



Visualize 2050 Planning and Programming Process

Bus Transit Planning

Part 19 of 27



National Capital Region
Transportation Planning Board

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OVERVIEW OF BUS TRANSIT PLANNING

The National Capital Region (NCR)'s residents and visitors have access to 15 providers of commuter, local, and regional bus service as well as many intercity bus options. Although more dense and centralized areas like Washington, DC tend to offer users the most direct access to multiple bus services, all corners of the region offer at least two bus service types. This rich and widespread regional transit network benefits significantly from planning coordination to ensure effective and efficient use of resources and broad accessibility. To foster this collaboration, there are a variety of forums within the NCR convening transit agencies to both discuss narrow topics and address greater needs. The TPB is an active participant in many of these groups but also conducts its own bus transit planning activities and facilitates conversations that propel agencies' priorities forward.

TPB'S ROLE AND KEY STAFF

The TPB, as the MPO for the National Capital Region, closely coordinates with the states, local jurisdictions, transit agencies and other organizations in the planning and programming of public transportation improvements. Transit projects using federal funds or those that are regionally significant are included in the National Capital Region Transportation Plan (NCRTP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and in modeling and analysis used to meet federal surface transportation and environmental requirements.

Transit service is a key component included in the regional travel demand model used to forecast future travel demand and meet air quality requirements. The TPB's performance-based planning and programming (PBPP) work also involves significant collaboration with transit agencies, including the setting of regional transit asset management (at least every four years) and transit safety targets (annually) in alignment with local and state targets.

Furthermore, the TPB interfaces with its members on issues related to public transportation, including governance, funding, environment, safety, and other areas of interest. One means of doing this is through the TPB's Regional Public Transportation Subcommittee, originally established as the Regional Bus Subcommittee in 2007 and which is described in more detail later in this chapter. As a result, the TPB passed a resolution in September 2014 declaring itself in compliance with the requirement for increased representation of public transportation on MPOs in the federal Surface Transportation Act Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21). Beyond the federal requirements, the TPB works with its members to develop research and analysis products that offer local and regional planners valuable transportation planning resources. TPB staff that regularly work on bus transit planning topics are noted in Table 19.1.

TABLE 19.1: KEY STAFF

TPB Staff	Title	Role
Kanti Srikanth	Executive Director	Staff Director for the Transportation Planning Board (TPB)
Eric Randall	Principal Transportation Engineer	Contributor
Pierre Gaunard	Transportation Planner	Contributor

Role of TPB Subcommittees

The TPB's Regional Public Transportation Subcommittee (RPTS) is a sub-group of the TPB Technical Committee that meets monthly with membership drawn from the public transportation providers in the National Capital Region. The RPTS serves as a permanent platform for coordinating public transportation, including bus transit planning, and integrating regional transit plans into the NCRTP. The subcommittee reports to the TPB Technical Committee on issues and interests of the region's public transportation providers.

Every RPTS member has an assigned liaison or variety of representatives that participate in the subcommittee. These representatives serve as bridges between TPB staff working on public transportation assignments and member transit agencies. Regional transit-related data requests, general inquiries, and collaborative work typically involve RPTS liaisons at some stage.

At RPTS meetings, members receive briefings on applicable TPB projects and programs, can give feedback on TPB work, share information about each other's operations and ongoing planning, and learn from regional partners and others about their transit-related projects. Lastly, RPTS also leads TPB's planning work related to intercity rail and bus travel, which includes studies of intercity bus and Amtrak passenger rail services.

ROLE OF KEY PLANNING AGENCIES

Due to its multi-state nature and the large number of bus transit operators in the NCR, there are many entities simultaneously involved in bus transit planning. Table 19.2 illustrates which agencies have the most significant planning programs and notes those agencies' key short- to long-term planning documents. More information about how some of these planning documents and major agency initiatives interface with Visualize 2050 and the TPB's broader planning efforts is provided in the following section.

