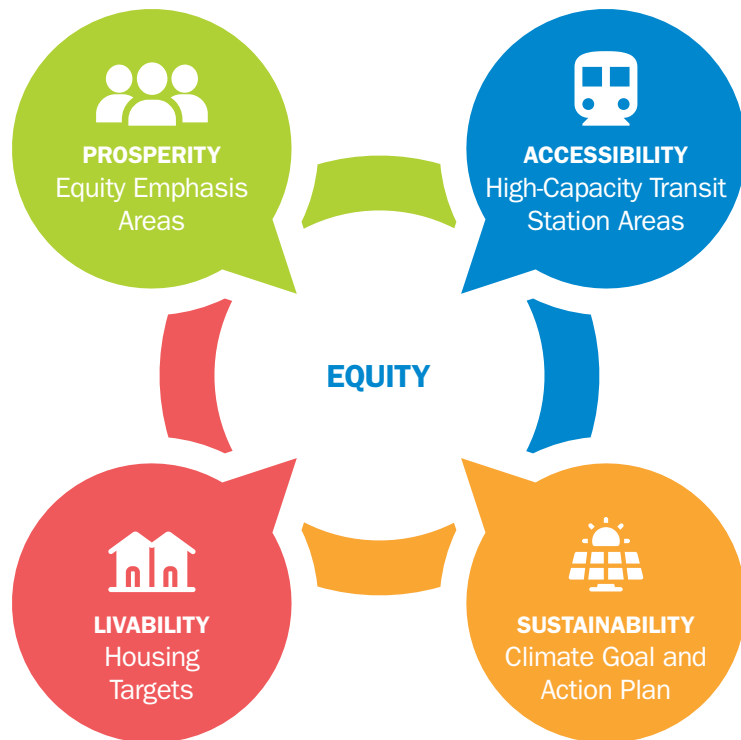
- ▶ Fostering further peer-to-peer learning and informing more integrated planning and decision-making,
- ▶ Promoting COG flexible grant and technical assistance programs as well as identifying external funding to jumpstart promising local projects, and
- ▶ Communicating more effectively about shared goals and solutions with area stakeholders and the public.

I invite you to learn more and engage with us in the months and years ahead as we shape a better future together.

**Christian Dorsey**  
2022 COG Board Chair

# Planning Framework for 2030

The framework's planning priorities help advance equity and the overarching goals in *Region Forward*, COG's vision for a more prosperous, accessible, livable, and sustainable future.



The following four regional priorities make up the planning framework:

- (1) **Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs)**—Planning concept to elevate equity and inform future growth and investment decisions. 364 locations with high concentrations of traditionally underserved communities.
- (2) **High-Capacity Transit Station Areas (HCTs)**—Planning concept to better leverage the region's major investment in transit and inform future growth and investment decisions. 225 locations around Metrorail, commuter rail, light rail, bus rapid transit (BRT), and streetcar stations that are in place or will be by 2030.
- (3) **2030 Housing Targets**—Planning targets to address the region's housing needs. Targets call for at least 75,000 additional housing units by 2030 beyond the 245,000 new units already anticipated, 75 percent of the units in Activity Centers or HCTs, and 75 percent of the units affordable to low- and middle-income households.
- (4) **2030 Climate Goal and Action Plan**—Planning goal and action plan to address climate change at the regional level. Goal calls for a 50 percent reduction in GHG emissions below 2005 baseline emission levels.





Numerous efforts are underway across the region that advance the planning priorities in the framework, such as:

- (1) **Montgomery County**  
The Brookville Smart Energy Bus Depot, an integrated microgrid and electric bus charging infrastructure project, is a first of its kind project and will support the sustainability and climate resilience goals of the county.
- (2) **District of Columbia**  
Through a Mayor's Order on Housing, the District has made a major commitment to and progress in adding new and affordably priced housing throughout the city, including in high opportunity areas like St. Elizabeths.
- (3) **Prince George's County**  
The New Carrollton area is being developed for business, residential, and retail use. It will be more bikeable and walkable, and will serve as a multi-modal "gateway" to the region.
- (4) **Arlington County**  
The site of Amazon HQ2 is being reimagined as a "live-work" neighborhood, where residents and visitors are better connected to the areas and amenities around it.
- (5) **Fairfax County**  
Embark Richmond Highway is an initiative planning significant transportation and infrastructure improvements, including a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, to revitalize the corridor and create economic opportunities.



