

This report is designed to serve as an overview of recent TPB staff outreach activities related to the Regional Mobility and Accessibility Scenario Study, including a summary of feedback received from participants and staff observations made during outreach events. It is intended to provide for the TPB and related committees a sense of how citizens, planning professionals, and community leaders around the region are reacting to the conclusions of the Scenario Study and the issues and concerns audiences raise when the study is presented. Our hope is that this information will inform discussions about strategies for implementing the regional goals reflected in the Scenario Study.

The Regional Mobility and Accessibility Scenario Study (RMAS)

- **Initiated in 2000**
 - Came out of 1998 TPB Vision and Activity Center identification
- **Led by Joint Technical Working Group**
 - Land use and transportation planners, and interested citizens
- **Land use and transportation scenarios developed and analyzed**
- **Technical Report issued in November 2006**



Although the process of developing the 1998 TPB Vision involved many public meetings and the participation of hundreds of stakeholders from around the region, the stewardship of the Scenario Study has been largely a technical exercise guided by TPB staff and planning professionals from member jurisdictions with some citizen involvement on the JTWG. One scenario, the “Region Undivided” scenario, was developed in response to a request by the TPB Citizens Advisory Committee, which has continued to promote and follow the study.

More information about the Regional Mobility and Accessibility Scenario Study can be found in the green-cover brochure “What if the Washington Region Grew Differently”. Copies of the Technical Report are also available upon request.

Scenario Study Outreach

- Began in 2004; evolved over time
- Different versions depending on time and audience
 - Briefing version
 - Full interactive version (since Fall 2006)



Public presentations about the findings of the Scenario Study began in 2004 and an initial phase of outreach continued through early 2006. These presentations explained the link between the Scenario Study and ongoing COG/TPB regional visioning efforts, detailed the process of developing alternative land use and transportation scenarios, and summarized the results of the study. This initial phase of outreach was primarily informational in nature and did not explicitly attempt to solicit and capture feedback on the study.

In Summer 2006, TPB public involvement staff developed an interactive component to the outreach program that allows audiences to construct their own alternative scenarios in response to the regional challenges identified in the presentation. In addition to the interactive component, staff developed a discussion guide for obtaining feedback about the Scenario Study and began incorporating a 15-30 minute discussion period at the end of outreach events.

Although the primary audience for this outreach effort has been interested citizens, most of the events have included participation by planning professionals and elected officials, and staff has in fact made a few presentations in the last several months expressly for planning staff and/or advisory committees.

Outreach Locations

- Yellow Stars = Interactive Program
- Orange Stars = Study Briefing
- *Full list of events included in draft report*



The map shows locations of Scenario Study outreach events since the beginning of 2006. Yellow stars denote events that included the land-use/transportation map activity. Many of the events have been identified and coordinated by alumni of the TPB's Community Leadership Institute. The third CLI was recently held in mid-June. Information about event locations and audiences can be found in an appendix of the feedback report.

Outreach Goals

- Communicate the regional challenge of growth
- Build the capacity of citizens to participate constructively at local level
- Collect input to guide future regional efforts



The outreach presentation emphasizes several land-use related factors that contribute to travel congestion in the region. Discussing these factors and the challenges we face in addressing them helps outreach audiences place their own local-level concerns about transportation and land use decisions in a regional context. The presentation is not about promoting a particular vision that we “professionals” have arrived at, but does convey the potential benefits of concentrating more development in activity centers, especially those served by transit.

Participants also gain an understanding of the role of the TPB and COG in facilitating regional dialogue, highlighting regional challenges, and producing long-term regional transportation plans. They get the opportunity to express their own opinions about how regional transportation challenges should best be addressed, suggest transportation projects that they think should be regional priorities, and provide input on how such efforts can be more beneficial and responsive to local communities.

Hopefully, audiences will thus be able to apply a more regional perspective when thinking about specific development or transportation projects in their localities, and participate more constructively in civic dialogue about regional growth and local projects.

Feedback Summary – Regional Consensus?