TABLE 19.2: NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION AGENCIES INVOLVED IN BUS TRANSIT PLANNING

Agency	Role	Key Planning Documents
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG)	Along with WMATA, leading the region's DMVMoves transit vision initiative which includes local, regional, and commuter bus services.	Visualize 2050
City of Alexandria	Local Transit Operator	Transit Strategic Plan (TSP) (FY25-FY34) (2024); Alexandria Mobility Plan (2021); Zero Emission Bus Implementation Study (2021)
Arlington County	Local Transit Operator	TSP (FY25-FY34) (2023); Zero Emission Bus Study and Implementation Plan (2023)
Charles County	Local Transit Operator	Transit Development Plan (TDP) (2019)
City of Fairfax	Local Transit Operator	City of Fairfax Comprehensive Plan Multimodal Transportation Plan (Transp. Element) (Adopted 2019, Updated 2022); TDP (FY18-FY23) (2016)
Fairfax County	Local Transit Operator	TSP (FY23-FY33) (2023); County Comprehensive Plan (2017) (Transportation Element, amended 2023)
Frederick County	Local Transit Operator	TDP (2022)
Loudoun County	Local Transit and Commuter Bus Operator	TSP (FY25-FY34) (2024); Countywide Transportation Plan (2019)
Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) – Maryland Transit Administration (MTA)	Commuter Bus Operator	2050 Maryland Transportation Plan (2024); Statewide Transit Plan (2022); MTA Strategic Plan (2021); Bus Cornerstone Plan (2018)
Montgomery County	Local Transit Operator (incl. the Flash BRT service, bus rapid transit)	Zero Emission Bus Transition Plan (2024); Thrive Montgomery 2050 - Transportation Element (2021); MoCo Transit Strategic Plan (2008)
Prince George's County	Local Transit Operator	Transit Vision Plan (2024 pending); Minor Amendment to MTP (2023); Transit Vision Plan (FY18-FY22) (2018); Countywide Master Transportation Plan (2009)

Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC)/OmniRide	Local Transit and Commuter Bus Operator	TSP (FY20-FY29); Omniride Zero Emission Bus Study (2023)
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)	Local Transit Operator (incl. the “Metroway” premium bus service)	Strategic Transformation Plan (2023); Zero Emission Fleet Transition Plan (2023)
VA Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment (OIPI)	Part of the Commonwealth’s Sec. of Transportation office and assists with various transportation planning processes and programming.	VTrans
VA Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT)	Administers statewide transit grant funding and manages related planning.	Virginia Statewide Rail Plan
Local Governments	Involved with bus planning activities within their jurisdiction.	Various

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public outreach at the TPB is handled in multiple ways, offering various opportunities for providing feedback regarding bus transit planning and other activities. First, the TPB, Technical Committee, and subcommittee meeting materials are published online and available for public review. Anyone interested in providing comments on a particular matter may then call or write to the TPB. Furthermore, members of the public may sign up to comment in-person at a TPB meeting. Whether or not an individual wishes to provide comment, the public may attend open TPB meetings in-person or online via meeting livestreams on YouTube. TPB meeting recordings remain available online after the meeting’s end.

Finally, members of the public may participate in specific TPB committees that are meant to incorporate broader perspectives into the board’s work. These include the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and Access for All Advisory Committee (AFA). Both include appointed members from an applicant pool, but the latter is for organizational representatives who are focused on representing the interests of traditionally underserved communities in the transportation planning process such as low-income, older adults, people with disabilities, and people with limited English proficiency. The Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan, referenced below, involves the AFA in the planning process, using the AFA as a sounding board for the plan’s policies. The CAC receives briefings and provides feedback on many public transportation topics including the annual State of Public Transportation report. One CAC member is appointed to participate in the DMV/Moves transit initiative (described in more detail later in this chapter). The CAC representative regularly liaises between the initiative and the CAC membership. In addition, TPB staff frequently update the CAC on the initiative’s progress.

Some recent examples of bus planning topics that were shared at TPB which the public had the opportunity to comment on are noted below in Table 19.3.

TABLE 19.3: RECENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT IN BUS PLANNING AT TPB MEETINGS

Bus Transit Planning Topic	Date
Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan	May 2023
Intercity Bus and Rail Travel Desk Study	June 2023
DMVMoves Update	October 2024
PBPP Regional Transit Safety Targets	December 2024
PBPP Regional Transit Asset Management Targets	February 2025

TPB PUBLIC BUS TRANSIT PLANNING KEY PRODUCTS

During the development of Visualize 2050, three products related to bus transit planning were produced as described below.

