As we visualize our transportation future over the next 25 years, what does it look like? More travel alternatives? Shorter trips? Increased access to opportunity? Hopefully, all these things and more.

The challenges of the future are significant, but the good news is that we are taking positive steps forward. The transportation system laid out in Visualize 2045 will increase the variety of travel options available to communities in all corners of the region. We are expanding public transportation. By the middle of the 21st Century, we will have moved into a new era in which a range of efficient and innovative transit options will be available. Within the next decade, we will finish work on the Purple Line, the Silver Line, and several new bus rapid transit (BRT) systems.

The region’s road system will also undergo profound changes. As we seek to alleviate congestion and raise revenue, an increasing share of our roads will be priced. By 2045 we will have doubled the tolled lanes in the region, investments which are intended to provide more options for travelers and more reliable travel speeds throughout the day.

And in 2045, more people will live and work in communities where driving is less essential. As a region, we have embraced the concept of Activity Centers, which are engines for economic growth and a force for environmental stewardship. Land-use forecasts for 2045 show an increased share of jobs (67%) and housing (35%) located in Activity Centers. The forecasts also predict that these centers will provide increasing opportunities for people to travel via bicycle, walking, and transit.
But while we continue to move forward, we are facing major challenges.

**Transit is not a realistic option for enough people.** Only 29% of the population currently lives within close proximity to high-capacity transit (Metrorail, commuter rail, light rail, streetcar or BRT). With the planned transportation improvements and increase in population, by 2045 the share of people living near high-capacity transit will increase to 38%. This is good, but the majority of people still will not have quick access to high-capacity transit, which creates impediments for young people, elderly people, people with disabilities, and low-income people.

**We are still too auto-dependent.** The majority of commuters today - 61% - still drive to work alone, and that number is forecast to go down only a few percentage points in 25 years.

**Congestion remains a daunting challenge.** Vehicle hours of delay is forecast to increase by 47% in the next 25 years, given current plans. Because our region has a strong economy, our population and jobs will continue to grow, which is the main contributing factor for growing congestion. We need to continue to explore innovative ways to move more people more efficiently, and transition away from measuring success based on how many cars we can move, focusing more on how many people we can move.

With these challenges in mind, the TPB decided that Visualize 2045 would not simply identify the future we can anticipate given current funding; it would also include an articulation of the region’s aspirations – a vision of the kind of future we would like to have, not just the future that current trends are dictating.

The aspirational element in this plan, which is featured in Chapter 4, describes ideas that we already know can make the future brighter. The TPB’s seven aspirational initiatives call for projects, programs, and policies that the region has agreed will make transportation conditions better, both in the short-term and 25 years from now. These are things that all corners of the region agree on – the core and the suburbs, eastern and western sides of the region, and representatives from different political ideologies. We have consensus that these are good ideas.
With the aspirational initiatives TPB is calling for regional decision-makers to:

- Encourage jobs and housing to be located closer together because it is an efficient use of space.
- Maximize the efficiency of the existing Metrorail system by expanding its capacity in the region’s core.
- Grow bus rapid transit throughout the region because it will bring high-capacity transit to new population and job centers, providing more people with more efficient travel options.
- Ensure that safe and efficient walking and biking options grow throughout the region, providing for more reliable and enjoyable travel and recreation.
- Develop a strategically designed network of managed and tolled lanes that encourage and incentivize carpooling and accommodate an enhanced express bus network throughout the region, connecting Activity Centers.

These strategies use resources wisely and effectively to move more people more efficiently.

Not surprisingly, the TPB has heard from those who think the aspirational initiatives in Visualize 2045 are not visionary enough and do not adequately consider future technologies. That sentiment certainly holds an element of truth and a challenge for future planning. Yes, big changes are afoot. Climate change is already having profound impacts, and the transportation system plays a large role in emissions, even while we stay below our emissions budgets. Ride-hailing apps like Lyft and Uber impact people’s travel choice and behavior; connected vehicles/semi- and fully autonomous vehicle systems are being tested and have the potential to affect both travel behavior as well as operations; internet commerce is shaking up travel patterns for passengers and freight alike. These evolving technologies will have an as-of-yet unknown impact on the region and on our society.
Future versions of our regional long-range transportation plan will need to continue to address emerging trends and accommodate the uncertainties. The TPB’s planners and analysts are engaged in activities to better understand evolving technology and trends, including the region’s strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for addressing them in future regional plans.

In the meantime, Visualize 2045 calls upon the region to embrace and celebrate how far we have come and how far we can go. The power of this plan and the vision it offers lies in its very pragmatism. The aspirational initiatives are things we can do right now—and we already are doing some of them in various forms. From years of experience, we already know that these kinds of changes can make a positive difference. More importantly, we know they can be even more powerful if we pick up the pace and begin to implement these kinds of changes more pervasively and with more vigor.

When the future residents of the National Capital Region look back at the early 21st Century, how will they assess the plans we are making today? Hopefully, they will value the pragmatism and stewardship of the decisions that are reflected in Visualize 2045 – the value placed on taking care of the system that is already in place, providing new choices for travel, and connecting communities to economic opportunity, while being open to transformational changes in how mobility and accessibility needs are met.

And hopefully, the region’s residents of 2045 will thank us for positioning them to thrive in our region and visualize a future that offers even more exciting prospects for generations to come.