

INTERSECT

NEWSLETTER

January 27, 2005

OF THE

Volume 9 Number 1

WASHINGTON REGIONAL NETWORK FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

New Study Rates ICC as Worst Option, Alternatives Perform Better

By Cheryl Cort

A new study of the ICC and alternatives finds four practical, cost-effective options perform better than the Intercounty Connector (ICC) on most measures, including travel times, air pollution and overall cost. The report was sponsored by regional and national environmental, transportation and smart growth groups and conducted by Smart Mobility, Inc., a nationally recognized traffic modeling firm.

“This study shows that faster, cheaper and cleaner alternatives to the ICC are practical and cost-effective,” said Michael Replogle, Transportation Director of Environmental Defense and a former Montgomery County transportation planning official.” By refusing to consider alternatives like these, the state is missing the opportunity to speed up commutes, protect the region's watersheds and deliver cleaner air.”

The groups commissioned the study after the state refused to look at transit, development, and local transportation changes as alternatives to a new highway.

Results of the Study

“This study shows that almost any other option performs better than the ICC for reducing traffic on local roads and regional highways,” said Stewart Schwartz, Coalition for Smarter Growth. The study also found that all but one alternative did a better job than the ICC at removing traffic from local roads and major arterials.

Not only did the alternative packages perform better than the ICC, the ICC performed the worst on almost every measure including time spent driving, delay due to congestion, total amount of driving or vehicle miles traveled, and the total number of trips made each day. Improving the balance of jobs and housing between Montgomery and Prince George's counties shortened commutes and reduced congestion.

“In essence, compared to all of the other alternatives, the
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SPECIAL EVENT

Leslie Steen Honored with Livable Communities Leadership Award

Reception: Monday, February 28

5:00 pm-7:00 pm

Mimi's American Bistro, 2120 P St., NW
(2 blocks west of Dupont Circle Metro)

Suggested donation: \$75 person, \$125 per couple
Reception with appetizers and beverages

WRN is honoring Leslie Steen, Vice President, Housing Partnership Network, and former President, Community Preservation and Development Corporation for her outstanding leadership in helping to create more livable communities for the Washington region.

RSVP (attendance only): WRN, 202-244-1105, or staff@washingtonregion.net.

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Dedicated Funding for Metro Proposed By Panel

By Cheryl Cort

Despite Metro's high farebox recovery and continued annual support from member governments, long-term viability of the Metrorail and bus system is threatened by insufficient funding, according to a special panel sponsored by the Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments and business lead-

(FUNDING continued on page 2)

WASHINGTON REGIONAL NETWORK

FOR LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

WRN advocates transportation investments, land use policies, and neighborhood designs that enhance existing communities and the environment of the Washington D.C. region.

4000 ALBEMARLE ST., NW, SUITE 305 WASHINGTON, DC 20016
PHONE: (202) 244-1105 FAX: (202) 244-4225
EMAIL: STAFF@WASHINGTONREGION.NET

Cheryl Cort, Editor; Stephen Wade, Chris Delfs, Andrew Steeble and Michelle Ernst contributing writers.

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ICC would make gridlock worse and cause residents to spend more time behind the wheel making more and longer trips each day,” noted Steve Caflisch of the Sierra Club. “The alternatives that performed the best included a combination of increased transit with more jobs and housing near transit, and a better east-west balance of jobs and housing.”

Recently the state has dropped claims that the ICC would reduce traffic on most roads in the region. The state’s study notes, “an ICC would not be expected to relieve traffic on the beltway” (page IV-316).

Details of the Study and Alternatives

Smart Mobility analyzed six packages of transportation projects and assumptions about the location of jobs and housing in Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties, including the ICC and the state’s “no-build” option. The four new alternatives include various transit options, such as the purple line, addressing local road changes and conservative estimates about the potential to shift more jobs to the eastern side of the region and transit stations over the same 25-year period the state studied the impacts of the ICC.

