

2003 END - OF - THE - YEAR REPORT

Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) of The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) Karren Pope-Onwukwe, CAC Chair

Value pricing... air quality conformity... the east-west regional divide... Regional transportation planning issues are very complicated. As a group of citizen volunteers, the TPB's Citizens Advisory Committee is faced with the formidable task of working to understand, question and comment upon regional-level transportation issues.

The committee has worked diligently throughout 2003 to fulfill its two-part mission, as defined in the TPB's Public Involvement Process, to:

- promote public involvement in regional transportation planning and
- provide independent, region-oriented citizen advice to the Transportation Planning Board.

I. PROMOTING PUBLIC INVOLVMENT

The CAC hosted six public outreach meetings in 2003—two each in Maryland, the District and Virginia. Each forum was moderated by a TPB member. Each forum focused on a transportation project or issue of local concern that had regional implications.

Descriptions of Public Forums

- ***“Show Me the Money: Financing D.C.’s Transportation System,” May 7 at the Martin Luther King Memorial Library in Washington.***

This meeting provided important information about the District's transportation funding process and outstanding funding issues that are reflected in this year's update to the CLRP. D.C. Councilmembers Phil Mendelson and Jim Graham, and DDOT Director Dan Tangherlini were the forum's speakers. The meeting was co-hosted by the Committee of 100 and the DC League of Women Voters. About 40 people participated in this lively discussion.

- ***“The Purple Line: What Would It Mean to Prince George's County and the Region?” May 20 at the Treetops Atrium in Landover, Maryland.***

More than 100 community leaders and citizens came together for this forum co-hosted by We the People, a community organization. The status of the Purple Line, particularly the eastern portion between Silver Spring and New Carrollton, was of interest to many participants. The vast majority of participants expressed frustration that the project was not

moving faster and that it is not considered a higher priority. The portion west of Silver Spring has been in the TPB's Constrained Long-Range Plan for a number of years. Speakers were Jack Johnson, Prince George's County Executive; Henry Kay, Planning Director for the Maryland Transit Authority; and Tom Hendershot, Prince George's Councilmember. The session was moderated by TPB Chairman Peter Shapiro, who was also the 2003 Prince George's County Council Chair.

- ***“How Can We Get There? Looking at Transportation Options for Southern Prince George's County,” October 1 in Oxon Hill, Maryland***

This forum provided an opportunity for more than 120 attendees to express their concerns, frustrations and visions about transportation planning issues in southern Prince George's County. Many participants learned for the first time of the existence of the TPB and its role in transportation planning. Other participants expressed the feeling that their community's transportation needs are consistently ignored. A number of participants called for rail on the Wilson Bridge. Others spoke about insufficient bus service and plans to cut bus lines. Speakers included Eric Foster of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Betty Hager Francis, Director of the Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation and Prince George's County Councilmember Tony Knotts. The forum was moderated by TPB Chairman Peter Shapiro.

- ***“(Re)Building Communities Around Public Transit on the Eastern Side of the Region,” October 7 in Washington, DC***

The CAC joined with the TPB's Access for All Advisory Committee for a public meeting that looked at transit-oriented development (TOD) and its implications for the eastern side of the Washington region. Approximately 40 people attended. The presenters spoke about the need for sustained community involvement and political leadership to realize transit-oriented communities. Participants at the meeting included several mayors and elected officials from nearby jurisdictions who expressed frustration that promises are continually made regarding development near transit stations, but there have been few real results. Broaching the subject of gentrification, some participants asked whether TOD would inevitably result in higher rents and living expenses, which would push out lower-income people. The meeting presenters were Karina Ricks, DC Office of Planning; Al Dobbins, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC); Denton Kent, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. The forum was moderated by TPB Chairman Peter Shapiro.

