



National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

MEMORANDUM

TO: Transportation Planning Board
FROM: Cristina Finch, TPB Transportation Planner
SUBJECT: Visualize 2050: Update on Plan Development Progress and Schedule
DATE: March 13, 2025

Since the 2022 adoption of the current National Capital Region Transportation Plan, Visualize 2045, National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) staff have been preparing for the next plan, Visualize 2050. Key to the development of Visualize 2050 has been the Zero-Based Budgeting (ZBB) activity which required member agencies to re-evaluate their previously planned projects and programs for alignment with TPB's goals and resubmit investment activities planned through 2050 for inclusion in the new plan.

During the TPB's approval of transportation investments deemed regionally significant for air quality purposes (RSAQ) in mid-2024, which are included in the region's air quality conformity analysis, the TPB directed staff to undertake a second analysis with one additional project, the I-495/95 Southside Express Lanes project, to give more time for member questions to be answered before deciding whether or not to include the project in Visualize 2050.¹ To provide additional time required for these analyses, the TPB revised the adoption schedule for Visualize 2050 and the FY 2026-2029 Transportation Improvement Program, postponing final approval to no later than December 2025, with the understanding that only one of the two regional air quality conformity analyses of Visualize 2050 would be approved.

At today's meeting, the update on Visualize 2050's development will provide an overview and status of key activities, the structure and basic contents of the plan and related documents, the remaining schedule through plan adoption, and the redesigned Visualize 2050 website.²

PLANNING PROCESS & DOCUMENTATION

The years long, comprehensive and cooperative process the TPB uses to develop the region's metropolitan transportation plan, Visualize 2050, results in the development of the following four separate documents: (1) The National Capital Region Transportation Plan (NCRTP), which summarizes the planned multimodal transportation actions in our region over the next 25 years; (2) The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for FY 2026-2029, which lists planned financial obligations for projects and programs in the first four years of the plan; (3) The Visualize 2050

¹ "Resolution on Inclusion of the I-95/I-495 Southside Express Lanes Project in the May 15, 2024 Approved Project Submissions for the Air Quality Conformity Analysis of the Visualize 2050 National Capital Region Transportation Plan and the FY 2026-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) (TPB R13-2024)," Resolution (Washington, D.C.: National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board, June 20, 2024), <https://www.mwcog.org/events/2024/6/20/transportation-planning-board/>.

² "Visualize 2050, the National Capital Region Transportation Plan," TPB Visualize 2050, 2025, <https://visualize2050.org/>.

Planning and Programming Process, which documents the process used to plan various components of the NC RTP and TIP and which accompanies the self-certification statement approved by the TPB and; (4) The Air Quality Conformity Report on Visualize 2050 and the FY 2026-2029 TIP, which determines the conformity of the region's air quality with federal air quality standards, over the next 25 years.

The National Capital Region Transportation Plan (NC RTP) is a point-in-time snapshot, with a 20-year, or more, horizon, describing the region's transportation planning activities, whose goal is to improve the transportation system. Visualize 2045 is the currently federally approved NC RTP that is being updated. The new NC RTP will be Visualize 2050. The Visualize 2050 planning process, as federally required for metropolitan transportation plans, occurs at least every four years. Each update begins with data and reports that come from the TPB, state agencies, and local, regional, and transit agencies. This data includes updates to studies related to safety, intercity travel, freight, congestion management, and more. Transportation plans from state agencies and local, regional, and transit agencies are also foundational to Visualize 2050. For this update of the plan, the ZBB effort aided the next step in assessing the available funding and the project selection process. From here, the long-term National Capital Region Transportation Plan (Visualize 2050) and the short-term Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for FY 2026-2029, which lists planned financial obligations for projects and programs in the first four years of the plan, are created by compiling projects with reasonably anticipated funding that reflect shared goals for the region.

Visualize 2050 contains eight chapters: (1) Introduction, which introduces the National Capital Region and the plan; (2) Transportation Today, which recognizes how the strengths of the region's current multimodal transportation system lay the foundation for future improvements; (3) Current System Performance, which reports the current system performance and the region's progress toward its targets; (4) Societal Topics, which reflects on the ways in which the transportation systems impacts/interacts with many topics related to the society at large; (5) Financial Plan, which highlights the investment strategies given current and reasonably anticipated funding availability; (6) 2050 System and Performance, which envisions the National Capital Region's 2050 transportation system and its future performance; (7) Key Challenges Beyond the Plan, which acknowledges the challenges beyond planned investments and anticipated financial resources and; (8) Moving Forward, which quantifies performance targets associated with transportation goals and identifies priority strategies to address challenges and meet regional goals. The result is a plan that communicates current efforts and priorities to provide stakeholders with a common foundation for advancing transportation for the National Capital Region and that meets air quality goals, especially the region's air quality conformity determination.

