

NORTHERN VIRGINIA TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chair Phyllis J. Randall and Members
Northern Virginia Transportation Authority

FROM: Monica Backmon, Executive Director

DATE: June 3, 2021

SUBJECT: National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board Proposed Resolution

Purpose: To inform the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) Resolution to be considered at their June 16, 2021, meeting.

Background: The TPB is responsible for developing/updating the National Capital Region's Constrained Long Range Plan (CLRP) called Visualize 2045, and conducting the air quality conformity determination on the plan every four years. The current Visualize 2045 plan was adopted by the TPB in November 2018, is set to expire in December 2022. The TPB has initiated the update to Visualize 2045. As part of this update; in December 2020, the TPB adopted the Visualize 2045 Update: Technical Inputs Solicitation which requires:

- A reduction in vehicle miles traveled and associated emissions in Visualize 2045 to achieve new interim GHG reduction goals and new climate resiliency goals.

At their June 16th meeting, the TPB is scheduled to take action on Resolution R19-2021, to approve the project submissions for inclusion in, and the scope of work for, the Air Quality Conformity Analysis for the 2022 Update to Visualize 2045.

Additionally, the TPB will also consider a resolution which suggests an alternative conformity analyses, alongside the one for Visualize 2045 long-range transportation plan's constrained element, with a different set of projects designed to achieve the region's GHG reduction goals as well as, develop and include an Alternative Build Scenario as part of the current Visualize 2045 update process.

Per the draft resolution submitted by Montgomery County (see attachment), the proposed Alternate Build Scenario would aim to achieve TPB climate and equity goals through the use of transportation demand management, transit, and land use strategies consistent with regional policy goals, a modified regional project list that reduces the number and scale of road capacity expansion projects in accordance with anticipated reduced travel demand, and with particular focus on public transportation and pedestrian/bicycle improvements needed to serve mobility disadvantaged populations.

The Authority, which is supportive of the TPB's climate and equity goals, has already invested or committed \$2.5 billion in regional multimodal transportation projects that will accomplish the following goals: Enhance quality of life and economic strength of Northern Virginia through transportation; Enable optimal use of the transportation network and leverage the existing network; Reduce negative impacts of transportation on communities and the environment. These goals are accomplished through:

- Reduce congestion and crowding experienced by travelers in the region;
- Improve travel time reliability;
- Improve access to jobs, employees, markets and destinations;
- Improve connections among and within areas of concentrated growth;
- Improve the safety of the transportation network;
- Provide more route and mode options to expand travel choices and improve resiliency of the system;
- Sustain and improve operation of the regional system;
- Reduce transportation-related emissions

The deadline for approval of the conformity determination for the Visual 2045 update by the Federal Highway (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA), is December 2022. There are significant questions regarding the recently proposed Alternative Build Scenario impact on this schedule/deadline. The TPB Chair sent a letter to the FHWA and FTA requesting an extension of this deadline.

If the joint federal agency approval is not received by December 2022, or an extension, the flow of funding (federal, state, regional, local, etc.) for regionally significant projects could be impacted

Projects funded by the Authority are regionally significant in nature and are submitted to the TPB to be included in an air quality conformity assessment. In addition to NVTA regional revenues, these projects usually have other funding sources including federal funds. As such, NVTA staff have questions about the ability of these projects to advance if the TPB does not meet the December 2022 deadline, or receive an extension.

Next Steps: Given that NVTA is not a member of the TPB but the primary funding entity of regionally significant projects in Northern Virginia, many of which are in active stages of implementation, it is important to understand the potential impacts of the proposed Alternate Build Scenario on already adopted and potential future projects given the Authority's mandate to reduce congestion.

