

## 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

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**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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 a 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? What are the impacts on NVTAs member jurisdictions as well as current and future NVTAs 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 commitments to advance projects identified in the Alternate Build Scenario?

Attachment: Draft TPB Resolution



# Attachment

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND**

**EVAN GLASS**  
COUNCILMEMBER  
AT-LARGE

TRANSPORTATION & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE  
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Transportation Planning Board

**FROM:** Evan Glass, Montgomery County Councilmember

**DATE:** June 9, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Resolution

The purpose of this resolution is to ensure that the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) has the information it needs to make decisions congruent with our adopted climate goals as we consider Visualize 2045.

Since introduction of the resolution at the TPB's May meeting, I have amended the resolution text to reflect input from stakeholders and TPB colleagues.

The attached updated resolution text includes the following revisions:

1. Language stating that the Alternative No-Build and Alternative Build scenarios will be modeled using the regional travel model, which is a lower threshold than the federal conformity requirements.
2. Language clarifying that TPB members will not be required to remove projects from the current draft project list.
3. Added language calling for an Alternative No-Build scenario that applies additional transportation demand management (TDM) and land use measures to TPB staff's No-Build scenario.
4. Additional language calling for an Alternative Build scenario that incorporates TDM and land use measures in conjunction with new transit projects, while omitting road expansions.
5. A recommendation to test a range of telecommuting scenarios.

The TPB put transit-oriented development at the center of its regional vision 11 years ago. As we consider Visualize 2045 goals today, *we must continue prioritizing sustainable regional mobility and land use patterns to meet our aggressive targets for greenhouse gas and vehicle miles travelled reduction.*

In 2018, TPB led various models analyzing green transit investments and their impact on travel. We need to build on these efforts and develop a more comprehensive analysis that works in tandem with Visualize 2045. Those prior efforts were different in scope than the Build model being considered by TPB staff for Visualize 2045. In order to create an equal comparison between the existing build scenarios in Visualize 2045's transportation and land use models and a climate-friendly alternative, TPB will have the basis for a decision that reflects our shared regional goals of reducing carbon pollution from transportation and cutting emissions.

I ask for your consideration of this resolution so that we may make an informed decision about our environmental and transportation priorities for the future of the region.

**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 model Alternative No-Build and Alternative Build scenarios during its conformity modeling process that aim to achieve TPB climate and equity goals; and

The alternative No-Build scenario will use transportation demand management and land use strategies with the existing base year transit and road network, similar to the regular No-Build scenario, such that the Alternative No-Build scenario would show improvements in per-capita vehicle miles traveled (VMT), non-auto mode share, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and job accessibility compared to the regular No-Build scenario and potentially the regular Build scenario; and

In addition to applying the transportation demand management and land use strategies, the Alternative Build scenario will include a modified regional project list that increases transit investment and reduces the number and scale of road capacity expansion projects in accordance with the anticipated reduced peak travel demand, and with particular focus on public transportation and pedestrian/bicycle improvements needed to serve mobility disadvantaged populations. The Alternative Build scenario will be prepared to show improvements in per-capita VMT, non-auto mode share, GHG emissions, and job accessibility compared to the regular No-Build and Build scenarios. The Alternative No-Build and Build scenarios are also anticipated to show improved travel times and reduced delay relative to the regular scenarios, based on findings from past TPB studies; and

The modeling for the regular No-Build and Build scenarios and the Alternative No-Build and Build scenarios will apply sensitivity testing, outside of the official conformity modeling, for a range of plausible post-pandemic telecommuting scenarios; and

The Alternative No-Build and Alternative Build scenarios will be modeled using the regional travel model but are not intended to meet federal conformity requirements. The Alternative scenarios and telecommuting sensitivity testing are intended to inform TPB Board review and possible revisions to the proposed Long-Range Transportation Plan, consistent with federal requirements, following the conformity modeling process and subsequent public comment period.

# Attachment

## POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD ON LONG-RANGE PLAN AND MEETING CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION GOALS

(6/9/21 Draft)

### Background

The TPB is poised to vote on the transportation projects and polices to be included in the next regional long-range transportation plan (2022 update of the LRTP) at its June meeting. If approved as is, it is expected to meet all federal requirements and contains projects that have been officially acted upon and sanctioned by the implementing agencies and associated parties. While this proposed plan makes continued progress on most TPB priorities, it appears to fall well short of the climate change mitigation goal adopted by both COG and many of the member jurisdictions. TPB staff notes that, currently, there are no federal climate change mitigation requirements for the TPB's plan, other than the air quality conformity assessment associated with criteria pollutants that are covered under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).

Various alternative actions have been discussed to secure increased greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions from the plan. One would be to delay the LRTP approval until later next year, given that the TPB's Climate Change Mitigation Study (CCMS) is due to be completed in December 2021. That action, however, appears infeasible given that the TPB's request for an extension of the deadline to update the plan was denied by both the FHWA and the FTA. Additionally, this option has been questioned due to potential delays on many transportation projects (highway and transit) in the region. Another action discussed is to create and adopt an alternate plan, as the LRTP, that would meet the climate change mitigation goals. That action, however, has been questioned as well, by the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA), among others, and it is not clear who would develop the alternate plan, what process would be used to develop the plan, how this alternate plan would be able to meet the stringent federal fiscal constraint requirements, what would be the potential negative impacts on the current set of projects already in and proposed by the member agencies for inclusion in the plan, and, finally, whether TPB staff would have the capacity to carry out this added work, given the staff's current federal work commitments.

The TPB and its member jurisdictions are committed to addressing climate change through mitigation and adaption actions to achieve climate goals established in both COG plans and local government plans. The land use and transportation investments of recent years, while supportive of this commitment, must be significantly enhanced and accelerated to achieve our climate change goals. To this end, building on its past work, the TPB, with expert consultant assistance, is working on the TPB CCMS, which will test alternative pathways to achieving transportation-sector, GHG reduction goals associated with 2030 and 2050. As noted above, findings from the CCMS are expected to be discussed in December. That study is expected to lay out what specific actions the region's transportation sector must take, such as VMT reduction and converting vehicle fleet to cleaner fuel, and the levels of outcomes needed from such actions to reduce GHG in the transportation sector commensurate with the region's climate goals.

### Proposed Actions



1. Adopt the proposed plan (2022 update of the LRTP) upon completion of the regional air quality conformity assessment in recognition that the plan makes some progress on climate change issues. The proposed plan includes projects that have been thoroughly vetted and publicly supported, and for which, implementing agencies have identified available funding. Given the federal requirements of updating the LRTP every four years, any delay could endanger these projects and raise the kinds of serious operational questions posed by NVTA.
2. TPB member jurisdictions commit to completing the TPB Climate Change Mitigation Study and review it thoroughly at the regional and jurisdictional levels through the first quarter of 2022.
3. TPB member jurisdictions formally commit to assisting the TPB to develop a set of transportation policies and projects, by the end of 2022, which would be implementable at the jurisdictional and regional levels, consistent with the recommendations of the Climate Change Mitigation Study, that, when fully implemented, will assure the region will meet its climate change mitigation goals.
4. TPB member jurisdictions and agencies commit to take actions to officially adopt the projects and polices developed to attain the region's climate goals within the transportation sector, and advance these projects into the region's LRTP beginning with a mid-term update in 2024.