For the first time in its long-range transportation plan, the TPB is highlighting aspirational ideas for transportation improvements that can help the region move closer to its goals. This chapter explains why this is a first for our region and what the aspirational initiatives are, and issues a call to action for regional leaders to implement the seven initiatives the TPB has endorsed.

Background

Since the TPB’s first Financially Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan (CLRP) in 1994, the plans have only included transportation projects that are expected to be funded. While these long-range transportation plans have been a reflection of the priorities of the TPB’s member jurisdictions, they did not envision a future that the region had collectively aspired to; rather, the plans have forecasted what could be expected, given anticipated revenues. Increasingly, revenues are expected to be tight over the years, and TPB members have frequently expressed concerns with the forecast performance of the transportation system under a financially constrained future.

TPB members expressed dissatisfaction that past long-range transportation plans were not anticipated to provide satisfactory future performance of the transportation system nor did they bring the region close enough to reaching goals laid out in TPB and COG policy documents. TPB members’ concerns with the future performance of the transportation system were based on future projected conditions, such as the significant projected increases in peak hour congested lane miles and daily vehicle hours of delay, projected reductions in carbon dioxide emissions falling far short of the region’s goal, and the continued dominance of single-occupancy vehicles as the most commonly used mode.

The TPB set out to grapple with these issues in the face of growing pressures on the transportation system as the region continues to grow in population and employment. Chapter 2 describes the vast growth in population and employment that we are expecting in the region between now and 2045. The TPB wanted to be proactive and execute a planning activity that would address questions such as:

- What could the TPB do to help the region grow in the best way possible?
- How can the TPB ensure that residents and workers have options to travel around the region efficiently, affordably, safely, and sustainably?
- How can the TPB help improve accessibility and mobility for all users of the transportation system?
- What can the TPB change about its long-range transportation planning to have a more effective impact on the region’s transportation future?

The TPB embarked upon a set of planning activities to explore ways to address these questions. Visualize 2045 is an important piece of the response, marking the first time a TPB long-range transportation plan incorporates a financially unconstrained component. Federal law requires MPOs to develop financially constrained plans, but they do not prohibit regions from also developing more comprehensive transportation plans that include unfunded or “aspirational” components. Indeed, most large MPOs
in the United States currently develop long-range transportation plans that comprise both funded and unfunded elements. This chapter highlights unfunded initiatives that the region has jointly agreed are important to our future—and worth pushing for.

The Seven Endorsed Initiatives

The TPB endorsed seven initiatives in early 2018 for inclusion in the aspirational element of Visualize 2045 and for other future concerted action. The TPB noted that these ideas, if funded and enacted, would have the potential to significantly improve the region’s transportation system performance compared to current plans and programs.

With its endorsement, the board issued a call to action for its member jurisdictions and agencies to commit to fully explore the concepts contained in the initiatives and take action to implement projects, programs, and policies to fully realize the potential improvements in the transportation system’s performance. In 2018, TPB staff began working with the appropriate subject matter experts to identify specific implementation actions that TPB members could take—individually and collectively—to make aspirational projects, programs, and policies part of the financially constrained element of future TPB long-range plans.

To explore these initiatives in an interactive online map, visit mwcog.org/InitiativesStoryMap.

BRING JOBS AND HOUSING CLOSER TOGETHER

What is it?

More housing and jobs in central locations. There would be new opportunities for people to live or work in Activity Centers – places where jobs and housing are concentrated and it’s easy to walk, bike, or take public transit.

Taking advantage of underused Metro stations. Local planning efforts would encourage housing and job growth close to Metrorail stations that aren’t as busy as others and have available space nearby for new construction.

Reduced traffic from commuting from outside the region. Our region doesn’t have enough housing for our expected growth. By building more housing, we can encourage more people to live in our region instead of commuting in and out every day.

Coordinated local policies. This initiative asks regional leaders to coordinate local policies – through zoning and revisions in local plans – that would allow more people to live closer to jobs.

“Visualize” the future:

Fewer, shorter trips in cars. More housing close to Metro and in Activity Centers would let more people walk to work and transit. That means there would be fewer cars on our region’s roads. And that would significantly reduce congestion, making driving more reliable for those who commute by car.

Increased economic opportunity. More jobs would be available to more people within a short distance from home – which is particularly important for low-income workers and those without cars.

