



Public Comment Provided on April 17, 2024 at the Transportation Planning Board Meeting

Good afternoon members of the Transportation Planning Board and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Kevin O'Brien and I am testifying on behalf of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) and its more than 5,000 members across the Washington metropolitan area to encourage the Transportation Planning Board to take a more critical look at the Visualize 2050 project list and evaluations to ensure the final plan will adequately deliver on our regions commitments around active transportation improvements, vulnerable road users' safety, and sustainability.

For over fifty years, WABA has worked to transform the capital region by improving the conditions for people who bike. Bicycling can and should be an equitable, safe, low-cost, time-saving, and sustainable way to navigate our communities for all.

As such, we greatly appreciate the critical role that the Transportation Planning Board, its adopted policies and commitments, and its long-range planning process has played in shifting how we think and talk about transportation priorities in the Capital region. But we also fear that the change in language has not been met by a sufficient change in the project selection or evaluation process, which will undoubtedly result in limited change in transportation outcomes in the future.

In particular, we question an evaluation regime that allows jurisdictions to grade their own projects. Almost every road-widening project gets a checkmark for safety – and while some of these car-focused projects add sidewalks and crossing improvements where none previously existed – there is little contemplation on how more lanes, higher-speeds, wider crossing

distances compromises safety in other ways (to say nothing of the impacts on carbon emissions and their associated negative effects).

Compounding this is an inconsistency between highly-scored and highly-touted projects. For example, we have noted road diet projects receiving generally poor marks under the Visualize 2050 scoring rubric nonetheless being touted as vital and worthy of Transportation Alternatives funding. This reflects a seeming disconnect between TPB's stated values (better safety, fewer vehicle miles traveled, and lower carbon emissions) and its metrics (still prioritizing road expansion on the now near-universally debunked theory of 'congestion relief').

We do want to recognize that this process is of course ongoing. The current major project list is focused now on those projects requiring an air quality conformity analysis and thus does not include many of the planned bicycle, pedestrian, trail, and safety projects that do not need such analysis and will be (hopefully) added later. Nonetheless, how we spend our time reflects our priorities, and the bulk of TPB staff time remains stubbornly focused on roads. Highly cost-effective projects like completing the 1,500-mile National Capital Trail Network do not get nearly the same attention or expedited construction timelines as completing the approximately 750 miles of new highway and arterial lanes proposed in Visualize 2050.

The alternative: a recommitment to modal shift and transportation options with renewed focus on effectively moving people rather than cars, on expanding transit capacity and pedestrian spaces and bikeways rather than vehicle lane miles. We therefore encourage the TPB to delay approval of the project list so that staff can do a more comprehensive evaluation of the overall project list that complies with TPB resolution R19-2021. The evaluation should compare the proposed project list with Visualize 2045 and with TPB policies, priority strategies, and in particular TPB's safety and greenhouse gas target and strategies.

Let's take the time to ensure we're setting ourselves on the path to a better future, one that truly enables everyone in our region to get where they need to go safely, sustainably, and conveniently. We look forward to working with you and others towards that kind vision. Thank you again for the opportunity to share this afternoon.