# ADVANCING PROSPERITY: Equity Emphasis Areas

## OUR CHALLENGE

Metropolitan Washington is one of the wealthiest areas in the nation, but that prosperity is not shared equitably. A wide range of economic and social disparities exist regionwide. Access to job opportunities, transit, and affordably-priced housing varies widely across the region. This access is particularly essential for traditionally underserved communities, such as people with low-incomes. COG has also found that even before COVID, health outcomes varied starkly by race and ethnicity, contributing to major differences in life expectancy.

## OUR PLANNING PRIORITY

To advance metropolitan Washington’s prosperity and weave equity considerations into local and regional planning more comprehensively, the COG Board established Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs) as a key regional planning concept in 2021. EEAs are 364 of the region’s more than 1,300 census tracts identified as having high concentrations of traditionally underserved communities, such as low-income individuals and/or racial and ethnic minorities. EEAs also have a higher share of households who rent, individuals with disabilities, and workers without a teleworking option. While concentrated in the District of Columbia’s wards east of the Anacostia River and adjacent communities in Prince George’s County, EEAs are present throughout the region.

Originally developed by the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) at COG for analyzing impacts of its long-range transportation plan, area officials saw the potential for a broader application of EEAs. COG will now use them as a planning tool across disciplines to help elevate equity and inform decision-makers seeking to lift up underserved communities.

The focus on EEAs aligns with actions in recent years by COG and its member governments to advance equity, including a COG Board resolution in 2020 affirming racial equity as a fundamental value. EEAs are also used as selection criteria in COG and TPB grant programs that fund planning for access to transit stations, housing near transit, roadway safety, and more.

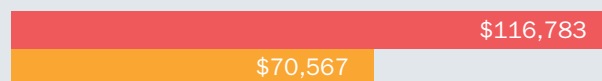
### Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs)

# 364

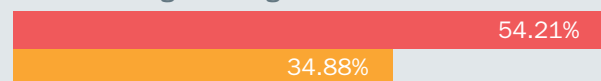
locations with high concentrations of traditionally underserved communities that should be elevated in planning and decision-making.

### Demographic Characteristics of EEAs vs. Region as a Whole

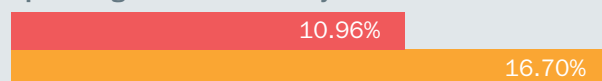
#### Median Household Income



#### Bachelor's Degree or Higher



#### Speak English Less Than Very Well



#### Commute by Public Transportation



■ Persons in the Region   ■ Persons in Equity Emphasis Areas





## BENEFITS OF INTEGRATED PLANNING

Through a broader application, EEAs can inform regional efforts to enhance accessibility, livability, and sustainability in our region as well as prosperity. For example, EEAs have been used to examine disparities in the location of traffic injuries and fatalities so that planners and decision-makers can consider more targeted actions to improve roadway safety and save lives. Beyond transportation, COG is applying EEAs to climate planning, another key element of the planning framework. Planners found that those living in EEAs spend a higher percentage of their income on energy costs and experience more extreme heat days than the average area resident.

EEAs are home to about

# 30%

of the region's population of 5.7 million residents.



Explore an interactive map: [www.mwco.org/eea](http://www.mwco.org/eea)