- ***“Thinking Outside the Box: Should the Beltway Be Expanded with HOT Lanes?” November 18 in Falls Church, VA***

A proposal to widen the Beltway with High Occupancy/Toll (HOT) lanes was the subject of this public meeting. The Fluor Daniel company is proposing to build the HOT lanes under Virginia's Public-Private Transportation Act. Using existing right-of-way for the most part,

Fluor Daniel estimates that the project could be completed by 2009. More than 100 citizens participated in the meeting. Proponents said the project represented an innovative and financially feasible way to combat congestion. Opponents of the proposal have questioned its financial feasibility, funding opportunities for transit, the feasibility of using the lanes for bus service, congestion relief effectiveness and community impacts.

- ***“Columbia Pike Revitalization: Can It Be a Model for the Region?” December 3, Arlington, VA***

This meeting focused on Arlington County’s efforts to revitalize Columbia Pike, including improved transit services and more pedestrian-friendly urban design. These enhancements are intended to return the Pike to a more traditional "mainstreet" environment.

Approximately 40 participants, from areas as diverse as Germantown and Greenbelt, came to learn about this project and whether this type of revitalization can be a model for the Washington region. Presenters included Arlington County Board Member Chris Zimmerman, Tim Lynch of the Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization and consultant Geoff Farrell.

Lessons Learned from the Outreach Meetings

Over the past few years the CAC believes it has developed a successful model for its public forums. By following this model, some of this years forums surpassed attendance records of previous years.

The CAC’s model for successful public forums:

- ***Choose topics with strong local interest and regional implications***

From past experience, the CAC has learned that it is difficult to get citizens to come out to a meeting on a purely regional topic. It seems to be more effective to present a topic with local resonance, such as Beltway HOT lanes, that has regional implications.

“Regional implications” can be broadly defined. Some of the projects discussed at the 2003 public meetings have a direct impact on the region’s transportation network—such as the Purple Line. Other meeting topics, such as Columbia Pike revitalization, might serve as models for the rest of the region to learn from.

The CAC understands that public meetings on local projects and issues are frequently convened as part of the planning process. What we are seeking is to “add value” to ongoing discussions by broadening the public’s understanding of the regional transportation planning process as well as injecting a regional perspective into a community’s discussions of local issues.

- ***Find partners — official and unofficial***

The CAC co-hosted a number of meetings this year with other organizations, such as the League of Women Voters, the Committee of 100 and the TPB's Access for All Advisory Committee. In other cases, community organizations helped to advertise the meetings and circulate notices to members. This assistance was extremely valuable in getting the word out and tapping into already organized groups of concerned citizens.

- ***Get a TPB member to moderate and play a prominent role***

All CAC public meetings are moderated by a TPB member who is typically a regional leader, local elected official, and the proponent of a local project. This TPB member participation gives citizens a chance to see that their local leaders and their local issues are part of a wider regional framework. The TPB member's presence also helps ensure that the issues discussed will get "fed back" into the decision-making process—at the local, state and regional levels.

- ***Advertise widely***

TPB staff has tremendously increased the number of mailings advertising the CAC's public meetings. Mailing lists are typically obtained from local TPB members, and include home owner associations and civic groups. E-mails are circulated widely. A wide number of media are contacted. The meetings are typically listed in "community calendars" on TV, radio and in newspapers. Most important, for people who do not attend the public forums, this outreach provides basic information about regional transportation issues and public participation opportunities.

II. PROVIDING INDEPENDENT, REGION-ORIENTED CITIZEN ADVICE

In addition to hosting six outreach meetings a year, the CAC meets every month to discuss regional transportation planning issues, especially the topics on the TPB's agenda.

Based on these discussion, the CAC's monthly report provides a collection of informed comments for TPB members to reflect upon and consider. The committee members raise questions, express concerns and request clarifications. The committee's diverse— and sometimes conflicting— opinions reflect the different interests, experiences and home jurisdictions of the CAC members.

In addition, the CAC members occasionally consider and pass resolutions, which are forwarded to the TPB. These resolutions express committee opinions on issues of particular concern.

2003 CAC Resolutions and Communications

January 9 — "In response to reports that the headquarters of the Department of Homeland Security is likely to be sited in a location not accessible to Metrorail". (Resolution expressed opposition to such a siting.)

March 13 — “Regarding the TPB Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study”. (Resolution essentially requested the development of the land use scenario that later became known as the “region undivided” scenario.)

