

ITEM 16 - Information

March 21, 2007

Briefing on Staff Responses to the TPB Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) Recommendations for the Regional Mobility and Accessibility Scenario Study (RMAS)

Staff

Recommendation: Receive briefing on staff responses to the CAC recommendations for the RMAS.

Issues: None

Background: At the February 21 meeting, the Board was briefed by the CAC Chairman on the CAC's ten recommendations regarding the scenario study.

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Transportation Planning Board

FROM: Ronald F. Kirby, Director, Department of Transportation Planning

SUBJECT: TPB Staff Responses to CAC Recommendations on the Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study

DATE: March 15, 2007

On February 21, 2007, Emmet Tydings, 2006 chair of the TPB Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), presented the Transportation Planning Board with a series of ten recommendations on the future of the TPB's scenario study – known as the Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study (RMAS). Following Mr. Tydings' presentation, TPB members asked staff to develop a plan for followup to the recommendations. This memorandum provides an overview of the staff's plans for the study's next steps and responses to the CAC recommendations.

OVERVIEW OF CAC RECOMMENDATIONS

The CAC has demonstrated a deep and continuing interest in the scenario study. The committee was instrumental in conceiving the study, has helped to guide its development, and has consistently promoted public involvement related to the study.

The CAC's recommendations on RMAS, which were presented on February 21, were offered to "help maximize the study's overall usefulness." These recommendations were grounded in a number of key goals, which called for the study to be used as a tool to: 1) influence project selection and land use decisions, 2) raise awareness about regional challenges, and 3) elicit public feedback to inform future scenario planning activities. The ten recommendations presented by the CAC provide specific commentary on how these goals might be implemented.

OVERVIEW OF TPB STAFF FOLLOWUP AND NEXT STEPS

TPB staff wishes to thank the CAC members for providing their insights on the RMAS. We value the contributions the committee has made since the study's inception, and we agree with the CAC's comment that "the study's greatest potential to influence the regional policy debate still lies ahead."

For the most part, the CAC recommendations are consistent with the activities that TPB staff has begun to implement or is planning to pursue. The activities, comprising Phase II of the study, include the following:

- Public outreach to inform the future development and utilization of the study.
- More detailed analysis of already developed scenarios (“drilling down”).
- Analysis of variably priced lane networks and implementation options.

In particular, related to the first point above, TPB staff will continue to conduct outreach forums over the coming months that are designed to elicit and document public input that will be used to set the stage for future development of the scenario study (see the response to Recommendations 3 and 4 below). We plan to wrap up the current phase of public outreach forums early this fall.

We believe that the three current activities described above will be crucial for determining the future direction of the study. After these activities reach a point of conclusion later this year, we would recommend the TPB consider a more comprehensive reevaluation of the overall direction and application of the study.

The TPB staff’s responses to the individual CAC recommendations are provided below.

RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC CAC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CAC Recommendation:

Make available the study findings, including the brochure and “What If” presentation, to elected officials and local planning efforts.

The CAC believes the Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study provides an essential regional tool for local land use and other community planning. Many local planning issues and problems are reflected in the regional challenges that have been examined in the RMAS. In recent months, the study was presented to planners and decision-makers in Bowie and in Montgomery County to provide a regional context for very specific local planning challenges. TPB staff should seek additional ways to make the study available to local land use and transportation project planning efforts.

It is particularly important that the RMAS and its results be fully explained to the wide range of incoming elected officials who will play a major, if not defining, role in local and state transportation project selection, funding and implementation, as well as in local land use planning. Both Mayor Fenty and Governor O’Malley, for example, should be fully briefed on the study and what it can contribute to their administrations’ initial efforts to identify and define transportation and land use planning priorities and policies.

TPB Staff Response:

TPB staff agrees that the scenario study is a valuable resource that provides a regional “what if” context to local and state governments as they grapple with “how to” challenges in their planning activities. In recent months, staff has presented the study to the Montgomery County Council, the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), the Bowie City Council, the staff of the Montgomery County office of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and a number of audiences at COG that have included elected officials and planning professionals. In addition, we have

conducted a number of interactive community forums (described below in Numbers 3 and 4), which have all included extensive participation from public officials.

In the future we will seek out more opportunities to brief elected officials and planning bodies, as well as exploring other means to make the study's findings available. We would be happy to work with members of the TPB and the Metropolitan Development Policy Committee (MDPC) at COG to expand this aspect of our outreach activities.

2. CAC Recommendation:

Support and expand the Transportation/Land-Use Connections (TLC) program.