NVTA staff will continue to coordinate with TPB staff and other relevant agencies as well as NVTA member jurisdictions to understand and report the impacts of the TPB Alternate Build Scenario on projects adopted in current and future Authority funded Six Year Programs that are submitted to the TPB for air quality conformity analysis. As a Region, Northern Virginia needs to the answers to the following questions:

1. Will the TPB create a new process to determine the selection criteria for the Alternate Build Scenario or will the same process currently used for Visualize 2045 be implemented?
2. Can a project be deleted from the Visualize 2045 Plan if a contract is already in place or if some expenditures have already be made, e.g. for PE/design and/or Right of Way, construction phases? Does this create any potential legal contract/legal issues? What are the impacts on NVTA member jurisdictions as well as current and future NVTA funding programs?
3. As the FHWA and FTA require that regionally significant projects be included in the air quality conformity determination, would the TPB adoption of the Alternate Build Scenario be considered a planning exercise or one in which the TPB would like to implement? Are there concerns regarding federal requirements?
4. Since the TPB is not a funding entity, and projects in the CLRP are required to demonstrate a "reasonable expectation of funding," how will the TPB seek concurrence from project sponsors on their commitment to advance projects identified in the Alternate Build Scenario?

Attachment: Draft TPB Resolution

WHEREAS, in December, the board of TPB voted 22 to 0 (with 8 abstentions) to "require its member agencies to prioritize investments on projects, programs, and policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, prioritize the aspirational strategies, and achieve COG's land use and equity goals..." and further recognized in the Technical Inputs Solicitation that meeting adopted greenhouse gas emissions targets "...will require a reduction in vehicle miles traveled and associated emissions in Visualize 2045;" and

WHEREAS, the draft Visualize 2045 project list is largely the same as the 2018 plan, which included \$40 billion in highway expansion but only \$24 billion in transit expansion. While transit operating investments are higher than those for highways, this is partially due to the fact that the costs of driving are not fully accounted for by TPB. Other costs include police/fire/emergency response for highways which are not counted as part of the highway agency budgets, nor are the negative health care costs of vehicle pollution, or the much higher personal household costs of driving compared to transit/walk/bike; and

WHEREAS, public input for Visualize 2045 showed that 84% of the region's residents agree that "elected officials need to consider the impacts of climate change when planning transportation in the future." The survey results also showed that the region's residents want to walk and bike more, drive less, and support transit if it is frequent and reliable; and

WHEREAS, while the currently proposed conformity analysis would use 2014 telecommuting rates, 2019 telecommuting rates were already noticeably higher than 2014 rates and post-pandemic rates are expected to be even higher than 2019 levels, possibly significantly so. Just a 5% decline in peak-hour traffic can return congested roadways to free-flow conditions; and

WHEREAS, the pandemic has demonstrated how critical transit is for our essential workforce in such fields as health care, grocery, shipping, maintenance, and more. It also showed that lower-income households live on very thin financial margins and that more transit along with free fares are investments that will help these families save money, buy food, pay rent, and build savings; and

WHEREAS, the urgency of the climate crisis means that the TPB region cannot put off creating a Visualize 2045 plan that commits to meeting greenhouse gas and vehicle miles reduction targets until the next long-range plan cycle. TPB and COG have the expertise, staff capacity, resources, time, and stakeholders at the table to develop a plan that adequately addresses the region's sustainability and equity goals now.

WHEREAS, the Council of Governments and TPB have been working to promote more mixed-use, walkable communities, affordable housing, and the extension of bus rapid transit.

NOW, THEREFORE, the TPB shall develop and include an alternative Build scenario in its conformity modeling process that aims to achieve TPB climate and equity goals through the use of transportation demand management, transit, and land use strategies consistent with regional

policy goals, a modified regional project list that reduces the number and scale of road capacity expansion projects in accordance with the anticipated reduced travel demand, and with particular focus on public transportation and pedestrian/bicycle improvements needed to serve mobility disadvantaged populations; and

The conformity modeling for the No-Build and two Build scenarios will measure the impact of induced demand, and use updated telecommuting patterns, and, as needed, sensitivity testing for a range of plausible post-pandemic telecommuting scenarios; and

The alternative Build scenario will meet federal conformity requirements such that TPB would have the option of adopting the scenario as its Long-Range Transportation Plan following the conformity modeling process and subsequent public comment period.

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