The elements in the packages of alternatives are, individually, all under consideration in other studies by the counties or the state, but were not included in the state’s ICC study. This study is the first time that they have been united into a comprehensive quantitative analysis.

Costs

The cost estimates for each package of alternatives range from \$626 million to \$2 billion, all less than the \$2.1-\$2.4 billion in construction costs currently projected for the ICC. Revenues raised from the tolled lanes alternatives would be used to fund bus and rail transit.

Environmental Impacts

While the state continues to claim the ICC would be “environmentally sustainable,” its study shows even more destruction of forests, wetlands, and streams than previous studies. Compared to the ICC, the alternatives would not take thousands of acres of forests and wetlands and would significantly reduce air pollution, the cause of much childhood asthma.

“We analyzed air pollution and our best alternative produces less NOx air pollution, by a half million pounds/year, than the ICC,” noted Lee Epstein of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

Methodology

The analysis was conducted by Smart Mobility, Inc. with staff representing 40 years of experience in transportation modeling, engineering, design and planning. The data and computer transportation analysis models came from the Council of Governments and the State of Maryland. The alternative packages were drawn from projects, plans and concepts under discussion at the local, state and regional level. Similar approaches are also being implemented around the country, with great results in places as diverse as Arlington, VA, Orange County/San Diego, CA, Minneapolis, MN and Houston, TX.

The Report was commissioned by Environmental Defense, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Audubon Naturalist Society, Solutions Not Sprawl, Sierra Club and the Coalition for Smarter Growth.

For the full report and a summary see: www.SmarterGrowth.net or www.environmentaldefense.org.

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ers. Warning of a downward spiral of overcrowded and underperforming service, the panel made up largely of business representatives recommended a fix: a single regional sales tax of one half of one percent dedicated for funding Metro’s long term needs. If the federal government picks up half the tab, the local tax would only need to be one quarter of one percent.

The political future of the panel’s recommendations are uncertain given the complexity of the three-state region, tight budgets, and reluctance to raise taxes. However, at the Jan. 19 meeting of the Council of Governments’ Transportation Planning Board, the region’s politicians voted to endorse the panel’s report. One of the panel’s sponsors, the Greater Washington Board of Trade, also expressed commitment to devising an implementation strategy to win support for the needed funding.

The funds generated by this dedicated revenue source would cover the projected shortfall of \$2.4 billion over the next 10 years in needed capital and operating funding. This figure is beyond what local, state and federal governments are anticipated to pay at continued levels of support, and beyond what riders pay with 57 percent of passenger revenues covering operating costs. With this funding, the transit authority would be able to implement the remainder of its capital renewal program, expanded capacity and access investments, and cover the operating costs associated with the new capacity. Overall, 79 percent (\$1.88 billion) of the total shortfall is in the capital budget.

In October 2004, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA or Metro) Board committed to a special

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“Metro Matters” \$3.3 billion funding agreement to implement the most urgent capital needs for the next six years. This program included rehabilitation of WMATA’s existing infrastructure, eliminating past maintenance deferrals and sufficient capacity increases (120 rail cars and 185 buses) to meet existing demand for services, and run 8-car trains on one third of the system during rush hour. The Metro Matters program is designed to meet ridership demand through 2013.

In order to meet demand beyond 2013, the capital program calls for continued renewal of the aging system, purchase of another 130 rail cars and system upgrades to permit 75 percent of all trains to operate with 8-cars. These improvements would allow the system to utilize 90 percent of Metrorail design capacity. An additional 275 buses will be purchased, and 3 bus garages will be built or replaced. Station enhancements include added escalators, elevators, and expanded mezzanines at Union Station, Gallery Place, and Metro Center; station connections between Farragut North and Farragut West, and Gallery Place and Metro Center. The capital program will also provide bus corridor improvements for 140 miles of high volume bus routes, and improved pedestrian and bicycle access and facilities at 25 stations.

