"Transportation Challenges in Metropolitan Areas"

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Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Ronald Kirby, and I am the Director of Transportation Planning for the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG). I greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today.

The Transportation Planning Board was formed in 1965 in response to a requirement of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 for the establishment of official Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). In 1966 the TPB became associated with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, which provides support for the TPB's MPO activities and responsibilities in the Washington Metropolitan Area. The TPB is one of 385 MPOs currently serving urbanized areas throughout the nation, and is an active member of the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO).

Membership of the TPB includes representatives of the transportation agencies of the states of Maryland and Virginia and the District of Columbia, 20 local governments, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the Maryland and Virginia General Assemblies, and non-voting members from the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority and federal agencies; 40 board members in all. Most board actions are taken by one vote per voting member, although a population-weighted voting procedure is used if requested by any voting member.

The long-range transportation plan developed by the TPB must meet several federal requirements related to the federal SAFETEA-LU transportation authorization bill passed in 2005. The bill established new requirements and reaffirmed existing rules for metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in developing long-range transportation plans. Key planning requirements are:

- Financial Constraint:

  The long-range plan must be based on revenue sources that are "reasonably expected to be available."

- Air Quality Conformity:

  Projects in the plan taken collectively must contribute to air quality improvement goals for the region.

- Public Participation:

  Adequate information and public comment opportunities must be provided.

- Environmental Justice:

  The plan is assessed for impacts on low-income, minority and disabled populations.

- Congestion Management:

  The plan includes strategies to ensure that existing and future transportation facilities are used efficiently in order to reduce the need for highway capacity increases for single-occupant vehicles.

- Transportation Safety:

  SAFETEA-LU added safety as a separate factor to be considered in the creation of the plan.

- Freight Planning:

  Full consideration is given to freight and goods movement.

- Environmental Consultation and Mitigation:

  Natural resource, conservation, environmental protection and historic preservation agencies are consulted regarding the development of the plan.

The transportation challenges facing the Washington Metropolitan Area are common to many large growing metropolitan areas throughout the country. Over the current forecast period of 2008 through 2030, increases in population and jobs of 26 percent and 31 percent respectively will lead to additional vehicles, trips, and congestion on the region's transportation system.

Given funding constraints, highway lane miles are expected to increase by only 13 percent, while VMT is expected to rise 23 percent, resulting in a 41 percent rise in lane miles of congestion. Nearly all of this increased congestion will occur in the suburbs, with the inner suburbs experiencing the worst congestion in the region. The outer suburbs will experience the most dramatic increase in congestion, with a more than 100 percent increase in lane miles of congestion by 2030. Transit work trips are forecast to increase by 31 percent, as an increasing number of people are expected to use transit to commute to work. This will create even more crowding on the Metrorail system, since the ability of the region to expand transit capacity is limited by funding constraints.

Emissions of ozone precursors and fine particulates from motor vehicles are declining steadily due primarily to cleaner vehicles and fuels, and the region is on track to attain national standards for these pollutants. Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles continue to increase, however. While the recently adopted CAFÉ standards will reduce the rate of growth in greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles, future emissions will still be well above current levels unless additional reduction strategies are adopted. To achieve significant reductions in greenhouse gases, such strategies must include a combination of more fuel-efficient vehicles, alternatives to petroleum-based fuels, and changes in travel behavior. We have yet to identify a set of strategies that will come close to achieving the reduction in greenhouse gases that we are told will be needed over the next several decades.

In order to ensure that long-range transportation plans meet the SAFETEA-LU financial constraint requirement, MPOs conduct comprehensive analyses of the construction, preservation, and operations costs of all existing and new facilities in their plans, as well as of all the revenues that are "reasonably expected to be available." In the Washington region, 70 percent of all available revenues are needed for system operations and preservation; only 30 percent can be applied to new capacity. One of the major challenges currently facing states, MPOs, and transit agencies is rapid escalation in construction and maintenance costs. Cost increases of 13 percent per year over the past few years have in many cases more than offset the modest increases in overall transportation funding levels during that period. Since operations and preservation are top priorities, cost increases and funding limitations result in fewer resources for new capacity.

Transportation revenues projected to be available to the Washington region over the period of the long-range plan come from several different sources: federal (27 percent), state (32 percent), local government (17 percent), transit fares (17 percent), and tolls (7 percent). The share of funding from tolls has grown from just one percent in 2003 to seven percent currently due to the addition of three major new highway projects which will have tolls that vary by time of day to manage congestion: the Inter-County Connector in Suburban Maryland, and High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes on the Capital Beltway and I-95/395 in Northern Virginia.

While the TPB is currently analyzing future scenarios with more extensive use of highway pricing, our studies indicate that toll revenues would be needed to finance construction, operation, and preservation of the toll facilities, along with expanded transit facilities to provide alternatives to travelers unwilling or unable to pay the tolls. Such toll revenues would not in any way substitute for other sources of transportation funding, all of which will need to be sustained and increased if the region's transportation challenges are to be addressed.