The CAC strongly supports the TPB's new TLC program and hopes the program will be expanded after its initial pilot phase. As stated in the committee's resolution to the TPB on October 12, 2006, the CAC "urges the TPB to become a national leader in adopting and generously funding cutting-edge regional transportation planning and capital programs that:

- a. encourage housing and jobs to be located within a pleasant walk or bicycle ride of Metrorail and commuter rail stations and very high frequency service bus stops;*
- b. partially reimburse companies that locate in Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) areas and provide transit commute benefits to their employees; and*
- c. pay for measures that preserve existing roadway capacity in congested regional travel corridors."*

TPB Staff Response:

As the TPB staff moves forward with implementing the pilot phase of the TLC program, it is already clear that this new initiative will offer many exciting opportunities, as well as a number of challenges. The program is currently slated to continue into the next fiscal year, and potentially be expanded. Staff believes that any expansion of the TLC program must be justified based upon the success of the pilot and that for the immediate future we must be focused on making the program's initial activities as effective and meaningful as possible.

3. CAC Recommendation:

Expand outreach to educate the public and raise awareness of regional challenges.

The committee supports efforts to expand outreach related to the scenario study. These expanded outreach efforts should include a greater number of forums and more interactive techniques to help citizens understand regional challenges in an experiential manner.

TPB Staff Response:

TPB staff agrees with this recommendation and we appreciate the CAC's long-standing interest in educating the public on the issues that are highlighted in the scenario study. We should note that the TPB's presentation "What if the Washington Region Grew Differently?" was first developed at the urging of the CAC. We anticipate the committee will be an essential partner in taking outreach activities in new directions.

TPB staff is currently planning to expand outreach efforts through two key methods. First, TPB staff has reconfigured the "What If" presentation into an interactive forum in which participants construct their own "scenarios" and then hear from staff about the scenarios developed at the TPB. This interactive approach, which has been demonstrated successfully in sessions in Rockville, Suitland and Alexandria, provides participants with a chance to actually work through the region's challenges, and thus better understand their implications.

Secondly, TPB staff believes we should strengthen our outreach to community leaders who can facilitate information dissemination to a broad cross-section of constituencies throughout the region. This focused approach to outreach was a key goal of the TPB's Community Leadership Institute, which is a two-day workshop designed to help community leaders understand the transportation decision making process, and the relationships between regional challenges and local needs. Several community leaders who participated in last year's institute sessions have been instrumental in setting up outreach meetings that we have conducted in recent months.

4. CAC Recommendation:

Establish a process for gathering public input and feeding it back to the TPB for the development of refined, new or composite scenarios.

The CAC recommends that the TPB and staff establish a process for public outreach efforts that will inform the development of refined, new or composite scenarios. This process should determine the extent of outreach efforts and target a number of outreach forums that will be held around the region. The process also should lay out a method for documenting public input and for using the input in the development of new scenarios.

TPB Staff Response:

The TPB staff outreach efforts are not just a good way to raise awareness; these activities also present us with the opportunity to get useful feedback for future long-range planning efforts.

In recent months, our outreach forums have increasingly focused on soliciting public feedback. As our outreach efforts (described above in #3) have expanded and become more ambitious, TPB staff agrees that we must establish a more systematic process for collecting and documenting the feedback we receive. This process should include deadlines for conducting forums and documenting feedback. The process should also ensure that enough outreach activities are planned to reflect a wide geographic and demographic sampling of constituencies throughout the region. Finally, the feedback that staff receives at the outreach meetings should be documented in a consistent manner so that public attitudes about macro and micro aspects of regional land use and transportation challenges can be compared and summarized.

TPB staff plans to review and refine our current feedback process in the near future to guide future RMAS outreach. We anticipate that the feedback from RMAS outreach conducted by July 2007 will be documented early in the fall of 2007 and presented in summary fashion to the TPB.

5. CAC Recommendation:

Provide public-friendly information on the TPB's variably priced lane scenario as quickly as possible.

The public has expressed a strong interest in toll lanes during recent presentations around the region. The scenario study's analysis of variably priced lanes could be an important contribution to the regional discussion on this topic. The "What If" presentation should be enhanced as soon as possible with information on the analysis of the variably priced lane scenario.

TPB Staff Response:

TPB staff agrees with this recommendation and we are working to conduct this analysis as quickly as possible. However, this analysis is expected to be quite complex, and therefore staff will need to make an extra effort to develop it as "public-friendly" information.

6. CAC Recommendation:

Move forward with developing and refining scenarios.

The CAC supports the development of refined, new or composite scenarios that will identify packages of transportation projects and land use strategies that produce positive, synergistic results. These scenarios should draw upon information developed from existing scenarios and from public feedback. The TPB should work to ensure that the analysis of these scenarios is useful to decision-makers involved in project selection.