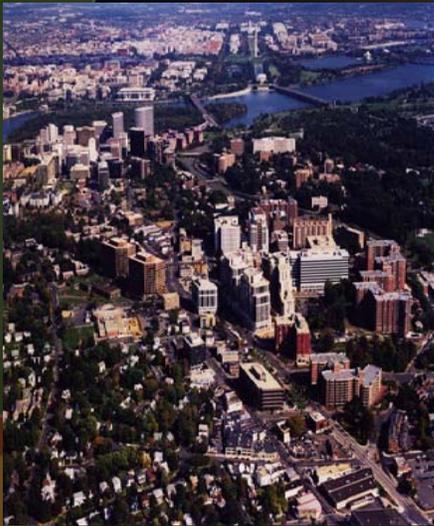
- **Common set of themes and sentiments heard around the region**
- **General support for the idea of concentrating growth in activity centers, especially those served by transit**
 - Recognition of causes of congestion
 - Need for a regional approach to bringing jobs and housing closer together



The notion of regional consensus may not be as elusive as often thought. There was surprisingly little difference in the reaction to the presentation and the scenario study around the region. Audiences that participated in the map activity did tend to value the rural and/or protected areas closest to them while disregarding those in other parts of the region. And interestingly, participants in the region's eastern jurisdictions tended to view transportation investments as catalysts for desired growth as opposed to measures to mitigate the effects of largely undesired growth in the west.

But audiences around the region generally agreed with the four causes of regional travel congestion presented in the outreach program: the regional jobs/housing imbalance, the distance between employment and residential centers within the region, the disparity between growth rates in the eastern and western sides of the region, and the growing percentage of development that is not transit accessible. They also accepted the Scenario Study's central premise – that getting jobs and housing closer together, and concentrated in activity centers served by transit, could help alleviate travel congestion.

Regional Progress



- This region is already renowned for success in concentrating development in activity centers, especially those served by transit
 - Along with good examples of sensitivity to community concerns

The Washington Region is recognized nationally and even globally for our success in encouraging and facilitating concentrated, mixed-use, transit-accessible development. As a 2004 Transportation Research Board report stated, "Metropolitan Washington D.C. is a true success story in part because shaping land use was a goal of the original transit investment. Signature Transit-Oriented Developments abound in the District of Columbia, surrounding cities, and increasingly in outlying suburbs, a result of rebounding markets for in-town housing and commercial space, unfettered market forces, and interventionist public actions."

Many of the region's jurisdictions have a wealth of experience with these types of land use and transportation strategies, and working with citizens to make them publicly palatable and even broadly desired. The general support for these strategies indicated at outreach events is likely a reflection of the familiarity residents of this region have with vibrant, desirable activity centers.

Sustaining the Momentum

- Consensus on regional challenges is much more apparent than consensus on solutions
- Many continuing challenges to implementing land use and transportation strategies
 - Complexity of the causes of existing conditions
 - Recognition of the difficulty in addressing the challenges without negative trade-offs

But while audiences were generally supportive of the overall strategies outlined in the TPB Vision and elaborated upon in the Scenario Study, they still identified many challenges to more widespread implementation, and concerns about the impacts on their quality of life.

They expressed skepticisms that fall largely into two categories: skepticism that the many factors that have led to current land use trends can actually be slowed or reversed, and skepticism about our ability to implement strategies to address regional challenges without negative side effects that would outweigh any potential benefit.

Forces Beyond Our Control?

- **“We will have to overcome many forces that caused and still perpetuate the current trends.”**
 - American lifestyle preferences and market forces
 - Disparities in public safety and public service quality around the region
 - Municipal fiscal motivations favoring jobs over housing



The first category of skepticism deals with the many factors that have led to existing land use patterns. These include not only the reasons people choose to live where they do, but reasons why certain land use policy decisions are made to facilitate or discourage these choices.

