May 16, 2008

Michael Knapp
Chair, Transportation Planning Board Scenarios Task Force
c/o Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street NE Suite 300
Washington DC 20002

Dear Mr. Knapp:

We are writing to provide comments on the Scenario Study currently underway by the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) Scenarios Task Force. The findings of the TPB Scenario Study will be essential to meeting our local and regional emissions of conventional air pollutants, but perhaps will be even more critical to addressing the CO_2 goals we are trying to establish as a region. It seems reasonable to anticipate carbon caps and carbon pricing at some point in the near future and these scenarios could be significant in suggesting the options that will allow our region to thrive in an increasingly carbon-constrained economy.

These scenarios are also essential to guiding our investments in a transportation system that can support our anticipated growth, buffer our residents and businesses from rising energy costs, provide the choices and quality of life that our citizens desire, and avoid infrastructure investments that may be a poor match with our future needs. The Study will be a key planning tool for the District of Columbia as well as the many other jurisdictions in the region.

There are two main issues that have not yet been addressed although they have come up in several of the briefings/presentations given on this study – increasing energy prices and bicycle and pedestrian capacity in the region.

Increasing Energy Prices

The first issue is about the basic assumptions that underpin these scenarios. Currently, the scenarios assume that energy prices, particularly gasoline prices, will rise at the historic rate of inflation. That assumption is drastically out of line with

what most experts predict will happen, for the primary reason that global demand is accelerating at a record pace at a time when worldwide inventories are generally declining.

The latest Energy Information Administration data suggests that world-wide consumption will increase 37% by 2030, which puts demand at approximately 118 million barrels a day (note that daily oil consumption in 2006 was 86 million barrels.) The lion's share of new demand is coming from the developing world. China is on track to double consumption within 10 years, while India is expected to triple its oil usage in the same period to more than 5 million barrels a day.

A number of factors that would reduce supply are also in play. Many experts predict that we are within 10 – 15 years of reaching global peak oil production, if we have not already peaked. Oil-exporting countries are becoming increasingly likely to "hold back" oil from the international export markets, opting to keep it at home literally to fuel domestic growth or to increase their profits from higher prices.

Admittedly, MWCOG would be in uncharted territory in making any predictions about either future energy prices or the rate of trip generation or mode split that would result from various price scenarios. But even at this early stage, price is affecting driving behavior. For the first time in more than 20 years, Americans cut back on their driving in 2007. Total travel fell 0.4 percent to 3.00 trillion miles from 3.01 trillion miles in 2006. In December 2007, when U.S. retail gasoline averaged $3.02 a gallon, travel fell 3.9 percent to 236.6 billion miles from 246.3 billion miles in December 2006. With gasoline prices still climbing, other data shows Americans are responding – not only are they driving less, but they are buying more fuel-efficient vehicles and utilizing more public transportation. Daily ridership on U.S. subways and public buses is at the highest level in more than 50 years.

TPB should consider collaborating with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and the American Planning Association and with the most pre-eminent transportation researchers to help answer these questions, not just for our region, but for every other metropolitan planning organization who is doing long range transportation

planning. For example, the Southern California Area Governments (SCAG) has initially adjusted their energy assumptions to be ***three times*** the rate of historic inflation. Preliminary results of SCAG's scenarios work reveals that assumption falls woefully short of where energy prices have already gone. Across the country, gasoline prices have increased 40% since November 2005. It is recommended even if the precise price adjustment rate is not known, using an assumption that is known to be inaccurate will suggest transportation investments that may be wildly inappropriate for our region.

Bike and Pedestrian Capacity in the Region

Secondly, the scenarios may better reflect the tools and options jurisdictions have at their disposal to influence transportation and land use decisions if there was greater consideration given to walking and bicycling modes, and to the potential to change the mode choices of our existing residents. One of the real competitive advantages of our region is that there are so many mixed-use development centers that could accommodate a shift in travel mode to bike or walk with relative ease. A major opportunity for VMT and carbon reduction is the 40% of daily trips taken that are 3 miles or less. These trips have a high potential to be shifted into walk or bike trips in many regions. However, the existing modeling capability needs to be upgraded in order to fully account for bike and walk trips. Most conventional 4-step transportation models emphasize transit and car trips and largely ignore bike and walk trips. Some regions have used additional models for biking and walking and then used those model outputs as inputs to the 4-step model. This is particularly important in this region like as development is increasingly directed into mixed-use centers that could accommodate a shift in travel mode to bike or walk.

The following recommendations are in regards to the "CLRP Aspirations" and "What Would it Take?" scenarios presented at the TPB meeting on April 16th.

CLRP Aspirations

- *Measures of Effectiveness.* Measures should also include pedestrian and bicycle access. Can land use density be added as a proxy measure for the feasibility of waking, cycling & transit use?
- *Menu of Options.* More options that impact the mode choice of the existing travel base (such as pricing, incentives, education, expanded service) should be examined. Can an estimate of the percentage of current motor vehicle trips expected to convert to alternative modes based on these strategies as well as some measure of the capacity of streets, trails, paths and sidewalks to absorb these trips be developed?
- *Building the Scenario*: In addition to supportive transit, we would like to see investment in bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Under pricing, can the impact of increased costs for gas or parking be tested?

"What Would it Take?" Scenario

Prioritizing Strategies. Interventions not included in the "U.S. Mid-Range Abatement Curve – 2030" from the McKinsey analysis that have the potential to convert short motor vehicle trips (under 2-3 miles) to walk/bike/transit trips should be considered. Short and mid-term strategies may include incentives (employer transit benefits and creative parking benefits), disincentives (parking costs, congestion, increased penalties for speeding and failing to yield the right-of-way), facilities/services (more bike-sharing, pedestrian-oriented signal timing, express bus service). Likewise, roadway pricing and parking pricing should be added as cost-effective strategies that are likely to generate revenues while reducing carbon emissions.

It may also be beneficial to combine these two scenarios prior to the implementation or "how to" stage of the Study's process. This region has agreed to emissions goals, and it is most likely that jurisdictions will need to implement the land use and transportation projects "within reach" in addition to other intervention strategies to meet these goals.

We look forward to continued discussion on these scenarios and appreciate the COG and TPB efforts in this endeavor and are prepared to facilitate further conversations with national resources that may be able to assist us. We have the reputation of being one of the country's leading metropolitan planning organizations; this is a critical time for us to exercise that leadership.

Sincerely,

Honorable Phil Mendelson
Chair of Transportation Planning Board
Councilmember At-Large, Council of the District of Columbia

Harriet Tregoning
Director, District of Columbia Office of Planning

Emeka Moneme
Director, District of Columbia Department of Transportation

Chris Zimmerman
Member, Arlington (VA) County Board of Supervisors

Nat Bottigheimer
Assistant General Manager, Planning and Joint Development
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

cc: Ronald F. Kirby Director, MWCOG Department of Transportation Planning