Vibrant communities. Imagine being able to walk and bike to work, school, errands, and fun. It’s good for our health and for the environment. More household growth concentrated in central locations would help us achieve that future.
CHAPTER 4 - Aspirational Element

What is it?

**Buses that mimic rail.** Bus rapid transit (BRT) in suburban Maryland, Northern Virginia, and D.C. would provide high-quality transit services that approach the speed of rail, but at a fraction of the cost to build.

**A dramatically expanded transit service.** BRT, streetcar, and light rail systems would be available for more people in more places throughout the region.

**Targeted rail projects.** Streetcar and light rail routes would provide targeted connections within the regionwide system, serving high-density locations and promoting economic development.

“Visualize” the future:

**A diversity of transit options.** Imagine having access to express transit, even if you live or work far from a Metrorail station. Fast and reliable transit now comes in many shapes and forms, and in the future, this initiative would provide an abundance of options. BRT buses would operate in their own separated lanes with pre-payment systems and level boarding to get people on and off quickly.

**More access to jobs.** Along with new transit comes access to new opportunities. BRT, light rail, and streetcars would not only connect the region’s many Activity Centers – our economic engines – but would also help people move around within them. More transit would provide new travel options for scores of people who currently struggle to get to and from work.

**Better bike/ped access.** New buses and rail encourage walking and bicycling. To maximize the benefit of new transit services, we need to make sure people can get to and from stations on sidewalks, paths and bike lanes safely.
What is it?

Moving more people through the center of the region. To move more people on Metrorail, there would be more trains and lines, and stations would be expanded. The focus would be on the downtown core of the region to accommodate more riders where stations and trains are overcrowded.

Longer trains. In the near-term future, eight-car trains (instead of six-car trains) would run on all lines at all times.

Expanded stations. Stations at the heart of the system would be expanded to handle new riders with less crowding. These changes would include expanded mezzanines and new fare gates and escalators.

A second station in Rosslyn. The addition of a second Rosslyn station to increase the frequency of Orange, Blue, and Silver Line trains would relieve a system bottleneck that slows down commutes throughout the region.

A new line in the regional core. A new rail line under the Potomac River (via a new Rosslyn tunnel) would connect Virginia to Georgetown, and on to Union Station.

“Visualize” the future:

Dependability. With Metro restored to an excellent state of good repair, imagine more trains, running more often, with stations that have space for more people. The expanded capacity would make the Metrorail system more reliable and efficient.

Regionwide impacts. Enhancing capacity on the existing system would benefit the whole region. Currently, the 26 stations in the region’s core are the destination or transfer point for 80% of all rail riders system-wide. When those links are clogged, travel everywhere is affected.

Reduced road congestion. These projects would not only affect transit riders. By making it easier to get on the train, we can reduce road congestion significantly and shorten many daily trips, whether on Metro or by car.

World-class system. The economic benefits would be profound. Enhanced capacity on Metrorail would improve access to jobs and strengthen our competitive advantage in the global economy.
What is it?

Reducing solo car trips. This initiative would expand programs to increase the number of people who telework, ride in carpools, or use transit. These programs can be implemented by employers, government programs, or both.

More workers teleworking. As a result of employer-based incentives, one in five workers in the region would telework each day. That's double the amount today. In addition, workplaces would let employees come to work early or late some days to avoid traveling during rush hour.

Subsidies for not driving. The number of employees receiving transit and carpool subsidies from work would increase significantly. And workers who currently receive free parking could receive the cash value of that benefit to pay for transit or other commuting options (known as parking cash-out.)

Reduced parking incentives at work. Local governments and employers would stop subsidizing the cost of parking in the region’s Activity Centers, where jobs and housing are concentrated. This would encourage more people to carpool or take transit. The new parking prices would vary based on distance from central business districts. Areas that currently do not charge for parking would charge lower amounts than those that already charge.

“Visualize” the future:

Getting cars off the road. Imagine a future with fewer cars clogging the roads and polluting the air. This initiative would take many cars off roads due to the number of people telecommuting and using alternate modes on any given day. Without needing to build any new roads or other infrastructure, this initiative greatly lessens congestion due to the vast reduction in people traveling alone in cars for work trips.

Reduced emissions. Vehicle emissions would consequently decrease, greatly benefiting the region’s air quality and environment.
What is it?