Recognizing that current levels of commitment to annual budgets and the “Metro Matters” program fall far short of addressing Metro’s long-term needs, the funding panel considered several dedicated sources to bridge the gap. Along with a sales tax, other revenue sources considered were access fees, congestion charges, gas tax, land-value capture, property tax, parking tax, and payroll tax. After much debate, the panel settled on a sales tax as the best revenue source to implement due to its current use in all three jurisdictions, and due to its broad base, which means only a small increment will be needed to generate sufficient revenues. Transit advocates, such as the Chesapeake Bay Foundation recommended looking to user-related fees that act as a disincentive to drive and an incentive to take transit, such as a parking tax or congestion tolls. WRN suggested that a progressive payroll tax was far more desirable than a regressive sales tax.

The panel’s recommendations do not address the rising cost of MetroAccess paratransit system whose expenses could reach \$200 million per year, or 60 percent of WMATA’s operating shortfall in 2015. The panel acknowledged that MetroAccess is an essential service but it argued that this service should be supported by a broader set of funders rather than disproportionately rely on transit funding to support the door to door service. For this reason, it removed the projected \$1.1 billion shortfall in MetroAccess funding through 2015 from its analysis for a dedicated revenue

source. Last year, a key recommendation by a WMATA panel reviewing paratransit services and costs called for a regional dedicated funding source that would be applicable to all modes of travel. The TPB’s resolution endorsing the panel’s report also concurred with this view, disagreeing with the panel’s disregard of MetroAccess funding needs.

Also excluded from the panel’s cost projections are the over \$4 billion capital costs for Metrorail beyond Dulles Airport, which will be covered through local sources. The operating subsidies for Dulles Rail which amount to an additional \$65 million per year by 2015, are part of the operating cost calculations. Between 2005 and 2015, Dulles Rail operating costs will represent 28 percent of the total operating budget shortfall. After 2015, when Dulles Rail is fully operational, operating costs will be substantially higher.

View the panel’s report at: <http://www.mwcog.org/uploads/committee-documents/pVxXFs20050106084602.pdf>

Mean Streets Study Finds Outer Suburbs Most Dangerous for Walking

By Stephen Wade

A new national report, *Mean Streets*, finds that 17 percent of traffic fatalities (1 in 6) in the Washington area are pedestrians, yet Maryland and Virginia are only spending one half percent of their federal transportation funds on pedestrian safety.

“The seemingly safe, everyday act of walking is ending the lives of more than 150 people in our region each year,” noted Laura Olsen, Assistant Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth. “All of our communities need to be safe places for people to walk.”

The report by the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) found that over half of pedestrians are killed trying to cross arterials – roads such as New Hampshire Avenue, Route 1, Rockville Pike, and Waxpool Road. The report also clarifies the misperception that pedestrians are generally to blame for their own death. Federal data shows that at least 40 percent of pedestrian fatalities occur where no crosswalk is present, demonstrating the drastic need for safer streets and communities that are designed for all users, including pedestrians.

“The heavy mix of motor vehicles and people on foot should not be a lethal combination, and crossing the street should not be a death defying act,” said Maryland Delegate Bill Bronrott (District 16, Montgomery County). “It’s time for motorists to give pedestrians a break and time for government to invest a major infusion of funds into making our communities safe, livable and walkable.”

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For the first time, the Coalition for Smarter Growth and STPP provided a pedestrian danger index for each major city and county in the Baltimore-Washington area. The District of Columbia and Arlington County are the safest places for pedestrians while outer suburban counties, Spotsylvania County, VA and Charles County, MD top the list as the most dangerous places for walkers.

“It is not surprising that counties dominated by scattered development with wide, fast roads, few crosswalks and sidewalks that end or don’t exist at all are more dangerous for pedestrians,” noted Olsen. “The best communities for walkers, the District of Columbia, Arlington County and Baltimore City, are places that have invested in creating safe and enjoyable places to walk. The result is more walkers and safer streets.”

“Pedestrian improvements are being made in some communities, but safe routes to school, work, Metro and stores are still the exception, not the rule,” commented Olsen.