# ADVANCING ACCESSIBILITY: High-Capacity Transit Station Areas

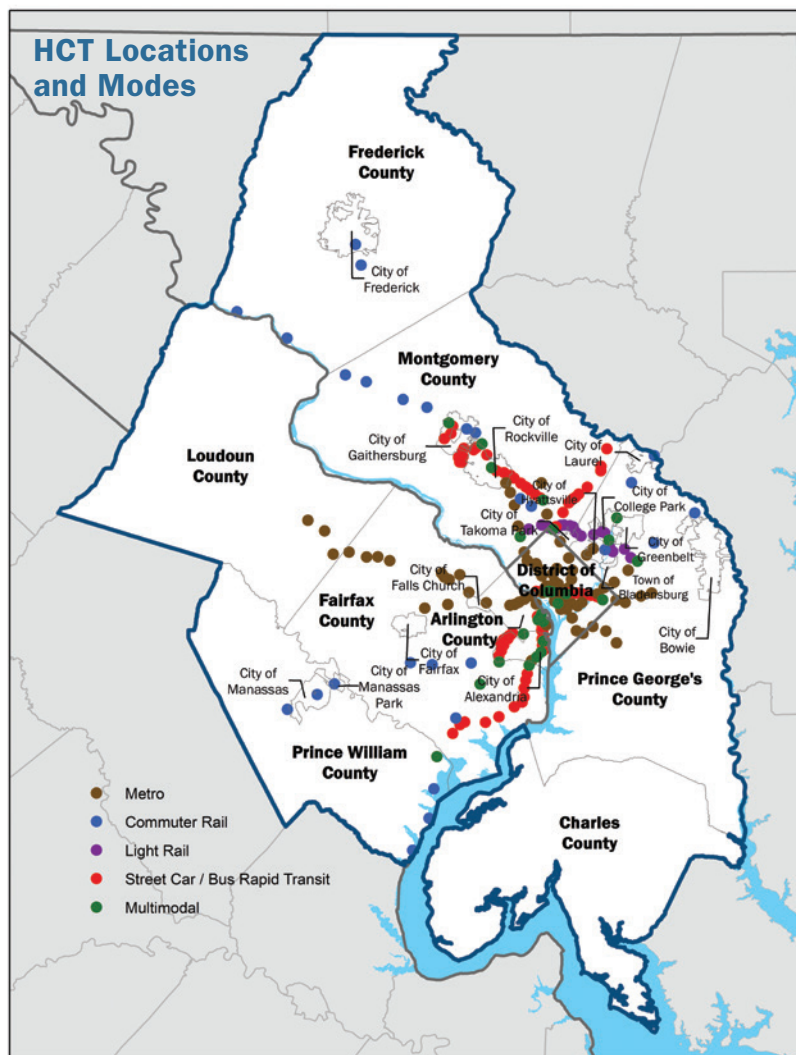
## OUR CHALLENGE

While area officials have made—and continue to make—major investments in transportation, metropolitan Washington’s multimodal network will be severely strained in the future as the region grows unless additional actions are taken. For example, as part of its *Visualize 2045* long-range transportation plan, the TPB forecasts morning roadway congestion to significantly increase in the decades to come. In addition, concerns about combatting climate change and planning for resilient communities and ensuring access to transportation for underserved groups require an even more comprehensive planning approach.

### High-Capacity Transit Station Areas (HCTs)

# 225

locations that can be optimized to better leverage the region’s major investment in transit and advance multiple goals.



Explore an interactive map: [www.mwpcog.org/hct](http://www.mwpcog.org/hct)





## OUR PLANNING PRIORITY

To advance metropolitan Washington’s accessibility, mobility, and various other interrelated goals, the COG Board established High-Capacity Transit Station Areas (HCTs) as a key regional planning concept in 2021 alongside EEAs. HCTs are 225 areas around Metrorail, commuter rail, light rail, bus rapid transit, and streetcar stations that are currently in place or will be by 2030.

To optimize HCTs, local jurisdictions can develop a variety of land uses like housing, offices, and shopping as well as improve access to transit and nearby amenities by completing pedestrian and bicycle projects, like the National Capital Trail Network, or providing bikeshare, e-scooter, or microtransit services.



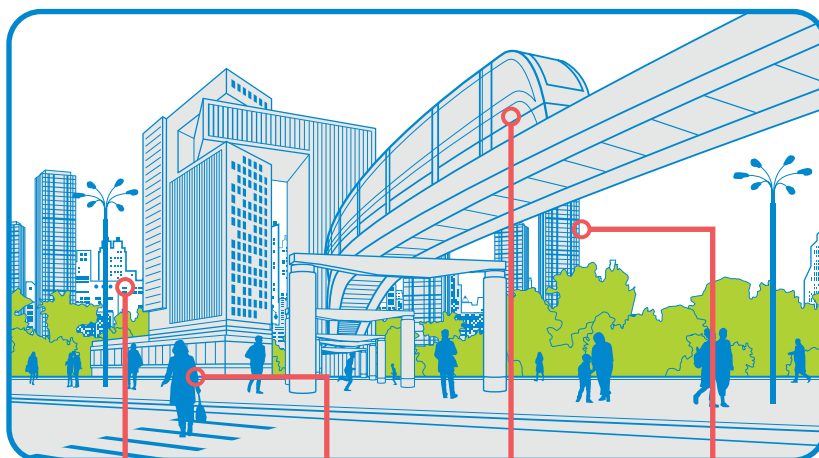
## BENEFITS OF INTEGRATED PLANNING

While Activity Centers—the precursor to HCTs—provide the opportunity to concentrate growth in housing and jobs in specific locations, HCTs greatly enhance this wise land use planning by offering connections to sustainable, affordable transportation options.