**Congestion-free toll roads.** Toll lanes would be added to existing highways throughout the region. Traffic on these lanes would be congestion-free because of dynamic pricing – toll rates increase during the most congested times of day. And higher tolls would reduce demand on the lanes, keeping traffic free-flowing.

**Building on an emerging toll road network.** Managed lanes exist today on new facilities in Maryland and Virginia. We are already seeing that toll lanes are the most likely way that we will be able to fund needed road projects in our growing region, even as we seek to reduce our dependence on driving alone. They would also encourage carpooling by exempting cars with more passengers from the tolls.

**New opportunities for transit.** A new network of express buses would travel in the express toll lanes, connecting people and jobs throughout the region. The revenues generated from the tolls would be used to operate the new extensive regional network of high-quality bus services.

“**Visualize**” the future:

**Less congestion**, faster trips. The expanded express lane system would reduce average travel times and congestion. Driving would be more reliable and predictable.

**Speedy bus service.** Operating in free-flowing traffic would ensure reliable bus service. For people who cannot regularly afford to drive in toll lanes, express buses would provide an attractive and dependable way to take advantage of the congestion-free express lanes.

**Expanded access to jobs.** Express lanes would expand economic opportunity, making it easier for commuters to know with certainty that they can get to work on time on a regular basis.
**CHAPTER 4 - Aspirational Element**

**What is it?**

**More paths to transit.** Our region doesn’t have enough safe options for walking or bicycling to transit stations. Often, there are barriers in the way, such as a lack of safe sidewalks or crosswalks, or a major road that cannot be crossed. If you live or work within a half mile of a rail or BRT station, you should be able to walk to the station within 10 minutes on average, or bike to the station within a short period.

**Removing barriers for walkers and bicyclists.** Sidewalks would be built or repaired, crosswalks and crossing signals would be installed, and new trails would be constructed. Walking or biking would be comfortable and convenient.

**“Visualize” the future:**

**Safe and comfortable.** Imagine having easy and safe access to transit, free of worry from unsafe sidewalks, poor lighting, or lack of safe crossings. Throughout the region, many more people would have safe and easy access to high-capacity transit – not only would this mean that people’s personal safety while walking or biking to transit stations would improve – but it would also mean more people would choose to use transit because it would become a much more attractive option to them.

**Providing key links.** First- and last-mile connections would provide access to jobs and other destinations within shorter commute times. Such cost-effective measures can improve Metro ridership and stimulate the economy. More people taking transit would take more cars off the roads, improving the environment and helping to reduce congestion for those who drive.

**Easily move around your community.** Diverse economic activities would thrive if people can easily move around their communities. Seniors, people with disabilities, and transit-dependent populations would have more opportunities to get around without a car. Communities would benefit from increased street life and renewed vibrancy.

**COMPLETE THE NATIONAL CAPITAL TRAIL**

**What is it?**

**A bicycle beltway.** The National Capital Trail, a network of bicycle/pedestrian trails, would circle the region’s central jurisdictions. It has often been referred to as the “bicycle beltway.” The trail would be 60 miles long when complete. Currently, 21 miles of the trail have not yet been constructed and three miles need to be upgraded.

**“Visualize” the future:**

**Access to opportunities.** When complete, the trail would connect 26 Metrorail stations and 36 of the region’s Activity Centers, where jobs and housing are concentrated. This means many thousands of the region’s residents would have access to high-quality trails for recreational use and vital connections for commuting and making other daily trips via the trail or by connecting to transit.

**A regional network.** The trail would be a regional crossroads, where visitors would mingle with local residents, and connections to communities would be easily navigable.
Getting to the Seven Endorsed Initiatives

The 2014 performance analysis of the Constrained Long-Range Transportation Plan (CLRP) underwhelmed the TPB in terms of moving closer towards the region’s goals. It predicted that road congestion and transit crowding would increase significantly in the coming decades. Board members noted that of the approximately $250 billion in investment included in the 2014 CLRP, about 83% was to be spent on system maintenance and only 17% was to be spent on system expansion. Relative to the forecast growth in travel demand, the proposed capital investment was noted to be inadequate, leading to system performance that would be less than desirable for some key measures.

