

Coalition for Smarter Growth | Active Prince William | Audubon Naturalist Society
Chesapeake Climate Action Network | Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions | Piedmont
Environmental Council | Prince William Conservation Alliance | Sustainable Mobility for
Arlington County | Sierra Club Virginia Chapter | Southern Environmental Law Center
Washington Area Bicyclist Association | YIMBYs of Northern Virginia

September 18, 2022

Honorable Phyllis Randall
Chair
Northern Virginia Transportation Authority
3040 Williams Drive, Suite 200
Fairfax, VA 22031

Re: Recommendations to improve TransAction

Chair Randall and NVTA board members:

We write to you today in support of regional transportation planning that identifies cost-effective, sustainable, and equitable solutions to improve mobility and helps inform investments through NVTA's 6-year program. The draft TransAction plan has many good ideas – like a regional Bus Rapid Transit network – and useful analyses, but it fails to provide a better framework for regional decisionmaking about transportation. NVTA has simply collected every project wish of every member jurisdiction and agency, and added dozens of new projects on top of these. This is not a plan.

We call on NVTA to create a new approach that addresses land use and housing, keeps us safe from climate catastrophe, leverages innovative demand-management strategies, and prioritizes a network of vibrant walkable, bikeable, inclusive transit-oriented communities. An improved TransAction would better inform the identification of candidate projects for NVTA regional funding and would make the selection process more transparent, methodical, and responsive to regional needs.

This \$76 billion unconstrained plan is neither realistic nor informative. We won't have anywhere close to \$76 billion to spend on transportation during the next 25 years. And we have other critical unmet needs that have huge impacts on transportation, such as building and preserving affordable housing near jobs and transit, reducing and eliminating deaths and serious injuries on our roadways, and upgrading our infrastructure to handle the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

We cannot afford to build all of TransAction's projects, nor should we. NVTA's own analysis demonstrates that if we did, the region would not meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets – even factoring in rapid electric vehicle adoption – and residents would be stuck driving even more miles on average. This is due to induced demand from road capacity expansion, a well-studied phenomenon that the plan notably ignores. To continue with the same expensive, carbon-intensive, and ineffective approaches to congestion is fiscally irresponsible and frankly unconscionable given the realities of climate change.

Numerous studies, including one by our own National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB), confirm that to adequately cut the largest source of emissions in the region – transportation – we must *both* transition vehicle technology and reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled. And we must do these urgently, with significant improvements by 2030. To ignore any of these necessary elements means accepting climate catastrophe.

NVTA itself has remarked that there are smarter ways to improve regional mobility than TransAction’s current approach. Its Technology Strategic Plan states that “expanding infrastructure capacity, especially highway capacity, presents multiple challenges in mitigating this congestion (due to the phenomena of induced demand) and achieving NVTA’s goals of equity, sustainability and safety...” The TransAction scenario analyses show that incentives and pricing, with equity provisions incorporated, and anticipated lasting increases in teleworking achieve largely the same improvements without spending \$76 billion and paving over Northern Virginia.

The region’s leaders, through the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG), have set a goal of locating 75% of new housing units near good transit and walkable activity centers, building enough housing to meet demand, and making 75% of all new units affordable. The TPB found that achieving these targets would reduce congestion by 20%, in addition to the tremendous environmental and equity benefits. Improvements to our transit system, safe walking and biking infrastructure and roadway design, local street grids in our activity centers, travel demand management programs, pricing and incentives, and targeted limited road capacity improvements would complement a mobility strategy that recognizes land use and housing.

To be an effective guiding plan for our transportation investments, TransAction must:

- Provide a more focused package of transportation improvements that better reflects adopted regional policies on transportation, climate, housing, and equity;
- Address the transportation-land use nexus by developing and modeling alternative project packages and smart growth land use scenarios;
- Move forward the incentives, pricing, and demand-management initiatives studied in the scenario analysis and supported by NVTA’s Technology Strategic Plan – this could include establishing a regional working group with other agencies; and
- Facilitate meaningful public involvement from the start, including when local jurisdictions develop their project submissions.

An improved TransAction is key to an improved Six-Year Program and would complement the recommendations outlined in our July [joint letter on the Six-Year Program](#). Taken together, these changes can help provide meaningful guidance and support regional transportation planning and funding that better benefits all residents and workers in Northern Virginia and protects our planet.

Thank you for your efforts to improve transportation in our region and your attention to stakeholders.

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