



November 14, 2023

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
Transportation Planning Board
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002

Re: PBPP Draft Highway Safety Targets & Suggestions for Visualize 2050

Dear Transportation Planning Board Members,

The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) and the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG) – two of the region’s leading advocates for walkable, bikeable, inclusive, and transit-oriented communities – respectfully write to provide comment on the ongoing and disturbing traffic fatality and serious injury trends highlighted by TPB staff in their draft *Annual Regional Transit and Highway Safety Targets* report and presentation.

In summary:

- A 15% increase in Nonmotorist Fatalities and Serious Injuries over the past five years – and an almost 23% increase since last year – is not acceptable
- We ask TPB members to make safety investments a higher priority, particularly for vulnerable road users, in their Visualize 2050 project submissions
- Safety is “regionally significant” and packages of safe street improvements for people walking, biking, and accessing transit in each jurisdiction should be reflected in the Visualize 2050 plan

For decades, WABA and CSG have worked to transform the capital region by improving the conditions for people who bike, walk, and take transit. Our efforts to advocate for better infrastructure, pass laws that promote safe roadway behavior, and provide education programming for all road-users have resulted in a drastically different cultural and political approach to active transportation. Biking and walking can and should be an equitable, safe, low-cost, time-saving, and sustainable way to navigate our communities for all residents, especially when complemented by robust transit options.

Unfortunately, our work to promote bicycling and other modes of active transportation is seriously undercut by pernicious and persistent road safety issues sadly and succinctly captured on slide 16 of the aforementioned staff report. As we prepare to mark the [World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims](#) this Sunday, November 19th, we must soberly grapple

with the fact that our region is failing its commitments to its residents, with traffic violence increasing rather than decreasing particularly for people on foot and bike.

We cannot let past failures deter us from the opportunities to do better going forward.

Your agencies are *right now* deciding on the projects they will submit to the regional long-range transportation plan, Visualize 2050. In your project submissions next month, we ask TPB members to make safety investments a higher priority, particularly for vulnerable road users.

The previous long-range transportation plan, Visualize 2045, aimed to spend \$28 billion on creating faster, wider, roads – envisioning 900 new lane miles. So we know there are resources available; what we need now is to repurpose some of those resources and political will to support more urgent safety and other needs. While some of the \$28 billion in road expansion projects incorporate new sidewalks and multi-use paths along the right of way, most of them lead to longer crossing distances across ever wider multi-lane arterials and higher volumes of cars traveling at higher speeds on area roads.

We recognize that many small local projects are not always reflected in the regional long-range plan as they are not considered to be “regionally significant”. We would counter that safety is absolutely “regionally significant” and that packages of safe street improvements for people walking, biking, and accessing transit in each jurisdiction should be reflected in the plan. This would be one small but important way of demonstrating a renewed regional commitment to meeting the travel and safety needs of all roadway users. Local efforts remain critical, too, and we implore you to prioritize the safety needs of those on bike and foot in your individual jurisdictions’ transportation plans, infrastructure designs, and budgets.

The scourge of traffic violence cannot be solved overnight. We have taken the first step by recognizing the scope and seriousness of the problem. What must follow is a steadfast resolve to act differently, to lean further into people-centered approaches to transportation planning, and to resist the urge to fall back into the familiar ruts of a car-centered paradigm. The lives of your constituents and neighbors depend on it.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments and look forward to working with you towards a future without traffic violence.

Respectfully,

Michelle Shin

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Bill Pugh, AICP CTP

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