

January 14, 2021

The Honorable Phyllis Randall
Chair
Northern Virginia Transportation Authority
3040 Williams Drive
Suite 200
Fairfax, VA 22031

Re: Feedback on regional transportation focus areas in 2021 and how to best tackle traffic congestion in the region, through a multimodal approach

Dear Chair Randall and members of the Authority:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. This is the extended version of the testimony that I summarized this evening.

We urge in the strongest possible terms a significant reappraisal in 2021 of NVT Authority priorities, shifting to a focus on reducing vehicle miles traveled in order to fight climate change, increase the sustainability of Northern Virginia, and enhance racial and economic equity, safety, and economic competitiveness. Your 6-year plan and your long-range TransAction plan must be tied to a focus on transit-oriented centers, 15-minute mixed-use walkable neighborhoods, conservation of remaining rural land, addressing the needs of residents of COG's Equity Emphasis Areas, and funding transit and local street connections and bicycle-pedestrian infrastructure instead of further expansion of highways and arterials.

Recently, local officials meeting at the Transportation Planning Board committed to reducing vehicle miles traveled, and to require member jurisdictions to prioritize transportation investments that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve the land use and equity goals of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC). The vote was 22 to 1 with 7 abstentions. Since that time the Commissioner of VDOT, Stephen Brich, has transmitted a letter indicating VDOT's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and indicating that their No vote was an error.

We recognize that Loudoun and Prince William Counties, and the Cities of Manassas and Manassas Park abstained out of concern about "requiring prioritization of projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions," but we note that the competitive future of all jurisdictions is best met by creating and supporting walkable, mixed-use, transit-oriented centers and there are a number of locations in outer suburban communities where this is possible. We also note that the costs of failing to address climate change are immense, including flooding in local communities, higher air pollution and heatwaves, resulting in health issues and even increased loss of life.

We also urge all NVT Authority jurisdictions to recognize that “congestion reduction” is not really possible in a vibrant metropolitan area like ours, and the undue focus on this metric is leading to the wasting of billions of dollars. This is because induced demand is a very real and confirmed result of highway and arterial expansion, filling up new capacity in as little as five years. The roads-focus is contributing to spread-out development and auto-dependent communities. In contrast, a TOD future provides many more options for accessing daily needs without driving. Combine this with the growth in telecommuting, and we can significantly reduce highway and arterial expansion.

The pandemic has exposed our equity crisis, with far too many people who make less than 50% of area median income, facing severe housing and transportation cost burdens. Black and Latino members of our community are disproportionately impacted. Investing far more into transit and safer streets, and fixing infrastructure in lower-income communities (COG Equity Emphasis Areas) should be a NVT Authority priority.

Our specific recommendations for the NVT Authority include the following, along with supportive points:

- **Prioritize climate change**
 - Sustainability is a NVT Authority core value.
 - One of the responsibilities of NVT Authority is “Developing, in coordination with affected counties and cities, regional priorities and policies to improve air quality” - this includes carbon pollution.
 - Transportation has the largest share of GHG in the region and most of that is from passenger cars.
 - TPB adopted the MWCOG climate target and has changed its long-range plan project submission to require that member agencies prioritize projects that reduce greenhouse gases.
 - Several of NVT Authority member jurisdictions are updating their own climate plans, recognizing the need to achieve significant reductions by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050.
 - Fall 2020 survey results of 2,400 regional respondents collected by TPB suggest that addressing climate change is a larger priority in our transportation plans than addressing congestion:
 - While 83% said that congestion was of concern, less than half of all respondents (44%) said that it is a significant concern that impacts their quality of life.
 - In contrast, 84% of respondents agree, and **72% strongly agree**, that elected officials need to consider the impacts of climate change when planning for the future.
 - Climate change only counted for 10% of the previous TransAction scoring – this existential threat to our region and world needs to be given much more weight.
- **Reducing VMT and increasing non-auto mode share are essential**
 - We can't rely solely on electric vehicles (CSG can provide the supporting data).

- TPB has recognized the need to reduce VMT to achieve the region's climate targets and has made these required elements of its project submissions.
 - Planning measures need to measure total VMT, not just congested and high-speed VMT.
 - Quantify GHG and whether the plan helps achieve regional climate targets.
 - The “bottoms-up” project identification in TransAction considers consistency with core values, so this must consider whether projects will be consistent with achieving regional climate targets – meaning not just whether they reduce congested VMT relative to the future baseline, but whether they help achieve more significant VMT reductions.
 - Projects that reduce the need to drive and increase non-auto mode share also support NVT Authority core values of safety and equity by allowing residents and workers to meet their daily needs with safer and cheaper travel.
- **TransAction needs to consider regional housing targets and climate action plans**
 - The TransAction demographic and land use collection task needs to review adopted regional and local jurisdiction housing targets, and climate action plans at the regional and local level. Adopted regional land use policies include locating 75% of new housing in activity centers with high-capacity transit.
 - **TransAction Scenario analysis needs to include – from the beginning – a transit-oriented development/rural conservation + transit + demand management VMT and GHG reducing scenario, with a project package crafted for it.**
 - Modeling different project networks in the scenario analysis from the very beginning provides a powerful way to help evaluate and prioritize projects.
 - In the last TransAction update, staff did modeling scenarios AFTER modeling one single project package -- a package with so many projects (350) that it remains unaffordable (\$43B). Instead, this time, two project packages (one of which is the TOD scenario) must be created up front and each modeled separately.

Sincerely,



Stewart Schwartz
Coalition for Smarter Growth