High-Capacity Transit Accessibility Study

In 2023-2024, the TPB conducted the High-Capacity Transit Accessibility Study¹ and took a deeper look at the geographies around existing high-capacity transit stations in the NCR to more clearly determine station accessibility to-and-from various points of interest. By helping TPB and jurisdictional staff and the public better understand the areas around High-Capacity Transit Stations (HCT), this project supported the progress of multiple TPB priority strategies including expanding bus rapid transit and transitways, moving more people on Metrorail, and improving pedestrian and bike access to transit connections.

Unlike the previous development of Transit Accessibility Focus Areas (TAFAs), this analysis used a Network Analysis tool (the R5 routing engine with OpenStreetMap and GTFS data) to more accurately navigate local street grids and available infrastructure and explore practical connectivity to HCTs. EEAs were also incorporated into the analysis to gain perspective on the differing impact of connectivity issues on underserved and/or disadvantaged communities in the region. The resulting HCT Study website is a powerful tool with various sub-analyses and data points that can give land use and transportation planners a holistic view of what the current state and needs of HCT zones are.

¹ National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (2024). COG High-Capacity Transit Accessibility Analysis. <https://hct-accessibility-analysis-mwcog.hub.arcgis.com>

Intercity Bus and Rail Travel Studies

An MPO like the TPB is required by federal regulations to apply its comprehensive, cooperative, and continuing metropolitan planning processes to “intermodal facilities that support intercity transportation, including intercity buses and intercity bus facilities.”¹ Accordingly, the TPB has conducted multiple desk and field studies of the NCR’s intercity travel network, including in 2016,² 2023,³ and 2024.⁴ These projects were presented at different stages in their development to the Board, its Technical Committee, and subcommittees for feedback and information. In 2023, a special work session was held before the regularly scheduled TPB meeting which featured presentations by representatives from the intercity travel industry and applicable regional agencies. The work session offered board members the opportunity to learn about intercity projects and plans impacting the NCR from those directly working on them.

For the 2024 analysis, TPB staff completed a comprehensive review of intercity bus and rail services that also enhanced regional understanding of rider demographics, travel choices, origins and destinations, and more. It involved a passenger survey, desk research, and interviews with subject matter experts. The resulting report and interactive web map are available for public use but are directed to local jurisdictional staff as a resource for their intercity travel facility and service planning efforts. TPB staff will continue to conduct periodic studies of and coordination opportunities with the NCR’s intercity travel network.

State of Public Transportation

The State of Public Transportation report⁵ is an annual product publication of the Regional Public Transportation Subcommittee and is meant to provide the board and the public a concise overview of the NCR’s public transportation network and its participating operators. The report first provides a summary of annual data from across the broader transit network, followed by a summary profile of each local fixed-route and commuter bus/rail service provider in the region. Information on paratransit and microtransit services is also included in these profiles. The report traditionally concludes with chapters providing a comprehensive review of transit providers’ key accomplishments and activities, along with the TPB’s public transportation initiatives for that chapter year. Publication of this annual report is ongoing, although formatting and related content may change over time as needed to keep the report useful and current. Summary presentations of the data in each report are presented to, at minimum, the Regional Public Transportation Committee and the TPB Technical Committee.

² National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (2017). *Intercity Bus Traffic and Patronage in the Metropolitan Washington Region*. <https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2017/01/18/intercity-bus-traffic-and-patronage-in-the-metropolitan-washington-region-bus/>

³ National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (2023). *Intercity Bus and Rail Travel Overview*. <https://www.mwcog.org/file.aspx?&A=xGBKbdBlaTDq1Lz4%2fngur6buJi%2b8tk7yku5VeEJiLIQ%3d>

⁴ National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board. *Intercity Bus and Rail Travel Study Final Report* (2024). <https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2025/02/24/intercity-bus-and-rail-travel-study-final-report-2024-bus-rail-tpb/>; National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (2024). *Intercity Bus and Rail Travel Study Hub Site*. <https://tpb-intercity-travel-survey-mwcog.hub.arcgis.com/>

⁵ National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (November 2023). *2022 State of Public Transportation*. <https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2023/11/15/state-of-public-transportation-report/>

Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan and the FTA Enhanced Mobility Program

The TPB and COG strive to improve mobility for people with disabilities, older adults, and other transportation-disadvantaged populations. The TPB is the designated recipient of the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program administered by COG. The program is funded by FTA Section 5310 formula funds. Under the guidance of its federally required and TPB-developed Coordinated Human Transportation Services Plan (Coordinated Plan),⁶ the matching grant program funds projects seeking to improve access to transportation for older adults and people with disabilities. The plan was last updated and endorsed by the TPB in May 2023.