The federal share of the overall funding stream plays a critical role in supporting the preservation, maintenance, and expansion of major highway and transit facilities throughout the region. The TPB is counting on a continuing strong federal role and partnership to address the region's transportation challenges.

A number of proposals and recommendations are currently being advanced for refocusing the federal surface transportation program on key national priorities when the program is reauthorized next year. From the perspective of the Washington region three major goals stand out as national priorities around which the federal program could be structured:

- Preservation and operation of the existing system.
- High value Investments in new infrastructure capacity; and
- Support for metropolitan areas to address pressing congestion, environmental and social challenges.

Ensuring the structural integrity, safety and reliability of the nation's primary highway, transit and intercity freight and passenger rail systems is essential to economic growth, environmental quality, and social development. States and local governments need the strong financial support and partnership of the federal government in preservation and operations of existing systems, most of which were built largely with federal funding. In the Washington region increased federal funding and participation is urgently needed to help preserve and maintain the Metrorail system, upon which much of the region's commuting and other economic and social activity depends.

The nation currently lacks a rational, robust program structure for prioritizing and providing financial support to high value investments in new infrastructure capacity. With the mid-twentieth century goals of building the Interstate highway system and recapitalizing urban transit systems accomplished, it is time to replace the modally-oriented program delivery structure designed around those earlier purposes with one suited to the challenges of today and tomorrow. A mode-neutral federal discretionary program is needed to select and support infrastructure investments aimed at critical chokepoints in surface passenger and freight transportation systems. "Mode-neutral" is essential for this program: sometimes the best investment to address a highway congestion problem may be new transit capacity or relief of a bottleneck on the inter-city freight rail system. It makes no sense to try to address the challenges of a major urban corridor with separate modal programs, each with its own evaluation criteria and program requirements.

In the Washington region we would welcome the opportunity to submit to the US Department of Transportation multi-modal investment packages for evaluation under comprehensive benefit/cost criteria which reflect national as well as state and local priorities. Federal financial participation and partnership is critical to the provision of major infrastructure improvements such as the Woodrow Wilson Bridges, extension of Metrorail to Dulles International Airport, support for major BRAC-related land development in the region, and even for some tolled facilities such as the Inter County Connector. Setting up a new federal mode-neutral discretionary program to replace

the current patchwork of modal programs and earmarks is certainly a major undertaking. However, there is an abundance of expertise, experience, and interest within the transportation community and other public and private sector programs which could be focused on this endeavor as part of the coming reauthorization cycle.

MPOs have long believed that in addition to formula funding for metropolitan planning, the federal transportation program should provide formula-based funding directly to metropolitan areas for project selection and implementation. Such funding would empower metropolitan areas to turn strategies developed in response to federal planning requirements such as those listed earlier into real projects "on the ground."

A relatively small-scale but nevertheless ground-breaking provision of the SAFETEA-LU legislation provides a model for how a new metropolitan transportation program could be structured and administered. Prior to SAFETEA-LU the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) discretionary program administered by the Federal Transit Program for metropolitan areas had become unwieldy and heavily earmarked. SAFETEA-LU restructured JARC along with a new "New Freedom" program into formula programs allocated to metropolitan areas in accordance with urbanized area population. Metropolitan areas were required to designate recipients who could administer these programs through a transparent and competitive project selection process. The TPB was among the first of almost 30 MPOs that sought and received these designations. As a result, for the first time in its forty-year history the TPB is now a direct recipient of federal program funds for the implementation of capital and operating projects, and can move forward directly with strategies developed in response to the planning process and stakeholder input.

While these JARC and New Freedom programs are quite small in dollar terms (just a few million dollars annually for the entire Washington region), they have led to the creation of a program delivery mechanism that could be the basis for a much broader and more comprehensive program of project selection and implementation at the metropolitan level. A number of other disparate elements of the current federal program could be "bundled" together with JARC and New Freedom into a metropolitan program that would bring project selection and implementation closer to the local government and stakeholder groups who are their main constituents and beneficiaries. Examples include funding devoted to such priorities as mobile source emissions reduction; pedestrian safety; coordination of transportation operations and incident management; promotion of commuter ridesharing, telecommuting, and other alternatives to the single-occupant vehicle; and, perhaps most important of all, the coordination of transportation and land use planning at the local and metropolitan levels.

The forthcoming reauthorization of federal surface transportation legislation provides an opportunity to replace the current overly complex, unwieldy, and outdated program structure with a new program structure designed to respond to current national, state, and local transportation priorities. I hope my suggested "three-goal"

program structure will make a constructive contribution to the extensive ongoing discussions already focused on redesigning and streamlining the federal surface transportation program.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to express the appreciation of the MPO community for the strong and growing support the Congress has provided for metropolitan transportation planning in the ISTEA, TEA-21, and SAFETEA-LU authorizations. Federal planning resources and requirements in these bills have provided a firm foundation for MPOs to assume increased responsibilities, not only for planning but also for some key new components of program delivery that could help in the near term to address the transportation challenges facing our metropolitan areas.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to testify before you this morning.