

September 18, 2023

Hon. Tom Dernoga, Chair Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee

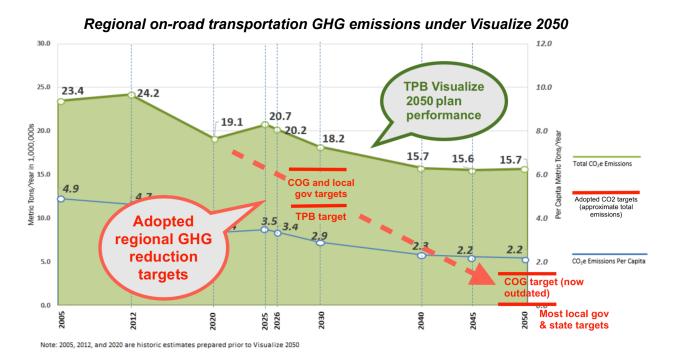
Re: Regional action on climate pollution falling short in Visualize 2050 plan

Dear Chair Dernoga and MWAQC members,

Metropolitan Washington has reached the mid-point for implementation of the COG 2030 Climate and Energy Action Plan. Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, and the new Visualize 2050 long-range transportation plan prepared by TPB shows that our region is not doing enough to lower vehicle pollution to meet our 2030 or 2050 targets.

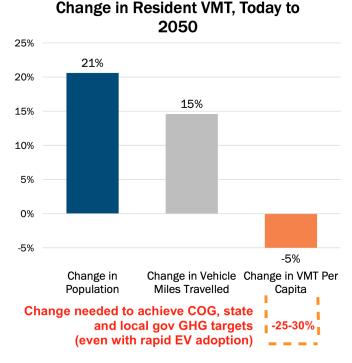
TPB's Climate Change Mitigation Study of 2021 found that the region must both quickly transition to electric vehicles *and* reduce per capita Vehicle Miles Traveled in the magnitude of 20% (and more in later decades) to achieve its GHG targets. We need both a less car-dependent region and cleaner cars. See attached article for more details.

The Coalition for Smarter Growth appreciates your call for further regional VMT reduction strategies in your draft letter on the Visualize air quality conformity analysis. CSG has recommended that TPB's plans also incorporate performance targets for the levels of per capita light duty vehicle VMT and EV adoption needed to achieve the adopted COG GHG targets.



Source: <u>TPB</u> chart, with red annotations by the Coalition for Smarter Growth





Source: TPB chart, with red annotations by the Coalition for Smarter Growth

The Region Forward plan and COG's Region United framework – and CSG – support a network of walkable, bikeable, inclusive, and transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the Washington, DC region to grow and provide opportunities for all. This approach, along with EVs, is also critical for addressing criteria pollutants and the significant non-tailpipe particulate pollution from vehicle brakes and tires.

We hope that MWAQC will continue to encourage the challenging but necessary work that the region must do for cleaner air and a safe climate, and hold the region accountable.

Thank you for your work.

Bill Pugh, AICP CTP
Transportation & Climate Director

CC: MWCOG Air and Climate Public Advisory Committee, Climate, Energy and Environment Policy Committee, and National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

Attachment: Bill Pugh, "Region's new transportation plan fails to meet climate goals" in *GGWash*, September 3, 2025

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Region's new transportation plan fails to meet climate goals

SUSTAINABILITY OPINION By Bill Pugh (Guest Contributor) September 3, 2025



Emma K Alexandra licensed under Creative Commons. This summer, the Washington region had <u>flash floods</u>, <u>wildfire smoke</u>, and <u>record</u>

We won't hit emissions targets even with a more rapid switch to electric vehicles. Image by