Planning

The Coordinated Plan highlights unmet transportation needs for people with disabilities and older adults, identifying strategies to meet those needs. These needs encompass accessibility, availability, affordability, and awareness of mobility options. The Coordinated Plan includes priority projects that can help the region better serve targeted groups. This information and identified priority projects inform the selection process for FTA Enhanced Mobility program grant funding. The Access for All Advisory Committee provides input and participates in the development of the Coordinated Plan.

Programming

The application of FTA's Enhanced Mobility grant program towards regional funding priorities are established based upon unmet needs identified in the Coordinated Plan. Recommended strategies for improved service and coordination identified in the 2023 Coordinated Plan update include: (1) Expand Availability and Coordination of Transportation Options; (2) Increase Awareness of Existing Transportation Services; (3) Improve Accessibility of Transportation Options; and (4) Make Transportation Options More Affordable and Sustainable. Every two years, upon the award of Section 5310 formula funding from FTA, TPB staff solicit grant applications and select projects that seek to implement solutions related to these strategies. Perspective grantees include nonprofits, local governments, and private companies. Projects can be capital or operating in nature, and range from wheelchair-accessible vehicle acquisition and vehicle preventative maintenance to mobility management or program operations. TPB staff oversee pre-award and post-award activities of all projects. Project metrics/impacts are gathered and reported to FTA on a quarterly basis.

The TPB's administration of the Enhanced Mobility program is detailed in a Program Management Plan that is updated and approved by FTA in conjunction with Coordinated Plan updates.

⁶ National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (May 2023). *2023 Update to the Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan for the National Capital Region*. <https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2018/12/19/update-to-the-coordinated-human-service-transportation-plan-for-the-national-capital-region-access-to-jobs-afa-enhanced-mobility/>

AGENCY BUS PLANS RELATIONSHIP WITH VISUALIZE 2050

Several agencies in the region produce their own plans for bus transit, and these are described below.

Local Transit Agency Strategic/Development Plans

Both Virginia and Maryland require that transit agencies within their jurisdictions prepare short-to-long-term planning documents known as either transit strategic plans (TSP) or transit development plans (TDP). These plans serve multiple functions; but perhaps most importantly, they set a strategic framework for agency operations and administration. TSPs and TDPs summarize an agency's existing operational state, detail proposed service expansion, address capital asset needs, review safety improvements, and more. In Maryland, updated TDPs are required every five years for all transit agencies, regardless of size. In Virginia, larger transit agencies operating a fleet of 20 or more buses and within an urbanized area of 50,000 people or more must develop a TSP. All others prepare TDPs. The operational visions laid out in these plans are woven into the regional transit outlook of TPB's NCRTP. Similarly, the capital investments required to implement those plans result in project proposals that are subsequently included in the region's Transportation Improvement Plan to qualify for funding.

Strategic Transformation Plan, WMATA

In 2023, WMATA completed its Strategic Transformation Plan (STP), which guides the regional transit service's short-range planning and influences its long-term strategy. The STP has four principal goals: providing service excellence to customers, fostering talented and supported teams, designing a more equitable and productive regional service, and running a more sustainable system. These goals are achieved through projects like the Better Bus Network Redesign, improved system maintenance, modernizing the various fare systems, incorporating more clean energy throughout its infrastructure, and more. WMATA's STP goals mirror many of TPB's goals with relation to transit access, safety, workforce investment, and environmental consciousness. The resulting projects make their way into the updated (and future) TIP, as well as the more frequent and sustainable regional transit network envisioned in the NCRTP.