They cited a perceived residential market preference for single-family homes on spacious lots, along with housing affordability issues that tend to drive people, especially families with children, to the outer reaches of the region. Many pointed out that the residential construction associated with infill and transit-oriented development has tended to be luxury units that are out of reach of most of the region's residents.

They also noted that issues with public safety, and the quality of schools and other public services in some parts of the region may make it difficult to refocus growth in those areas.

Finally, many participants pointed out that the overall jobs/housing imbalance in the region, identified as a major challenge in reducing travel congestion, is perpetuated by local government policies favoring job growth over household growth for tax base reasons. They saw this overall motivator as unlikely to change and as a hurdle to regional cooperation.

Weighing the Benefits and Side Effects

- **“Appropriate public investments will have to be made to accommodate density and not let it damage our quality of life.”**
 - Public services
 - Transportation infrastructure
- **“It has to be clear that the improvements outweigh the costs.”**
 - Other quality of life measures
 - Gentrification and other side effects

One of the main benefits of the Scenario Study outreach effort has been its ability to allow for conversations about the impacts of concentrated growth that get beyond the typical initial reaction to any talk of “density.” When asked to probe the issue and really consider what it is that people fear, audiences discussed at length the negative consequences they associate with increased density and thought about how the positives of density can be magnified while the negatives, especially the impact on public services and traffic congestion, could be minimized. They simply associate concentrated growth in the region with *sacrifice* at the local level, and they don’t want their community to be the one making the sacrifice.

For many people, it seemed to come down to an issue of faith (or lack thereof) in their leaders to provide additional capacity, be it on roads, in schools, etc., to fully accommodate growth without reducing the levels of service for existing residents. While practically everyone sees Transit-Oriented Development as a good idea in theory, many are wanting it to slow down because they fear that the region’s transit systems can’t keep up with the increased demand.

Many audience members determined that they couldn’t make a judgment about implementation strategies without knowing more about scenario impacts on other quality of life factors important to them. They highlighted other potential negative consequences and debated whether or not those could outweigh the expected benefit to travel conditions.

Transportation Prioritization

- **Money will have to be spent on the right transportation projects.”**
 - Circumferential infrastructure (multimodal)
 - Diversion of cut-through traffic
 - Bicycle and Pedestrian
 - Unconventional or innovative modes
 - HOT Lanes/Tolling
 - Public Input



In addition to expressing skepticism about the overall commitment of state and local leaders to transportation investment needed to fully accommodate growth, many audience members mentioned specific ways in which they think transportation planning and expenditure are falling short in the region. Most frequent was an emphasis on circumferential infrastructure, both transit and highway. The most common features of visioning activity maps were circumferential “purple line” loops and “outer beltway” roads, some of which served the added function of diverting regional cut-through traffic that many people blamed for some of the region’s congestion problems.

Adequate connections that are safe and appealing for cyclists and pedestrians was an issue listed by many as a key prerequisite for making dense activity centers work and getting cars off the road.

Many participants just wanted to know that one idea or another had been fully considered in the transportation discussion. While some of these ideas are considered shopworn in transportation planning circles, it may be important to keep acknowledging their consideration just for the sake of public perception. And while many promoted more innovative thinking in transportation provision and funding, attitudes were profoundly mixed regarding HOT lanes and tolling.

Finally, some audience members simply wanted to know that transportation projects are actually being prioritized at the local and regional levels with some input from the public, with many saying they didn’t understand why some projects move forward and not others.

Coordination and Regionalism

- **“Land use and transportation agencies and elected officials will need to better coordinate with each other to make these strategies work.”**
 - Transparency of developer-government relationship
 - Importance of infrastructure and development timing
- **“Local officials have to be able to think regionally.”**
 - Local responsibilities include responsibility to the region

Citizens and even some elected officials expressed skepticism about the ability of planners and developers to “do density right”, with some citing relationships between developers and local governments as one reason, and many others citing a lack of land use and transportation coordination as another. Many expressed the sentiment that no one is looking out for their interests, and that plans and projects move forward with key stakeholders left out of the process. While they may acknowledge the merits, they are not willing to buy in to any regional land-use/transportation strategy that might affect them without having confidence that their leaders will work together and that they will have an opportunity to be involved in the process.