Because of the underwhelming future performance of the transportation system the TPB decided that it was time to do something different with the long-range transportation plan. Over the next four years the TPB worked through a new process to identify what would help the region meet its goals. The TPB passed multiple resolutions and convened two working groups from 2014-2018 to address the issues they identified. The Unfunded Capital Needs Working Group convened from 2014-2016 and the Long-Range Plan Task Force picked up where that body left off and convened throughout 2017.¹

STEP 1: Unfunded Projects Analysis

In September 2014, the TPB asked staff to compile an unfunded capital needs inventory that would encompass transportation projects included in the plans of TPB member jurisdictions and transportation agencies but had not yet been submitted for the CLRP due to lack of anticipated funding. This list of projects became known as the “All-Build,” representing projects that would help address current and future demand but that for one reason or another had not yet been fully funded.

TPB staff, with help from TPB members’ staff, compiled the inventory that comprised more than a thousand projects, including a large number of small-scale bicycle and pedestrian facility improvement projects as well as over 550 highway and transit projects. Under the direction of the Unfunded Capital Needs Working Group, staff performed an analysis of the project list.² TPB members and staff wanted to answer the question: if these projects were funded and built, would that alleviate the transportation problems we are anticipating will grow and continue into the future?

What Projects Are In The “All-Build”?
The full All-Build list of unmet transportation needs regionwide consists of all the unfunded projects that are in all TPB members’ plans. At this time, the TPB is not maintaining a database of all unfunded projects in the region. To find more information about what unfunded projects are in local plans visit TPB members’ websites.

The “All-Build” Project List We Studied

The inputs for the All-Build scenario analysis study were drawn from 33 plans and other sources from jurisdictions throughout the region. Some of the key sources include the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority’s “TransAction 2040” plan, WMATA’s “Momentum” and “ConnectGreater-Washington” plans, the District of Columbia’s “moveDC” plan, the Joint Transportation Priorities Letters from Charles, Frederick, Montgomery, and Prince George’s counties in Maryland, and the Highway Needs Inventory of the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA).

The full inventory and a list of source documents can be found at: mwcog.org/AllBuildProjectList2016

Results

The All-Build study was useful for demonstrating that attempting to simply “build our way out” of our congestion problem, in the face of prevailing levels of congestion together with the expected growth, will not be viable. The cost of doing so would be too high. The All-Build scenario included hundreds of projects that together were estimated to cost $100 billion beyond the $42 billion assumed in the CLRP – and regional leaders need to be selective when deciding what projects are worth investing in. And even if the money were available for all the projects, the All-Build scenario did not reduce congestion enough to be considered worth the cost. The TPB determined the All-Build project list was not the answer they had been looking for to address the region’s needs, and they decided to find other creative ways to reach the region’s goals.

The All-Build scenario analysis also underscored the importance of supplementing any proposed system expansions with supporting land-use policies, other policies, pricing mechanisms and other programs. The region must manage transportation demand as well as provide new capacity – making changes in land-use patterns can have a profound impact on demand. The TPB concluded that we can’t simply build ourselves out of the challenges we face as a region – and that we need more nuanced approaches that combine projects, programs, and policies.

¹ The full repository of meetings, resolutions and meeting documents can be found at mwcog.org/LRPTF.
² “Phase I Report of the Long-Range Plan Task Force” can be found at mwcog.org/LRPTFReports.
STEP 2: Bundled Projects, Programs, and Policies for Analysis

Having learned from the All-Build study that new capacity projects alone cannot solve the region’s transportation issues, the TPB convened the Long-Range Plan Task Force to explore ways to enhance the current mix of projects, programs and policies that make up and underlie the region’s long-range transportation plan. The TPB directed the task force to identify six to ten projects, policies, and programs that would have the potential to improve the performance of the region’s transportation system and to make substantive progress towards achieving the goals laid out in TPB’s and COG’s governing documents.

The Long-Range Plan Task Force explored combinations of approaches that would promote multimodal travel and reduce vehicle miles traveled. The early meetings included exercises where members could add any projects, programs or policies to a list of potential ideas. The task force decided to explore ideas in theory, without regard to immediate implementation hurdles such as funding or political and public support. This approach provided the task force with an opportunity to think creatively about novel ideas that could benefit from further analysis.

The task force then combined the projects, programs, and policies into mutually supportive bundles, which became known as “initiatives.” These initiatives contained combinations of approaches to expand capacity, reduce demand, and reconfigure land-use. By bundling mutually-supportive ideas together, their collective impact could be magnified. For example, adopting policies encouraging and incentivizing development near transit stations would create new riders and increase transit demand. The resulting demand would need to be met with new investments in transit capacity, such as more frequent or improved service. Doing one without the other could create demand for which there is no capacity, or capacity without adequate demand. The benefits of such steps could be further amplified with policies and programs, such as discounted fares for low-income riders or incentives for using transit provided by employers to their employees, that encourage more people to choose transit.

