
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The George Washington Region is the fastest growing region in Virginia. Between 1990 and 2006, the region's population grew from 170,000 to 310,000 residents. By 2015, the population is expected to increase to 394,000 residents, and by 2035 it is expected to grow to 593,000 residents, or nearly twice as many residents as today. This rapid growth has put increasing strain on the Region's transportation system, which has historically been and continues to be highly auto-oriented.

Current intra-Regional transit services are relatively limited and consist of local FRED services that provide a basic level of mobility to the Region's needier residents. While there have been some recent and marginally successful attempts to serve commuters, FRED services are primarily for the transit-dependent. To and from Washington, D.C., VRE commuter rail service and private carrier bus service provide peak period service. In addition, there is a vibrant rideshare program that provides support to carpoolers, vanpoolers and other members of the extended transit family,

A large number of drawbacks are associated with the Region's current auto-oriented transportation approach. Chief among them are the limits to the extent to which the roadway system can be expanded, the extremely high associated costs, continued increases in congestion in spite of roadway expansion and adverse environmental impacts.

In response to these concerns, FAMPO initiated the George Washington Region Transit Policy Plan to determine the most effective ways to improve transit and begin to develop a more balanced transportation system. This study examined a large number of transit improvement scenarios, representing a range of choices, from relatively low levels of transit service to large expansion that could make transit a more integral component of the Region's transportation system. It also examined a variety of governance options that could facilitate the implementation of transit improvements, and a variety of financing mechanisms that could be pursued to provide the funding that would be required.

This study was conducted using projections of future development that were based on the land use policies current in effect for local governments in the Region. These projections indicate that future

development will be similar to current development patterns, and will consist of low density development that will sprawl into currently undeveloped areas.

In addition, nearly all transit riders walk to and from transit, and thus are also pedestrians. As a result, an area's walking environment is critical to the success of transit. In areas where the walking environment is unpleasant (no sidewalks, wide roads to cross, large parking lots between bus stops and stores, etc.), people who have cars will drive instead of using transit. As a result, in automobile-oriented environments such as the George Washington Region, transit typically struggles to attract "choice" riders.

As a result, one of the key findings of the study is that transit can provide only limited effectiveness within the George Washington Region, and the recommendations presented herein reflect that reality. However, there is an emerging awareness in the Region of the problems associated with current development patterns and the start of a process to examine different types of growth. If the Region ultimately chooses to adopt "smart growth" development practices, then transit could play a much more effective role in the Region's transportation system, and in which case the recommendations in this current study will need to be updated to reflect new realities and the opportunities they provide.