Another set of outreach participants is bought in to a regional approach but frustrated by the difficulty in moving it forward. Citizens who advocate change through a regional approach express frustration about what they see as their local leaders’ inability to set aside parochial concerns, while local officials who are on board with a regional approach voice their own frustration at the difficulty in weighing regional concerns along with local ones when “NIMBY” attitudes are so prevalent.

What Can We Do?

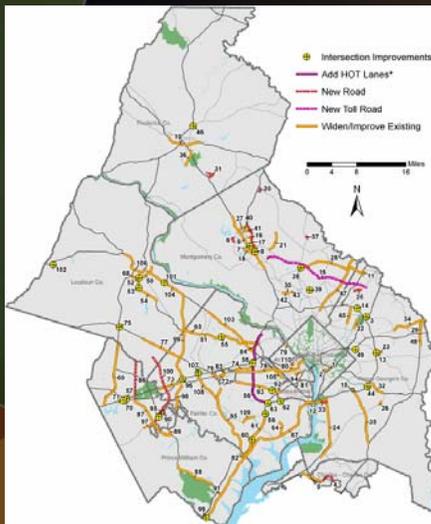
- We can make the regional message of the Scenario Study more compelling
 - More information about:
 - Baseline conditions
 - Local- and project-level impacts
 - Non-transportation quality of life measures



This feedback from recent Scenario Study outreach activities points to several ways in which the TPB could do more. Among them is the goal of making more compelling the regional message about the challenges of growth and our options for dealing with those challenges as a region. This could include more information about expected conditions in 2030, not only in terms of regional measures but also local conditions, and not only in terms of travel indicators but also other quality of life measures like environmental quality, housing affordability, and others.

In addition, many people have sought information about the expected effects of specific transportation projects or localized land use shifts, as a way of identifying those which might have the highest payoffs or conversely the worst unintended side effects. It could also be a first step in potentially prioritizing transportation investment and targeted land use strategies on a regional level.

What Can We Do?



- We can prioritize transportation projects that help make the land use strategies work for the region
 - Use insights from Scenario Study activities and regional outreach to guide decision-making

Based on feedback from this outreach effort, it is clear that demonstrating that transportation priorities are arrived at through a process that considers regional needs, local impacts, and broader quality of life implications would go a long way toward improving public perception and comfort level with a regional strategy of concentrated growth. The Scenario Study and related TPB activities could be valuable tools in introducing such considerations to the transportation prioritization process in the region and connecting with the public.

What Can We Do?

- **We can work to increase public confidence in inter-jurisdictional and inter-agency coordination and problem solving**
 - Continue and expand the TLC Program
 - Provide a regional toolbox of strategies
 - Work to address regional challenges in a way that reflects local concerns



Unfortunately, there is a fair amount of frustration and skepticism being expressed in the region about efforts to address travel congestion and overall quality of life concerns. The good news is that the region's residents, planners, and officials generally accept the notion that a strategy of concentrating development in activity centers, especially those served by transit, could have regional benefits in alleviating travel congestion, or at least making it less worse in 2030. But at the same time, many expressed doubts about the ability of the region's planners to coordinate with each other and solve problems with the public's input.

All of us as public servants and planning professionals strive to overcome this skepticism but at the regional level we have unique opportunities to shape the regional dialogue about transportation and land use issues and share knowledge around the region about effective strategies and solutions.

The TPB's TLC Program has already assisted several TPB member jurisdictions with projects that have involved inter-agency and inter-jurisdictional coordination and the TLC Clearinghouse website is up and running as a broad regional resource and toolbox.

Next Steps

- Report back in the fall with more detailed options, including:
 - Possibilities for future scenario study activities and stewardship
 - Options for expansion or refocusing of the TLC Program

In the fall, we plan to return with more detailed ideas about how the Scenario Study might move forward and how the TLC Program could be expanded or refocused.