TPB Staff Response:

Phase II of the study, as funded in the TPB's Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), calls for staff to conduct a number of activities, including 1) expanding outreach, 2) finalizing the variably priced lanes scenario and 3) conducting deeper analysis of existing scenarios (see #9 below). TPB staff believes that at the conclusion of these steps, it will be appropriate for the TPB to determine how best to proceed with the development of new, refined or composite scenarios. We anticipate the TPB will be able to consider the next phase of the study at the beginning of calendar year 2008.

7. CAC Recommendation:

Use the RMAS scenarios to develop a plan of regional priorities.

The CAC believes the scenarios should be used to develop a plan of regional priorities not constrained by available funding. This recommendation is consistent with our recommendations to the TPB in January 2006, which stated that the TPB should "develop a list or plan of unfunded priority projects that would provide a 'big-picture' context for understanding project selection for the Constrained Long-Range Plan (CLRP). The

development of this plan could start with the projects that have been identified for study in the TPB's Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study."

Using the study's scenarios as a starting point, this plan could be developed as an unconstrained element of a comprehensive regional transportation plan, similar to the plans of other Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Further, this regional transportation aspirations plan should take into consideration the different unconstrained plans that have been developed at the sub-regional, local and state levels, such as the TransAction 2030 Plan in Northern Virginia.

TPB Staff Response:

The development of an unfunded plan of regional priorities could be considered upon completion of Phase II activities, including the current phase of public outreach. These activities are expected to be completed in the fall of this year.

8. CAC Recommendation:

Develop useful analysis of existing scenarios ("drill down") to provide more detail on which actions could be most effective.

The CAC supports TPB staff plans to "drill down" into the scenarios to more extensively examine effects, such as the impacts of individual transit lines or the impacts on specific localities. The CAC believes that this deeper level of analysis can provide useful information to decision makers and potentially influence project selection. But in order to be effective, this analysis must be accessible. The CAC asks that staff seek to make the results of this "drilling down" as user-friendly as possible to decision-makers, local and state planners, and to the public.

TPB Staff Response:

TPB staff agrees with this recommendation, which is included in the current RMA activities under the Unified Planning Work Program. We hope to provide such information to the TPB later this year.

9. CAC Recommendation:

Analyze a scenario or scenarios that assume the conversion of existing general purpose lanes to variably priced lanes.

Currently, the extensive toll lane scenario under analysis mainly looks at new roads or widening existing roads. The committee would be interested in a scenario that focuses mainly on converting existing lanes to variably priced lanes to boost their productivity during peak hours and support high efficiency express bus, bus rapid transit, and other transit services. One approach could emphasize enhanced transit utilizing the variably priced lanes. Another could integrate variably priced lanes into an existing scenario that emphasizes transit, including increased rail transit. The scenarios could be refined by including limited additional road capacity increases in the segments of the system where tolls

would have to be set very high to keep traffic operating efficiently even with improved transit services.

TPB Staff Response:

TPB staff is currently examining the conversion of existing capacity to variably priced lanes on a number of facilities, including roads in the District of Columbia and on parkways. As the study continues, additional existing facilities could be considered for conversion to variably priced lanes.

10. CAC Recommendation:

The TPB should establish a working group to look at future phases of and steps to implement the study.

Once the next steps in the study are completed, the TPB should evaluate how best to advance the study in the future, consistent with the adopted TPB Vision and other regional transportation, land use and integration goals and objectives. Some possible considerations for this future, on-going working group might be:

- a. How will public input be solicited, compiled and reported to the TPB for use in the development and evaluation of the scenarios?*
- b. Have we looked sufficiently at scenarios for all modes, including a fairly modest roads alternative and at non-motorized mobility options, such as bike and pedestrian-oriented solutions?*
- c. Should the study at some point look at more dramatic scenarios that are beyond current local and state plans? Have we been creative enough in crafting imaginative scenarios?*
- d. At what point is the study considered finished? What products are the final “close-out” results, and how will they be reported back to the states and local jurisdictions? How much urgency is there to bring Phase II of the study to completion? Should the study – or at least the follow-up and assessment phases of it – ever be considered “finished”? If not, does it need a different type of institutional vehicle for planning and updating, such as is currently done with cooperative forecasting, the TIP and the CLRP?*
- e. In general, what is the appropriate group to conduct initial analyses of policy options that implement the study’s next or final steps?*

TPB Staff Response:

Once the current phases of the study are completed this fall, including the current round of outreach, TPB staff believes the questions articulated above should be fully examined. In particular, the TPB may wish to consider the question of what type of institutional vehicle should direct the study into its future stages.