View the full report at www.transact.org.
See the local rankings and details for each county at <http://www.smartergrowth.net/issues/transportation/pedbike/meanstreetsrankings.html>

Rockville Sets New Standards for Pedestrian Safety

By Chris Delfs

Concerned that poor design of the built environment increases the probability of pedestrian fatalities, the City of Rockville’s Traffic and Transportation Division has created and applied an Intersection Safety Rating system, or performance measure, to most of the intersections within Rockville. The underlying purpose of such an evaluation is to identify and improve those intersections that are labeled with unacceptable ratings – intersections that present the greatest threat to pedestrians.

The majority of intersections in Rockville are now tagged with a rating of Poor, Sub-par, Adequate, Good, or Excellent, according to the city’s criteria.

For a standard intersection to achieve an Adequate rating, it must have sufficient pedestrian crossing time, no sight distance problems and at least one of the following: pedestrian crossing signals, pedestrian refuge islands, or marked crosswalks (depending upon street classification).

City staff obtained relevant data by conducting site visits, combing over aerial photography, and debating potential problems and solutions. Although analysis still requires individual assessment of each intersection, applying standardized safety criteria permits engineers and planners to convert their findings into a quantifiable policy.

Not surprisingly, most intersections with Poor or Sub-par ratings in Rockville are located on the wide, arterial streets such as Rockville Pike (MD-355) and MD-28.

Rockville’s performance measures have pointed out where pedestrians need help. Now, the state and city governments are in the process of producing the appropriate funding and necessary public and political support.

Washington Area’s Transit Service Saves Commuters 50 percent in Delays

By Michelle Ernst

The Washington area ranked 4th nationally in the annual traffic congestion rankings according to a new report by the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI). However, these rankings don’t reflect the dramatic impact of transit and operational improvements. Without transit, the study finds that area commuters would face delays 50 percent longer.

For the second year in a row, the TTI quantified the benefits to commuters of public transit and operational improvements such as HOV lanes. TTI’s report found that transit service is saving D.C. area commuters almost \$1.2 billion each year and saving each peak period traveler from sitting in traffic an additional 35 hours, or 50 percent longer than they currently do. HOV lanes and operational improvements such as signal timing, ramp metering and incident management were found to save area commuters \$124 million annually.

For tables on D.C. region see: http://mobility.tamu.edu/ums/congestion_data/tables/washington_dc.pdf

For the full TTI report: <http://mobility.tamu.edu/ums/report/>

VA’s Public-Private Highway Projects Costly to Taxpayers, Report Shows

By Cheryl Cort

The first comprehensive analysis of a 1995 law that allows private entities to build transportation projects in the Commonwealth of Virginia shows the law is failing to live up to its promise of attracting private money to fund increasingly expensive projects. Instead, projects proposed under the Public-Private Transportation Act (PPTA) rely almost exclusively on tolls and/or taxpayer dollars, according to the analysis recently released by the Southern Environmental Law Center. Moreover, the report finds that PPTA projects often circumvent the normal state transportation planning process, limiting public input and consideration of alternatives, and shifting transportation planning away from the Commonwealth Transportation Board.

The report is particularly timely, given recent budget proposals from Gov. Mark Warner and House of Delegates Speaker William Howell to earmark millions of taxpayer dollars during the 2005 General Assembly to jumpstart public-private

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transportation projects.

The report was written by Jim Regimbal, a principal with Fiscal Analytics, Ltd. with more than 20 years experience in state policy analysis, including serving on the staff of the Virginia Senate Finance Committee. The report examines the PPTA's purpose, explores critical policy issues it creates, discusses seven projects and proposals in detail, and makes numerous recommendations for reform.

The report identifies a number of other problems with the PPTA statute and projects: Proposed projects tend to contribute to sprawl development; Proponents have an interest in promoting rapid growth and greater driving to increase toll collections; Traffic and revenue projections have been erroneous or highly questionable; Major projects have been advanced before other alternatives have been fully studied; Competition may be reduced by making it more difficult for smaller contractors to get work and by demands from project proposers that the state limit improvements to other roads.