The Visualize 2050 Planning and Programming Process document provides a detailed description of the continuing, comprehensive and collaborative process used to examine and plan a wide variety of topics that inform and or make up the NC RTP. These topics include safety, congestion, freight movement, land use assumptions and estimates, bus transit, and bicycle, pedestrian, micromobility planning. Each of the 28 sections includes an overview of the topic, the TPB's role and key staff, the role of key planning agencies, and any public engagement related to the topic. Additional information and planning activities related to each topic are also included, as needed. This includes local, regional, and state collaboration in the National Capital Region on the TPB annual Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and on plans such as local comprehensive and transportation plans, transit agency development plans, and other state related plans.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES & STATUS

The development of Visualize 2050 has thus far comprised of three major planning activities: public engagement, zero-based budgeting (ZBB), and Air Quality Conformity (AQC) and future performance analysis. From February to November of 2023, the public had the opportunity to provide comments on current Visualize 2045 projects by using a SurveyMonkey form. During that period, agencies initiated a review of all transportation project inputs as a starting point for Visualize 2050 and submitted their inputs for projects deemed Regionally Significant for Air Quality purposes (RSAQ). In March 2024, there was a public comment period that focused on receiving feedback on the Air Quality Conformity (AQC) analysis inputs and RSAQ projects by using a MetroQuest interactive mapping and public input tool. In May and June of 2024, following the March comment period, the board approved the RSAQ inputs and AQC scope of work, and TPB staff began related technical work (i.e., developing the transportation networks use by the travel model, beginning to run the travel demand forecasting model, and beginning to run the mobile emissions model). In August 2024, Non-Regionally Significant (NRS) for air quality inputs were submitted.

Since then, staff have been undergoing various plan development activities including conducting both the AQC analysis and the performance analysis of the plan (which require running the travel model and mobile emissions model), continuing ZBB activities with member agencies, writing and reviewing planning and programming process documentation, creating interactive maps, and drafting the Visualize 2050 plan and FY 2026-2029 TIP.

Because the NCR is designated a non-attainment area for air quality standards (for ozone), the TPB must analyze the potential impacts of future major transportation projects. As the AQC inputs have been finalized, staff is working on the AQC analysis and performance analysis, which includes running the regional travel demand forecasting model and the mobile emissions model, and which requires about nine months to complete. For both the air quality conformity analysis and the performance analysis, staff use the RSAQ Visualize 2050 projects, and the Round 10.0 Cooperative Forecast data. This will help to understand how the region's transportation network will perform from now to 2050 given the anticipated changes in road capacity, and transit service. The output from the travel model provides information such as congestion, accessibility, mode choice, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and vehicle hours of delay (VHD).

Between now, March 2025, and May 2025, TPB staff are working with member agencies on project clarifications and analysis. Through this effort, staff seek to understand what each project and program is and to ensure that the data in the TPB's Project InfoTrak (PIT) database is accurate, up to date, and to the liking of each member agency. Since many transportation projects can have multiple segments or components, we use the term "Overarching Project" (OAP) to refer to collections of projects that constitute one larger project. Staff are working with agencies to review OAP titles and TPB project titles, to ensure that they are consistent. Agencies will also finalize the mapping of their projects to ensure that they are accurate geographically. Following agency review of this information, staff will make the updates into the PIT. The remaining fields such as programming information, schedule information, and project questions, will undergo an TPB internal staff review by subject matter experts. This will provide an opportunity for staff to learn more about the inputs, potentially gain insight on how the region's investments will support many topics of interest and will help to uncover any potential improvements that could be made to the project input system for future efforts.

Staff have completed the [National Capital Region Existing Transportation System interactive map](#) which includes roadways, managed lanes, high-capacity transit stations, transit routes and stops, and bicycle facilities as well as the [Environmental Consultation and Mitigation interactive map](#) which includes protected lands, green infrastructure, floodplains, wetlands, and historic places. Following the finalization of the Visualize 2050 project mappings, an interactive map of Visualize 2050 will be created. The public and agencies will then be able to reflect on the current transportation system and how future investments will support the movement of goods and people.

The Visualize 2050 financial analysis is also in development as staff work to demonstrate how the plan can be implemented financially with limited funding availability. The resulting financial plan will account for the forecast revenues reasonably expected to be available through 2050 and will cover estimated costs. It also includes projects, programs, and services that are currently funded through FY 2029 and future priority investments beyond FY 2029.