VTrans, OIPI

VTrans is the Commonwealth of Virginia's multimodal state transportation plan and is prepared by the Commonwealth Transportation Board and the Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment (OIPI). It serves as the commonwealth's principal planning document for all transportation modes, including bus transit. The transportation vision outlined in VTrans, and its associated goals, objectives, and strategies, lay out both general and more specific expectations for transit projects across Virginia. Regarding bus transit, applicable provisions are contextualized broadly under transit, but prioritize asset management, network resilience, and economic considerations. VTrans is intended to guide the types of projects initiated and funded by the commonwealth. Many of these projects would concurrently be submitted for TIP approval at TPB and influence the region's broader transit vision in the NCRTP.

Cornerstone Plan, MTA Commuter Bus

The Bus Cornerstone Plan (2018) is the long-term planning guide for Maryland's various bus operations, including commuter services. It sets the vision and priorities for bus transit services over 25 years. The projects, concepts, and investments detailed in the plan capture what service

and capital investment priorities MTA intends to work on between the short to long-term. Any projects meant for development in the short- to mid-term or in progress within the National Capital Region would likely be included in the TPB's TIP. The broader vision for the commuter bus system's growth or service changes would be reflected in the NCRTP as part of the region's future transit expectations and plans.

Statewide Transit Plan, MTA

In addition to mode-specific long-range plans such as the Bus Cornerstone Plan, MTA also produces a long-range Statewide Transit Plan which sets a fifty-year vision for the state's transit network. It ties together the overarching goals the state has for making public transportation more efficient and accessible across Maryland. Regarding MTA's commuter bus service, this plan highlights in its vision expansion of intercity and commuter connections to more areas both in and out of the state, including service between Waldorf, MD and Anacostia in DC, and Frederick to DC along I-270. It also envisions expanded bus rapid transit across the state, including the US 29 corridor between Montgomery and Howard counties. The plan highlights examples of coordination and collaboration with MTA partners to accomplish its goals. With respect to the TPB, this engagement occurs through discussion of projects at Board and committee meetings, inputs into the TIP, and feedback from state agency representatives into the TPB's vision and guiding principles for the region.

DMVMoves, COG and WMATA

DMVMoves is a joint initiative of the COG and WMATA boards meant to develop a long-term dedicated funding solution for WMATA and local transit services. As part of that process, it has also developed an updated vision for a world class regional transit system that makes the customer experience more seamless and efficient across the respective local transit operators and WMATA's own services. The initiative officially began on May 1, 2024, but is in large part the result of a decades-long effort to address WMATA's financial shortfalls and those of other transit agencies in the region. These funding concerns garnered greater attention during the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated loss of significant fare revenue and ridership.

The initiative's work is led by a Task Force made up of elected officials and government representatives that are tasked with providing the guiding vision and ultimately the recommendations for participating members to vote on and implement individually. The Task Force receives advice and support from two advisory groups, including a Government Partners group (GPAG) consisting of jurisdictional staff and representatives from transit, transportation, administrative and other offices, and a Community Partners group (CPAG) featuring representatives from area businesses, non-profits, associations, and other members of the public. The CPAG includes a representative from TPB's Community Advisory Committee (CAC) who also serves as a liaison between the initiative and the CAC.

Although DMVMoves is co-led by COG, TPB staff (which come from the COG Department of Transportation Planning) help provide project management support. Staff have regularly presented updates to the TPB, its Technical Committee, and various subcommittees about DMVMoves meetings and general work. The established connections TPB staff have with transit and transportation staff at local transit agencies and existing data from previous research and analysis provide DMVMoves with a stronger foundation with which to conduct the necessary outreach and collaboration.

MAPPING OF EXISTING BUS TRANSIT

Data used to inform TPB’s mapping for Visualize 2050 of the existing bus transit was collected to create a “snapshot” of bus facilities in the region in 2023. For this geospatial work data was collected from the following sources:

TABLE 19.4: DATA SOURCES FOR MAPPING OF EXISTING BUS TRANSIT

Layer	Source
Regional Bus Stops and Routes	<div>TPB staff compiled General Transit Feed Specification route and bus stop data from providers of fixed-route bus service in the TPB Planning Area:</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arlington Transit• CUE Bus - City of Fairfax• DASH• Fredericksburg Regional Transit• Fairfax Connector• Loudoun County Transit• Maryland Transit Administration• Montgomery County MD Ride On• OMNIRIDE• Regional Transportation Agency of Central Maryland• TheBus• Transit Services of Frederick County• University of Maryland Shuttle-UM• WMATA