April 10 — Requested that the TPB communicate to the U.S. House Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee that Metro should be a regional transportation priority, as established in TPB Resolution R36-2001, which was approved by the TPB on April 18, 2001. (This resolution was passed in response to the TPB’s endorsement in March 2003 of project lists that local jurisdictions had submitted to Congress for consideration in the forthcoming six-year transportation reauthorization legislation. The CAC felt that the TPB should remind Congress of the importance of Metro as a regional priority.)

May 15 — Endorsing a proposal developed by the Sierra Club called “Get MetroBus on the Map.” The proposal called for distribution of free bus maps; increasing the number of locations where maps are available; posting the maps at all Metrorail stations and at bus shelters; and developing an action plan to upgrade bus information at all bus stops.

Some Themes Emerging From CAC Activities and Discussions in 2003

- ***Emphasis on the east/west regional divide***

In 2003, the CAC focused attention on the east-west divide in the Washington region. The “Region Divided” is a term coined by the Brookings Institution to describe the economic inequities between the disadvantaged eastern side of the region and the wealthier western side. In looking at regional transportation issues throughout the year, committee members sought to make sure that “region divided” considerations went beyond purely academic discussions and were explored as a means of bringing more equity into regional transportation planning. This theme was consistent with the expressed interests of TPB Chairman Peter Shapiro when he spoke to committee at its first meeting of the year in January 2003.

Some specific committee actions in 2003:

- The CAC asked the TPB to include a “region undivided” scenario in the TPB’s Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study. This proposal, which was accepted by the study’s working group, will look at the effects of concentrating more jobs and housing in the eastern side of the region.
- The CAC hosted a number of public meetings on projects important to the eastern side of the region, including two meetings in Prince George’s County, a meeting near Benning Road Metro (Transit-Oriented Development session on October 7) and a meeting on Columbia Pike.
- The CAC endorsed the Sierra Club’s proposal that Metro provide the public with free bus maps as well posting maps at stations and bus stops. The CAC recognizes the importance of bus service to lower income communities, particularly those on the eastern side of the region.

- ***Continuing interest in the Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study***

The CAC has a continuing and close interest in the Regional Mobility and Accessibility Study, which originated in a CAC resolution in 2000 that asked the TPB to perform an analysis of various transportation and land use scenarios.

As noted above, this year the CAC requested that a “region undivided” scenario be incorporated into the study. In addition, the committee has received numerous briefings on the study this year and CAC members regularly attend the meetings of the study’s joint technical working group.

Over the years, the CAC has repeatedly emphasized the importance of maintaining the momentum behind this study, and the need to frame it and develop it so that the study’s outputs will be as useful as possible.

- ***Emerging interest in value pricing***

The CAC is interested in the potential uses of pricing policies to influence travel behavior, cut congestion and raise revenue. As the concepts of value pricing have gained prominence this year, the CAC has maintained a strong interest. In November, the committee hosted a public meeting on a proposal to build High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes on the Beltway in Virginia. In the future, the committee will continue to follow various value pricing proposals, such as HOT lanes, and promote dialogue about the desirability and effectiveness of these projects.

- ***Monitoring ongoing TPB agenda issues***

As a primary responsibility, the CAC continues to follow the recurring, cyclical activities of the TPB. The committee recognizes that federally mandated responsibilities— like air quality conformity, long-range financial analysis, and long-range plan development — are the fundamental reasons that the TPB and its CAC actually exist. Since its inception 11 years ago, the committee has taken seriously its responsibility to follow these issues.

- ***Continued challenges in “thinking regionally”***

The CAC members represent widely different interests and opinions. Committee members frequently do not agree on transportation issues facing the region. But committee members are united in at least one thing: the belief that it is important for communities to work together as a region. Throughout 2003, the CAC has attempted to promote public involvement in regional transportation planning despite the difficulties of balancing varied interests in the region and developing common regional goals. As challenging as it is to “think regionally,” the committee believes it is vital for citizens to remain involved in the TPB’s regional process.