"The report clearly shows that there is no free lunch with these projects," said Trip Pollard, director of the Southern Environmental Law Center's Land and Community Project. "Taxpayers are still on the line for many project costs, and the driving public is paying the rest through tolls."

The law allows private entities to enter into agreements with the state or localities to construct, improve, maintain, and operate transportation facilities. Some 14 public-private construction projects have been proposed or explored under the law, including the Pocahontas Parkway (the only project that has been completed), Route 288, I-495 and I-95 HOT Lanes, widening I-81, and the Hampton Roads Third Crossing.

"The law can be an innovative tool to tap into private sector creativity and efficiency to save time and improve transportation project delivery," Regimbal said. "But it has not attracted as much private money as expected, instead allowing large construction consortiums to come up with projects that primarily use taxpayer-subsidized revenue bonds backed by tolls or local taxes, as well as governmental transportation funds."

Further, Pollard said, the PPTA has created a shadow transportation planning process in which private entities come up with projects that are profitable to them but don't necessarily meet the transportation priorities identified by the Commonwealth Transportation Board, the official policy-making body for transportation in Virginia. "The danger is that our limited transportation dollars could be used on projects that benefit the corporate bottom line but don't relieve traffic congestion or protect our natural resources, including our open space and farmland," Pollard said.

The report's recommendations included: provide for addi-

tional public input; require that proposals be part of normal planning processes; give the Commonwealth Transportation Board greater authority over proposals; require private entities proposing a project to invest a certain amount of capital in a project; require them to pay for independent verification of traffic and cost estimates.

"Public-private partnerships can be beneficial, but as this report shows, there are serious questions about how effectively the current law serves the public interest," Pollard said. "The statute and guidelines need to be improved before additional projects are authorized to ensure that we are making smart transportation investments and that we are adequately protecting our communities and environment."

View the full report: <http://www.southernenvironment.org/>

Arlington Affordable Housing Guidelines Set Back by Developer Suit, County to Appeal Decision

By Stephen Wade

On December 10, an Arlington Circuit Court issued a ruling that Arlington's 10 percent Affordable Housing Guidelines were in fact a requirement and not voluntary, thereby not legal under Virginia's Dillon Rule, which restricts local authority. Because the affordable housing guidelines were established under the negotiated site plan process option, many believe that the this lawsuit could threaten the County's hallmark transit-oriented planning and development review site planning process that Arlington has used to create walkable, quality, high-value communities around Metro stations.

Strong advocacy by local groups along with broad recognition of the precipitous loss in affordable homes and a booming real estate market convinced the County to adopt the 10 percent housing guidelines.

In response to the ruling, the County stated, "Arlington categorically disagrees with the Court's conclusion that affordable housing contributions by developers have been inappropriately required.

"Affordable housing and other community benefits that have been obtained through the site plan process are the result of negotiations. Developers obtain increased development rights, primarily density and height, resulting in significantly increased profitability of development projects. Developers agree to a total site plan package that enables them to build a project that may be as much as five times larger than permitted under their existing zoning."

In the Washington Post, County Board Chairman Jay Fisette said that the county had decided to appeal the decision. "We believe that the actions we took were appropriate and justifiable in light of the huge challenge our community faces," he said. WRN, along with other affordable housing advocates and smart growth activists, filed a friend of the court brief.

Reality Check Exercise Set for February 2005

In February 2005, a one day planning exercise will be held that will address some of the regional challenges as the area adds more than 2 million people and 1.6 million new jobs over the next 25 years.

The exercise, known as Reality Check, will bring together more than 300 political, business, environmental, real estate and civic leaders to participate in negotiating alternative growth scenarios based on actual demographic and economic data. Reality Check is co-sponsored by the Urban Land Institute's Washington District Council and the Smart Growth Alliance.