The task force considered dozens of initiative bundles but needed to choose between six and ten to move on to the scenario analysis phase of the study. The task force voted to determine which packages of projects should be studied, made that recommendation to the TPB, and the TPB approved the list of ten initiatives for study.

TPB staff and a consultant team studied the ten initiatives chosen for analysis and presented the results back to the task force and the TPB. The scenario analysis exercise demonstrated how the ten initiatives compared to each other in terms of a set of performance measures and challenges agreed upon by the task force. The analysis also compared the projected scenarios of the ten initiatives to current conditions and the planned future under the TPB’s 2016 long-range plan.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES

The Long-Range Plan Task Force agreed on a list of 14 regional transportation challenges that they would seek to address through their work, originally drawn from the Regional Transportation Priorities Plan. A few of those challenges were:

- Housing and Job Location: Most housing, especially affordable housing, and many of the region’s jobs are located in areas outside of Activity Centers where transit, bicycling, and walking are not safe and viable options.
- Roadway Congestion: The region’s roadways are among the most congested in the nation, making it harder for people and goods to reliably get where they need to go.
- Transit Crowding: The transit system currently experiences crowding during peak hours and lacks the capacity to support future population and job growth without reducing ridership.
- Inadequate Bus Service: Existing bus service is too limited in its capacity, coverage, frequency, and reliability, making transit a less viable option, especially for people with disabilities and limited incomes.
STEP 3: Endorsed Seven Initiatives with the Most Promise

The TPB had requested that the task force recommend initiatives which would provide the most benefit to the region. The task force came to a consensus that five of the ten initiatives that were studied held the most promise, based on the results from the analysis. On December 6, 2017, the task force agreed to advance five of the ten initiatives that were studied to the TPB for its endorsement (Bring Jobs and Housing Closer Together, Expand Bus Rapid Transit and Transitways, Move More People on Metrorail, Provide More Telecommuting and Other Options for Commuting, and Expand Express Highway Network).

At the December 2017 TPB meeting, the board passed a resolution proclaiming that the TPB “endorses the attached list of five initiatives, found to have the most potential to significantly improve the performance of the region’s transportation system compared to current plans and programs, for future concerted TPB action, and directs staff to include these initiatives in the aspirational element of the TPB’s long-range transportation plan, Visualize 2045.”

The final two of the seven aspirational initiatives were endorsed by the TPB at its January 2018 meeting. These two initiatives focus on regional pedestrian and bicycle improvements (Improve Walk and Bike Access to Transit and Complete the National Capital Trail). In addition to including the initiatives in the aspirational element of Visualize 2045, the TPB resolved that staff should use the initiatives “as a factor in selecting projects for the TPB’s Transportation Land Use Connections (TLC) Program and the federally funded Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Program,” effectively establishing a system to ensure these initiatives are prioritized through activities the TPB directs.

In endorsing these seven initiatives, TPB has called on regional leaders to act. It’s time to change the way we have been planning. It’s time to shake things up and think outside the box. The December 2017 resolution stated that the TPB “recognizes that the TPB’s endorsement is a milestone first step and calls on its member jurisdictions and agencies to commit to fully explore the initiatives to identify specific implementation actions that could be taken, individually and collectively, to make them part of TPB’s future fiscally constrained long-range plans.”

A Call to Action

The TPB has committed to championing these ideas. In order to make these initiatives a reality, TPB members, TPB staff, and other jurisdictional staff must champion these ideas throughout the region. The TPB and its members need to lead and provide examples to other decisionmakers regionwide. It’s especially important to start regionwide conversations since so many of these initiatives are interconnected. These ideas require regional collaboration across sectors and jurisdictional lines. By working together, we can bring the region closer to a better future.

TPB is calling upon its regional leaders to:

- Examine, enact and enforce POLICIES
- Fund and administer PROGRAMS
- Prioritize and fund PROJECTS

That

- Better manage peak period travel demand
- Reduce single occupant travel
- Make transit more viable and affordable
- Enhance existing infrastructure

3 “Phase II Detailed Technical Report - An Assessment of Regional Initiatives for the National Capital Region” can be found at mwcog.org/LRPTreports.