

August 23, 2013

**Summary of the CAC Response to the Draft Regional Transportation Priorities Plan (RTPP)**

This document, drafted by members of the CAC, provides a summary of key themes revealed during the CAC's discussion of the RTPP draft. These comments were gathered through a series of meetings and written exchanges among the members.

The CAC held a special meeting Thursday August 15, specifically to focus on the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan. In addition, The CAC provided initial reactions during the July CAC meeting, when the draft was first revealed, and members also participated in the TPB - RTPP workshop in July.

The discussion has been focused on:

- 1) Review of content in the draft RTPP
- 2) Elements that appear to be incomplete or missing from the draft RTPP
- 3) Issues surrounding implementation

Many of the key points raised tend to fall into broad themes, as described in the sections below.

**Goals, Challenges, and Strategies**

**Goals:** The CAC generally endorses the broad regional goals presented in the report. The CAC has been a strong advocate of multi-modal planning, including efficient connectivity within and between modes, and believes that regional planning is most effective by linking long-range transportation and land use planning.

**Challenges:** We can certainly appreciate that there are challenges and obstacles to achieving regional goals, and the report highlights some key issues. Greater emphasis should be placed on funding as a major challenge, and report lacks any broad quantification of what levels of funding would be required to achieve the goals.

**Strategies:** The RTPP draft lists 15 strategies that can best be used to achieve regional goals. However, the report is missing a clear sense of what process was used to nominate and select the specific strategies put forward. Why these and not others? What analytical process was used to identify and select these as best able to meet regional goals? A recommendation is that an appendix be included

that rigorously describes the evidence for inclusion, and potential costs and benefits arising from implementing each strategy.

### **RTPP Recommendations in Establishing the Highest Priorities**

The consensus of the CAC is that recommendations on priorities for the most effective strategies need to be further focused and refined. There is a risk that if all strategies are advanced as being important, then we are left with no real priorities. The RTPP should avoid the temptation to have something for everyone.

While the recommendations are summarized to three major groupings, each contains several strategies that in essence capture nearly all strategies considered.

- The *first recommendation* on maintenance of metro and roadways seems clear in its intent, but lacks specifics on the steps toward implementation (see below).
- The *second recommendation* on transit crowding and roadway congestion captures all strategies that broadly touch supply and demand.
  - This includes a variety of elements on supply ranging from Metro capacity expansion to toll road construction. We agree that Metro core expansion is essential; however, we don't yet believe that consensus has been reached with regard to an extensive toll lane network.
  - Many other strategies are mentioned on the demand side. The CAC is a very strong advocate of creating effective links between land use and transportation through activity centers and believes this should be called out in its importance.
- The *third recommendation* continues to be a catch-all. The report should expand the discussion and take a more firm stand on items that are truly worthy of being high priorities to meet regional goals.
  - A Complete Streets policy should be given explicit mention as an effective means to enhance bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and should be given emphasis in the third grouping. Other integrated bicycle and pedestrian improvements are high-return, cost-effective solutions.
- Key recommendations surround the maintenance and expansion of Metro. These same points are key elements of WMATA's Momentum plan. The RTPP makes no mention of Momentum and it should. WMATA needs to be a key partner in the priorities plan, and providing explicit support to their long-term strategies for maintenance, expansion and funding is essential.

While we agree that public input provided through the surveys provided some valuable insights, the survey results should not be the only major driver for setting priorities. Expert opinion from planners and subject matter experts need to also drive the recommendations.

## Planning Process for Implementation

This is perhaps the greatest missing element in the plan. At minimum, there needs to be a report section -- ideally a Chapter 6 -- that has a fulsome discussion on how the RTPP will drive the planning process. The short paragraph on page 84, describing "Next Steps", is not sufficient.

Elements should include:

- The specific interactions including the timing and content of such interactions, between the TPB, COG transportation staff, transportation planning organizations of each jurisdiction, and WMATA.
- How does the RTPP influence the initial formulation of projects, and identify those projects that best serve the RTPP? The RTPP should set the agenda for the planning process, not be a measuring stick after projects are already formulated and funded.
- CRLP process: While the draft makes mention that it can influence the CRLP, there is a risk that is already too late in the process. Items close to inclusion in the CRLP have already been subject to extensive engineering and targeted for funding. Instead, the RTPP needs to work further upstream to influence projects first being conceived, to include those that best fulfill regional goals. In essence, the CRLP becomes subordinate to the RTPP, and the RTPP is a framework into which the CRLP would have to conform.
- Funding: The realistic elements of funding need to be discussed in an implementation chapter. The discussion can be expanded to include ways that federal and other funds can be targeted toward initiatives that are truly regional in nature. To be most effective, the TPB can take a stronger role in directing how such funds are best spent to meet broad regional goals.

Developing broad changes to the planning process to accommodate the RTPP may be more than can be agreed over the next few weeks. Further phases of the RTPP dealing specifically with implementation steps should be considered. To be effective, this will require considerable dialogue among all regional planning entities.

## Measurement

CAC members are concerned that the RTPP does not provide enough emphasis on the economic analysis, compliance monitoring, and other forms of measurement. There was relatively minor discussion on what analytical process was used to determine the list of 15 strategies. Clearly, measurement needs to be an important part of an ongoing planning process. Specific concerns regarding measurement and setting priorities include:

- How will the effectiveness of the RTPP be measured? "You cannot manage what you cannot measure." What criteria will be used to monitor success or failure?
- What is the process to hold jurisdictions accountable for making sure their projects are conceived and judged against the RTPP?

- Cost – benefit and other economic analysis needs to take a broader role in setting priorities. While it is easier to conduct such analysis on individual projects, how do we know if the broad strategies being put forward are most cost effective relative to their benefits? The CAC believes that such cost-benefit analysis needs to be essential in the implementation phase.

Measurement should be given considerable mention in the suggested implementation section.

### **Regionalism**

A greater emphasis in the document should be placed on integrated regional planning that transcends jurisdictional boundaries. The plan should give greater priority to the strategies and ultimately the resulting projects that best meet regional goals – not those narrowly focused on one jurisdiction.

Combining various jurisdictional plans does not constitute a regional plan. The planning process needs to be responsive to regional infrastructure needs given future demographics, independent of jurisdictional boundaries and political bias. That becomes the baseline against which progress can be measured.

In summary, we would ask staff to carefully consider each of the comments above. These were gathered with much thought from experienced and passionate transportation advocates who have been active in CAC meetings this year, and some members for many years.

Other specific comments have been put forward individually by members of the CAC as part of the public comment period.