HCTs are key to building mixed-use, mixed-income transit-oriented communities, which have the potential to advance all of the priorities in the planning framework.

Expanding people’s access to transit beyond a half mile walkshed by providing bikeshare or microtransit services is one way the region can optimize its HCTs.

## Transit-Oriented Communities



Housing affordable at all income levels and family sizes

Expanding opportunity by co-locating housing, jobs, and amenities

Affordable, environmentally friendly travel options

Housing, office options that use less energy



## ADVANCING LIVABILITY: Housing Targets

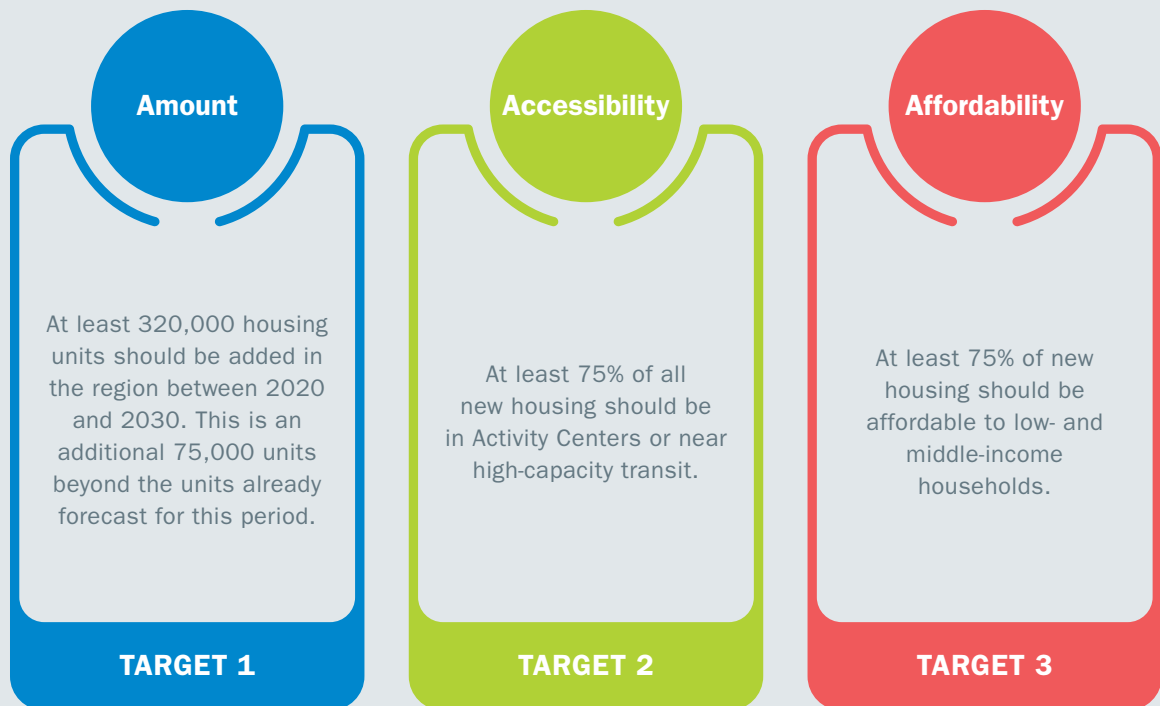
### OUR CHALLENGE

Over the previous decade, new housing construction did not keep pace with the demand for housing in metropolitan Washington. And this housing shortfall is expected to worsen without intervention in the years ahead. Its effects are wide-ranging—adversely impacting affordability, undercutting the region’s appeal to new companies and talent, and resulting in workers living far from their jobs, which strains the transportation system and leads to less sustainable commuting patterns.