<u>humidity</u> – symptoms of our warming planet due to excess greenhouse gas emissions. Yet our region will continue to spew unsafe levels of climate-warming pollution under Visualize 2050, the new long-range plan from the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB). It's clear that under the proposed plan, even a more rapid switch to electric

vehicles won't be enough to meet our emissions reduction targets. The plan does

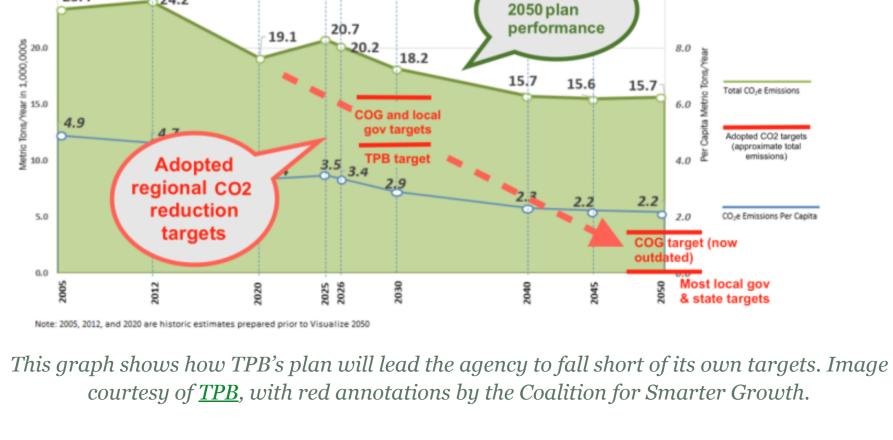
too little to foster the more walkable, bikeable, transit-friendly communities needed to curb emissions from vehicles. **Visualize 2050 = visualizing climate change**

The TPB, composed of local and state officials, prepares a long-range plan every four years, comprising the transit, rail, and road investments and programs

planned by various government agencies for the next 25 years. The results of the new Visualize 2050 plan just came out, and unfortunately, they're not pretty. <u>Visualize 2050 greenhouse gas emissions</u>

TPB Visualize

25.0 23.4



Carbon dioxide (CO2) pollution from cars and trucks would hardly drop compared to the scale needed. In the chart above, the green line shows forecast greenhouse gas emissions from our road and rail network under Visualize 2050's mix of

highway expansion, transit improvements, and adopted fuel efficiency standards.

The red line shows the trajectory needed to meet adopted emission reduction

targets by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), most cities and counties in our region, and the TPB's own 2030 target. Transportation is our region's largest source of CO2 emissions (explosive data <u>center growth</u> is yet another growing concern). So if the Washington region's policymakers are falling short on promoting clean transportation, they're failing overall in addressing climate change.

Beyond switching to EVs, we need less car dependence Several years ago, the TPB conducted a valuable study showing what is needed to

reduce climate pollution at the pace needed. The answer: both electric vehicles

TPB's Visualize 2050 analysis is conservative in terms of how fast the region

(EVs) and less driving.

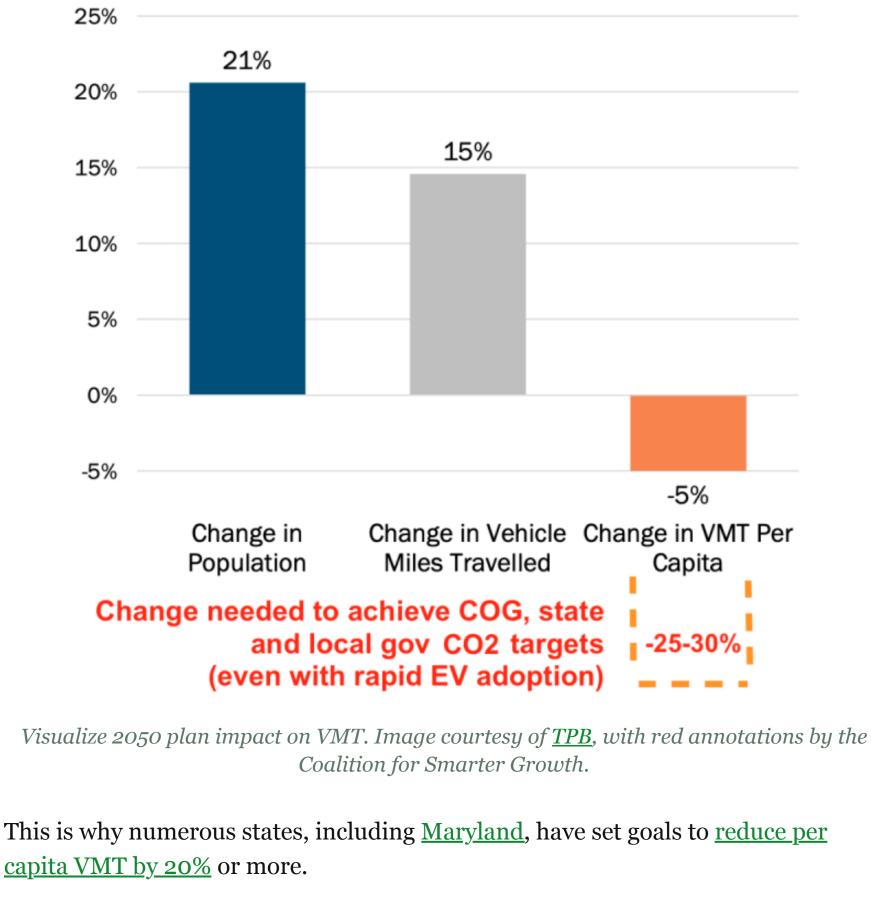
transitions to EVs, so actual adoption – and drops in CO2 emissions – could be faster. However, note that the national forecast for EV adoption has fallen from reaching 48% of car sales by 2030 to only 27%. <u>In the Washington region</u>, while DC residents are buying EVs at double the

