

CHAPTER 6: KEY FINDINGS IN THE 2035 LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

6.1 KEY FINDINGS

Growth and Development

The George Washington Region is primarily an ex-urban area subject to significant development pressure from the Washington metropolitan area to the north and, to a lesser extent, from the Richmond metropolitan area to the south. This growth in the regional population over the past several decades has far outpaced the growth of any other region in Virginia. While this rate of growth will likely ease somewhat in the next few decades, the Region's population is anticipated to double, to nearly 600,000 residents, by 2035. A comprehensive transportation network is needed to maximize efficiencies while providing a variety of modes that meet a diversity of human purposes.

Region Suffers from Roadway Congestion

As the Region has grown, its road system has experienced increased use and traffic congestion. Today, a significant percentage of the Region's roadways are operating below acceptable levels of service for substantial portions of the day. This congestion prolongs travel time, detracts from the quality of life, injures economic vitality and causes increased pollution.

Limited, Expensive Congestion Solutions

This Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) identifies a comprehensive list of roadway and transit/TDM improvements that would cost nearly \$10 billion to complete (accounts for all highway/bicycle and pedestrian needs as well as all transit/TDM improvements for the entire George Washington Region). Approximately \$8 billion of that amount would be required for the Region's urbanized area, which is comprised of the City of Fredericksburg, and Spotsylvania and Stafford Counties. Anticipated revenues from all State, Federal, local and private sector sources, for the period of this LRTP, however, comes to about \$2.5 billion, or only about 25% percent of the need.

A construction program of the magnitude needed to address the purported need is neither feasible nor sustainable. Consequently, the Region needs to continue to integrate all modes of travel in its long range planning to maximize available resources while ensuring economic vitality and fostering an acceptable quality of life. In addition, the Region should explore alternatives for raising additional revenues, within the context of regional transportation planning.

Economical Improvements

This LRTP calls for sound public transit and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) investments to be made in both the I-95 corridor and in the greater region. In the I-95 corridor, construction of the new HOT Lanes will also include expansion of commuter parking, carpool/vanpool programs, commuter bus, and VRE service. These overall improvements will help to maintain this interstate corridor's level of service during the period of this plan. In the greater Region, public transit performance cannot be improved by simply increasing transit

service frequencies and expanding transit user groups and areas of transit coverage, because the land use densities are too low to support this type of increase economically.

Regional Transportation Authority

Establishing a regional entity, such as a transportation authority, may be advisable for operating public transit, raising and allocating transportation revenues, and operating specific facilities such as toll roads. Research has shown that the Region could potentially generate approximately \$50 million annually if taxes such as those recently authorized for Northern Virginia could be imposed. Additional local revenues could be obtained through local option taxes, also recently authorized for Northern Virginia communities.

Creation of a regional entity would require consensus of regional jurisdictions as well as positive action by the Governor and the General Assembly. The regional discussion of a new transportation authority could be readily accomplished through FAMPO and GWRC.

Land Use is the Key to Long Term Transportation Success

The dispersed development patterns in the Region, exacerbated by rapid regional growth, have led to high levels of roadway congestion, with few good alternatives available as a solution. Moreover, constructing more roads simply to ease congestion will result in continued sprawl development. The widely spread out nature of the Region's development is a substantial obstacle to providing cost effective public transit (buses and trains) outside of the I-95 corridor. Dispersed land use patterns also present severe obstacles to auto use reduction, such as carpooling, bicycling, and walking. Low density development patterns are simply not conducive to continued growth because they cease to function effectively when overwhelmed. In addition, the public cost to support low density development eventually outweighs the incoming revenue, so taxes increase. To overcome these problems, the Region needs to look to more sustainable solutions.

Sustainable growth has several characteristics:

1. Planning begins with the end result and then works back to a plan of advance.
2. Development is guided to areas where jurisdictions can provide cost effective services.
3. Development and implementation plans are regional, when appropriate.
4. Planning includes preservation of farmland and open space.
5. Mixed use developments supporting alternative transportation modes are encouraged.
6. Developers are able to invest with confidence.
7. Redevelopment is made viable.
8. Existing development concentrations are preserved.
9. The region's sense of place is identified and maintained.

Transportation and land use decisions have a profound impact on any region's development. Decisions in one jurisdiction have a long-term impact on neighboring jurisdictions. More compact growth allows public transit and TDM to be effective alternatives to widening roadways, but regional land use and transportation need to be addressed together. In this Region, FAMPO, with the support of the GWRC, is a good forum for regional discussions related to adopting complementary Comprehensive Plans and zoning ordinances. This process would ensure local government retained control of their land use decision making, but coordinate them more comprehensively through the regional transportation planning process.