### OUR PLANNING PRIORITY

To advance metropolitan Washington’s livability and address housing production and affordability challenges, the COG Board set regional targets in 2019. The targets were the culmination of a coordinated effort by COG and local planning and housing agencies initially sparked by the TPB’s *Visualize 2045* long-range transportation plan. In seeking a better balance between growth in jobs and housing, a TPB task force determined a jobs-to-housing ratio to optimize economic competitiveness and improve the performance of the transportation system. Using the ratio, COG determined the region’s housing needs.

### 2030 Housing Targets



For a report on the initiative, visit: [www.mwcog.org/housingtargets](http://www.mwcog.org/housingtargets)



Local governments are already planning and working to preserve and increase the supply and diversity of affordably priced homes in their jurisdictions but face a variety of challenges—from community dynamics and market forces, to competing funding priorities and reduced federal resources.

In addition to setting regional targets, the board called on officials to work within their communities to adopt local-level targets on production, accessibility, and affordability.

### **BENEFITS OF INTEGRATED PLANNING**

For many area residents, the housing shortfall means enduring long commutes to work in turn for access to affordably priced housing. Otherwise, it can mean difficult choices between paying rent or affording other basic necessities such as food or medicine. By expanding housing opportunities for all residents, the region can build a stronger foundation for economic mobility and advance equity.

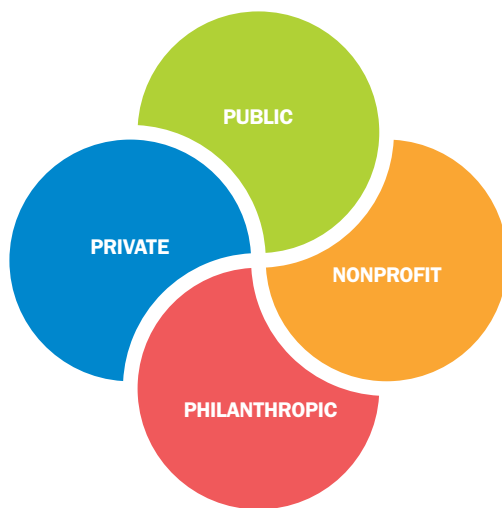
When achieved, the housing targets will also help enhance the region's competitiveness and improve mobility by bringing housing and jobs closer together. For example, the TPB has estimated that meeting the targets could result in a significant reduction in traffic congestion, if coupled with actions like supportive land use policies and infrastructure investments.

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Currently, too few housing units are affordable for low- and middle-income households, those with monthly housing costs below

**\$2,500**

### **Multi-sector Partnership to Advance Housing Needs**



It will take a range of tools and innovative policies to meet these targets, including strategic partnerships with the business, non-profit, and philanthropic sectors. No one sector alone can solve the region's housing challenges.





# ADVANCING SUSTAINABILITY: Climate Goal and Action Plan

## OUR CHALLENGE

Metropolitan Washington is already experiencing the impacts of a changing climate. Temperatures and water levels in the Potomac River have been rising and will continue to rise. More frequent extreme heat days will affect public health, increase energy demand, and cause travel disruptions. With more frequent and intense storms, flooding events will increasingly threaten lives and damage homes, businesses, and the region's infrastructure.

## OUR PLANNING PRIORITY

In 2020, to advance metropolitan Washington's sustainability and address climate change at the regional level, the COG Board set a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction goal for 2030. The 2030 goal calls for a 50 percent reduction in GHG emissions below baseline levels—or 2005 emission levels—and aligns with President Biden's national goal announced in 2021. It also eliminates the 30-year gap between COG's previously endorsed 2020 and 2050 targets helping members more closely track progress.