NEW VISUALIZE 2050 WEBSITE LAUNCH

The TPB is launching an updated Visualize 2050 website, visualize2050.org, to serve as the primary communications hub for sharing information and resources on the National Capital Region Transportation Plan, the FY 2026-2029 TPB Transportation Improvement Program, and the related Air Quality Conformity Analysis Report. In addition, the website will be the landing point for the third Visualize 2050 comment period in fall 2025 where the public will be able to access the draft plan, a comment form, interactive maps, and other resources to inform comment.

The new Visualize 2050 website was developed with the support of Clark Communications and COG and TPB staff. New features include accordions in user interface, flipbooks for easy viewing of documents, icons that correspond with the plan document, a map gallery with links to interactive maps, and timelines to track the plan's progress. The website houses the following key content.

Home: latest developments, call to action alerts, a description of the NC RTP, and timeline. The Home footer includes contact information and a link to subscribe to TPB News and Visualize updates.

About: key topics, plan requirements, and glossary

Plan Development: schedule, key activities timeline, meetings, stakeholder resources, and frequently asked questions

The Plan: TPB principles, goals, and strategies. The draft and final plan will be posted to this page later in 2025.

Plan Resources: FY 2026-2029 Transportation Improvement Program, Air Quality Conformity Analysis Report, and maps

Get Involved: Past and upcoming comment period information, ambassador resources, and social media

NEXT STEPS & REMAINING SCHEDULE

At the next TPB meeting in April, the Board will hear a presentation from the Virginia DOT on the I-495 Southside Express Lanes project. On May 9, 2025, all remaining zero-based budgeting information from agencies are due. After completing the ZBB process and reviewing the project inputs internally, any takeaways will be incorporated into the plan or documented for future efforts.

In July, a TPB work session and regular meeting will be held that will focus on the AQC results, system performance assessment, financial plan, and key challenges beyond the transportation plan. By September, the Board will vote on whether the I-495/95 Southside Express Lanes project should move forward in the development of Visualize 2050 or not. In October, a third and final public comment period will be held with a focus on receiving feedback on the draft Visualize 2050 document, FY 2026-2029 TIP, and the draft AQC Report. In December, the TPB will vote on approving Visualize 2050, the FY 2026-2029 TIP, the AQC Report and self-certify its planning and programming process. Following TPB approval, the documents will be shared with the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration for review, and possible approval of, the Air Quality Conformity Report. These milestones are listed in the table below

Month	Milestones
January – April 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TPB staff and agencies complete zero-based budgeting exercise. TPB releases updated Technical Input Solicitation for TIP financial details on funding amounts by fiscal years between FY 2026-2029. TPB receives a briefing at the April meeting from VDOT on the I-495/95 Southside Express Lanes (SEL) project.
May 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All remaining ZBB activities including detailed FY 2026-2029 TIP financial inputs due Friday, May 9, 2025. TPB staff draft financial analysis for the plan and TIP.
June 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TPB staff draft AQC and performance analysis for the plan and TIP.
July 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TPB work session: Detailed presentation of the Air Quality Conformity Results, Financial Plan, and System Performance Assessment for both options – with and without the I-495/95 SEL project; VDOT SEL project update. TPB meeting: Briefing on draft results of the Air Quality Conformity, financial plan and system performance analyses for both options; VDOT SEL project update. TPB to pick one option at its September meeting. TPB briefed on the draft system level key challenges beyond the current transportation plan.
September 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TPB votes to move forward with or without the I-495 Southside Express Lanes project for continuation in the plan development and air quality conformity processes. Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee (MWAQC) and MWAQC Technical Advisory Committee (MWAQC-TAC) reviews draft results of AQC analysis for the updated plan and FY 2026–2029 TIP. Staff finalize the draft plan, TIP, and AQC documents, website, and advertise the comment period.
October 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public comment period on the draft plan, TIP, and the results of AQC analysis for the updated plan and FY 2026-2029 TIP (tentative dates: <u>Saturday, October 4 – Sunday, November 2, 2025</u>). TPB, TPB Technical Committee review the draft Visualize 2050 plan, FY 2026-2029 TIP, and Air Quality Conformity Analysis Report.
November 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TPB and Technical Committee receive a summary of the comments received on the analysis, plan and TIP; the agencies sponsoring the projects will have the opportunity to provide responses to comments.
December 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TPB will be asked to approve the results of the AQC analysis and adopt the Visualize 2050 plan and the FY 2026-2029 TIP.