Reality Check is similar to exercises that have been held in Los Angeles, Utah and Chicago. It is designed to accomplish four tasks: provide a region-wide awareness of the level of growth that is coming; allocate projected housing and job growth among jurisdictions; recognize the legitimate points of view of different stakeholders; and lay the foundation for the development of a concrete list of next steps to assure quality growth to meet the region's needs over the next two decades.

Post-event tools provided after the exercise will help participants look for ways to implement the best solutions within their own communities.

To learn more: e-mail jbailey@uli.org or visit: www.RealityCheckWashington.org.

Thanks!

WRN wishes to thank the following friends of WRN for their generous contributions:

Bruce Adams, Anne Ambler, Mary Kay Bailey, Tad Baldwin, T. David Bell, Melissa Bondi, Darren Bowie, Janet Brown, Jim Clarke, Sally Cooper, Kent Cooper, Cheryl Cort, Julia Cuniberti, Jacqueline DeCarlo, Rosalyn Doggett, Joanne Droppers, Lee Epstein, John Evans, Chris Forinash, Ralph Garboushian, Alice Giancola, Josh Gibson, Allen Greenberg, Jeremy Gunderson, Peter Harnik, Marilyn Hoskins, Nancy Iacomini, Rob Inerfeld, Tania Jackson, David Kaplan, Jonathan Kass, Deborah Katz, Lee Alice Kimball, Stephen Klein, Alison Kolwaite, Karen Kumm-Morris, Lara Levinson, Helen Lewis, Yakir Lubowsky, Tom Metcalf, Toby Millman, Kevin Mills, Bill Mosley, Mary Nagelhout, Tillman Neuner, Patricia Nicoson, Craig Pascal, Kristin Pauly, Kathryn Pettit, Kevin Pettitt, Tom Petty, Eliza Platts-Mills, Karen Pope-Onwukwe, Ann Powel, Richard Reis, Michael Replogle, William Rice, Walter Rybeck, Harry Sanders, Jim Sebastian, Webb Smedley, Leslie Steen, Douglas Stewart, Edward Thomas, Tim Torma, Jennifer Van Driesen, Kyle Walton, Carol Wayman, Gerald Widdicombe, Bill Wilkinson, and Sara Wilson.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, January 27 and Saturday, January 29: D.C. Comprehensive Plan Week. The D.C. Office of Planning will hold a series of public workshops on affordable housing, land use, and transportation. January 27, 6:00-9:00 PM. Wards 7 and 8, Ballou Sr. High School, 3401, 4th Street, SE. January 29, 8:00 AM – 1:00 PM. Shaw Junior High School, 925 Rhode Island Ave., NW. For more information call 202-442-8812 or visit www.inclusivitycity.org

Saturday, January 29, 9:30 AM. ICC Alternative Rally. The rally will be followed by the state's final public hearing on the ICC. Blake High School, 300 Norwood Rd., Silver Spring, MD. www.SaveCommunities.org.

Tuesday, February 1, 9:30 AM. Loudoun County Board of Supervisors Business Meeting. The Board will hear testimony on a proposal to include parkland in the Creekside Development Proposal for residential high-density development. Loudoun County Government Center, 1 Harrison Street, S.E. in Leesburg. <http://www.loudounsfuture.org/> or info@loudounsfuture.org.

Tuesday, February 8, 6:30 PM. Board of Supervisors Public Hearing. The Coaliton for Smarter Growth will present a petition against residential development near Leesburg. Loudoun County Government Center, 1 Harrison Street, S.E. in Leesburg. For more information contact Nicola Wood, Nicola@smartergrowth.net.

Monday, February 21, 3:30 PM. Program Open Space Lobby Day. Information session and opportunity to speak with legislators individually on farmland, park and natural resource preservation. Joint Hearing Room in the Legislative Services Building, Annapolis. Contact Liz Nelson to RSVP at 410-280-9855 or enelson@mdlcv.org.

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