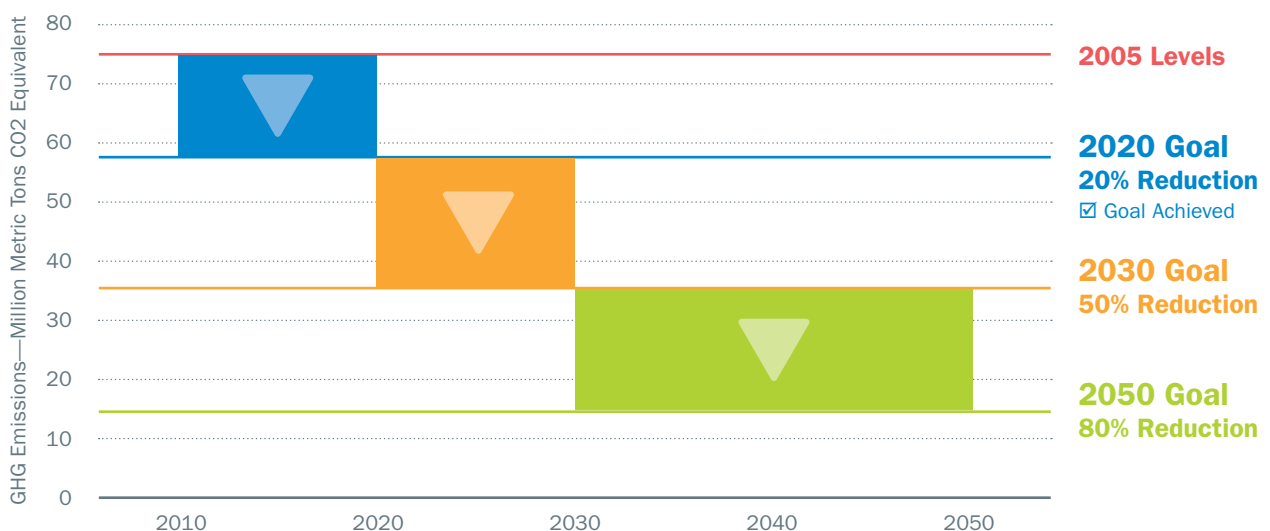
According to COG's most recent inventory, more than 90 percent of the region's GHG emissions come from residential and commercial building energy consumption and transportation, underscoring the importance of multi-sector solutions. Much of the region's progress reducing emissions since 2005 can be attributed to a cleaner energy grid, cleaner cars, and reduced vehicle miles traveled per person. In fact, a recent analysis revealed the region met and surpassed its 2020 climate goal—a major achievement.

### 2030 Climate Goal

# 50%

GHG reduction below  
2005 baseline  
emission levels

### Metropolitan Washington GHG Emissions Reduction Goals



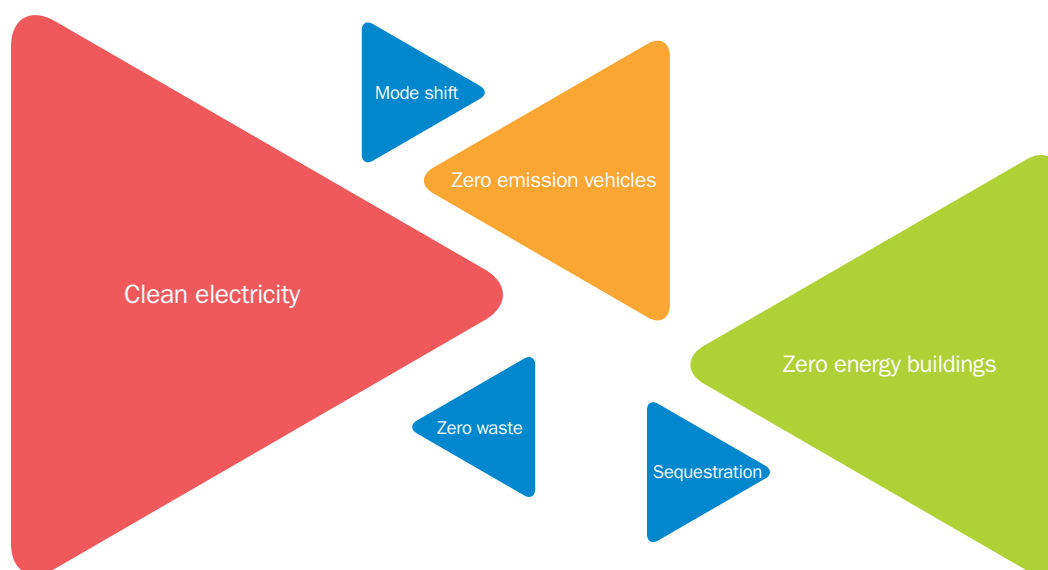


Meeting the 2030 goal will require an unprecedented set of collaborative actions, across sectors and at all levels of government, as outlined in COG's *2030 Climate and Energy Action Plan* developed by its Climate, Energy, and Environment Policy Committee. COG is also currently assisting several member governments on local climate and energy action plans and electric vehicle fleet policies and plans.