national rate (21% of sales), Maryland and Virginia residents are buying them at

around the national average (10% and 8% of sales, respectively). But even if the

region achieves COG's goal of EVs totaling 50% of new car sales by 2030, the region still needs to shift to become much more walkable, bikeable, and transitfriendly to meet its climate targets. How much people drive to meet daily needs, referred to as resident vehicle miles traveled (VMT), would need to <u>drop by about</u> 20% by 2030 and further by 2050, even if we met COG's EV adoption goal. Here's the tiny progress Visualize 2050 would achieve versus what's needed:

Change in Resident VMT, Today to 2050



TPB pledged ambitious climate action. What happened? Ironically, the TPB adopted an <u>emissions reduction target</u> that is more stringent

plan two years early, with accountability on climate action, as a result of the failure of the previous one.

required by its 2021 resolution. Four years after its important climate change mitigation study, TPB hasn't advanced its recommendations for new ambitious action, aside from adopting EV programs. Local governments (with some exceptions and recent efforts) have also been slow to ensure sufficient housing options in accessible parts of the region by

travel The failure to slash carbon pollution is also a failure to increase access to jobs and

distances, and risk personal safety. This access largely depends on local and state-

other daily needs without having to pay a fortune for multiple cars, drive long

level – not federal – decisions under our local officials' control.

This fall, the Washington region's residents will have a chance to comment on the Visualize 2050 draft plan, including the key decision of whether to include the <u>flawed I-495 Southside</u> highway widening and toll lanes project. Stay tuned for the Coalition for Smarter Growth's complete analysis of the Visualize 2050 plan ahead

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Bill Pugh, AICP CTP, is an urban planner, advocate for a livable planet, and senior policy fellow for the Coalition for Smarter Growth. He lives in Alexandria.

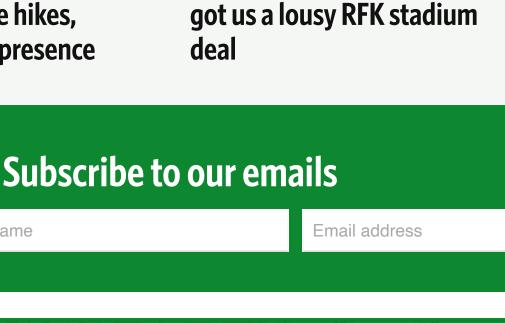
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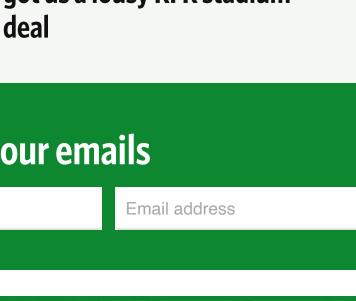
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Wednesday's Council vote