### **BENEFITS OF INTEGRATED PLANNING**

While climate change impacts everyone, certain people and places will be more vulnerable to its effects. For example, people living in EEAs can be more heavily burdened by extreme heat and flooding. By taking steps to meet the 2030 climate goal and considering climate actions through an equity lens, the region can make significant progress improving the lives of all area residents. In addition, efforts to create more transit-oriented communities will help decrease auto travel and increase transit, reducing GHG emissions. Denser development will allow for better building energy efficiencies and healthier lifestyles from increased walking and biking.

### **Emission Reduction Strategies**



COG's *2030 Climate and Energy Action Plan*, which has been recognized by the Global Covenant of Mayors, outlines 35 collaborative actions for area governments and partners to take, including strategies focused on these priority areas. To learn more, visit: [www.mwcog.org/climateplan](http://www.mwcog.org/climateplan).



# Accelerating Action

The following COG and TPB programs, plans, and resources are available to support local jurisdictions in advancing the goals outlined in the framework.

## TARGETED GRANTS/TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

**Climate and Electric Vehicle Planning Technical Assistance**—Support provided by COG and its consultants on local climate and energy planning as well as local and regional electric vehicle and zero emission fleet plans and policies.

**Housing Affordability Planning Program (HAPP)**—COG grant program supporting planning initiatives and projects that could increase the amount and affordability of housing near transit. Funded through the Amazon Housing Equity Fund.

**Regional Roadway Safety Program**—TPB program providing short-term consultant services to assist with planning or preliminary engineering projects that address roadway safety.

**Transit Within Reach (TWR) Program**—TPB program funding design and preliminary engineering projects to help improve bike and walk connections to existing or planned high-capacity transit stations.

**Transportation Alternatives (TA Set-Aside) Program**—TPB program providing grants for pedestrian and bicycle facilities, including sidewalks, crosswalks, trails, and safe routes to school projects, as well as community improvements, historic preservation, and environmental mitigation.

**Transportation Land Use Connections (TLC) Program**—TPB technical assistance program providing short-term consultant services to local jurisdictions for small planning projects that promote mixed-use, walkable communities and support a variety of transportation alternatives.

## FORWARD-FOCUSED STRATEGIES

**Climate and Energy Action Plan**—Plan recommending actions to help move the region towards meeting its 2030 climate mitigation and resiliency goals.

**Regional Housing Equity Plan**—Initiative to ensure that the region is better aligned in its efforts to expand housing choices so that all people can choose to live in communities with access to quality jobs, schools, housing, and transportation options.

**Visualize 2045 Aspirational Initiatives**—The TPB's long-range transportation plan includes Aspirational Initiatives that have the potential to significantly improve the region's transportation system performance, if funded and enacted. The following Aspirational Initiatives have informed the planning priorities in this framework.

- ▶ Bring Jobs and Housing Closer Together
- ▶ Improve Walk and Bike Access to Transit
- ▶ Complete the National Capital Trail Network

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COG is making available a wide array of resources, including funding opportunities, staff expertise, and interactive tools, to help propel this work forward.



## MAPS/TOOLS/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**DMV Climate Partners**—Website for educating area leaders and residents about efforts underway to fight climate change, locating funding for climate projects, or engaging with local climate-focused groups and events. Members may also subscribe to receive a free newsletter.

**EEAs/HCTs Maps and Data**—Website for exploring regional and jurisdiction-specific maps of EEAs and HCTs, data on demographic characteristics of EEAs, forecast growth in HCTs, and more.

**Future of Housing in Greater Washington**—Report on the COG housing targets effort, including the analysis to determine the amount of housing needed to address the regional shortfall.

**New Narrative for Housing**—Messaging playbook providing guidance to area leaders on how to talk about housing solutions in a time of uncertainty and change, linking housing with better health outcomes, a stronger economy, and greater equity.

**Racial Equity Cohorts**—Professional development program organized by COG and the Government Alliance on Race and Equity for local government staff members to develop new policies and practices to help advance equity.

**TPB Climate Change Mitigation Study of 2021**—Scenario study to assess ways to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the on-road transportation sector to meet regional climate goals.

To learn more about these programs, plans, and resources as well as the latest news related to the framework, please visit:

**[mwcog.org/regionunited](https://mwcog.org/regionunited)**



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