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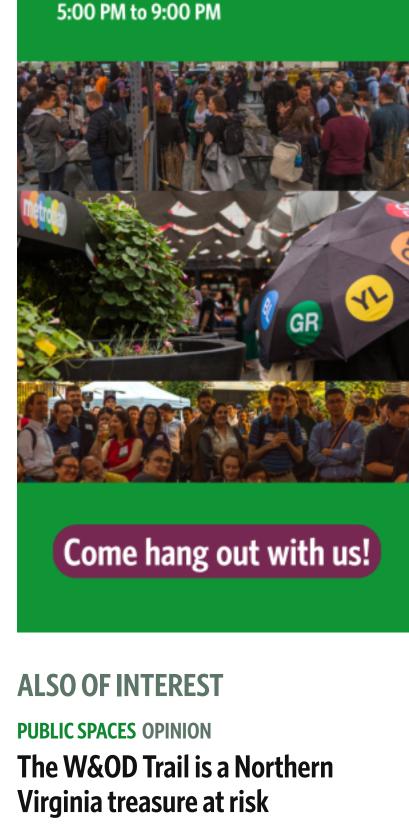


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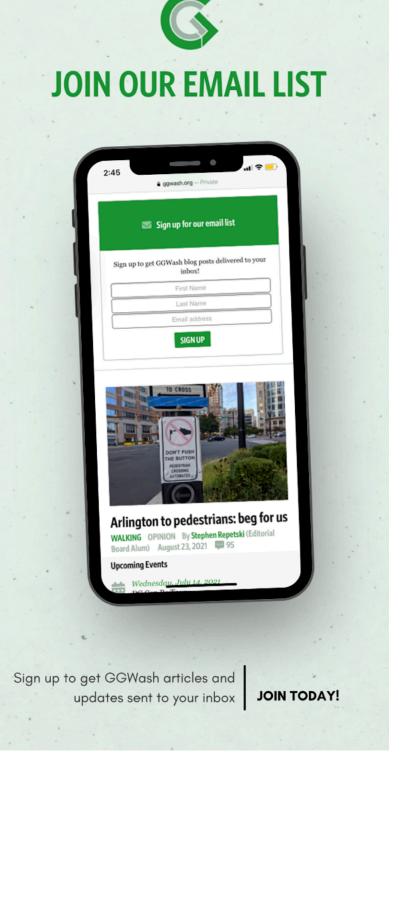
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(compared to 2005), but specifically reducing car and truck CO2 emissions by 50%. Also, TPB officials decided in 2021 to immediately re-do their long-range

than COG's – for not just helping to reduce overall CO2 emissions by 50% by 2030

Despite localities wisely dropping a few wasteful and destructive road expansion projects (especially in Maryland), Visualize 2050 still includes a number of counterproductive <u>projects</u> that will drive increased emissions – like widening Chain Bridge Road in front of the Tysons Metro station from 8 to 10 lanes. The TPB also failed to do the accountable analysis of proposed projects that was

2030, as they <u>pledged in 2019</u>, which are essential for <u>curbing sprawl and CO2</u> emissions. Note that TPB has done great work on resilience (dealing with the impacts of climate change) – an important complement to fixing the cause of the problem. Better strategies mean more sustainable, affordable, convenient, safer

of the October to November public comment period. Opinion posts do not necessarily reflect the views of Greater Greater Washington. For

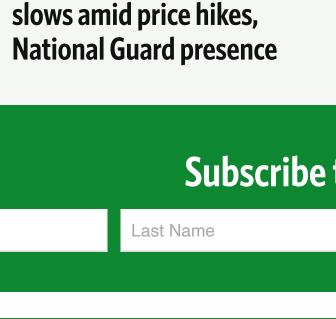
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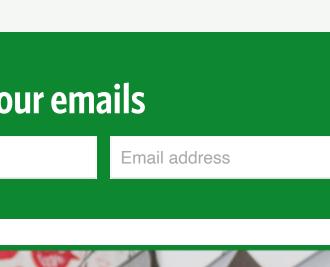
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