

WASHINGTON, D.C.

METROPOLITAN GREENWAYS AND CIRCULATION SYSTEMS

In 1998, the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) adopted a transportation Vision for the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region. The Vision calls for the concentration of growth in and near regional activity centers that contain “a mix of jobs, housing, services, and recreation in a walkable environment.” These activity centers are to be linked by multimodal transportation corridors.

TPB’s adopted Vision establishes a regional framework for transportation and land use policy. Like other metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), however, the TPB itself does not fund transportation projects or make land use decisions. If the Vision is to be realized, state agencies and local jurisdictions must identify and commit to specific transportation investments and land use policy changes.

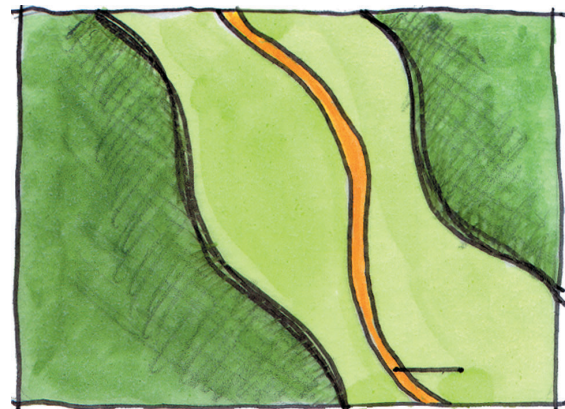
TPB recognized the possibility that key elements of the 1998 Vision might not be implemented because of a lack of attention by state and local agencies. It was concerned that two elements in particular would be overlooked in programming and funding decisions:

- Integrating greenways—natural corridors that can be used for non-motorized transportation and recreation—into a connected regional network; and
- Designing circulation systems within activity centers for transit, pedestrian, and bicycle travel.

With the assistance of a Transportation and Community and System Preservation Pilot Program (TCSP) grant, TPB undertook an innovative, stakeholder-driven process to identify, prioritize, and develop implementation mechanisms for projects in both of these potentially neglected areas.



Bike racks: part of a circulation system.
Courtesy Transportation Planning Board



Greenway Concept. Courtesy Transportation Planning Board

THE PROJECT

The Transportation Planning Board was awarded an FY 1999 TCSP grant of \$380,000, matched by \$100,000 in local funds, for its project to implement greenways and circulation systems. With its funds, TPB established two committees of stakeholders to identify and prioritize projects. It then developed a set of reports, adopted in February 2001, that describe the prioritized projects and identify specific implementation mechanisms. The stakeholder involvement process and reports are intended to promote and facilitate the advancement of the projects by state and local agencies.

TPB set aside \$80,000 of its TCSP grant for project evaluation. A consultant attended meetings and interviewed participants to identify the successes and lessons learned from their approach. The consultant’s evaluation report was released in April 2001.

By promoting greenways and circulation systems projects, TPB’s TCSP-related objectives are to facilitate transit and non-motorized travel in order to reduce automobile use, and to improve access to jobs via transit. In addition, by providing recreational opportunities, TPB expects that the greenspace and circulation projects will improve public health and community quality of life.

PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTICIPATION

A critical objective of the Metropolitan Greenways and Circulation Systems project was to build stakeholder support to address each Vision element. To do this, TPB established a different and innovative stakeholder involvement process. The greenways and circulation systems elements were established as separate but parallel tracks, each with its own stakeholder committee.



Each committee was chaired by an elected official from the TPB board and comprised of roughly 20 stakeholders from throughout the region. These stakeholders included elected officials as well as representatives of planning, transportation, and public works agencies, advocacy, conservation, and citizens groups, business associations, and transportation management agencies.

Both committees met four times over a period of five to seven months. With assistance from TPB staff and consultants, the committees undertook a five-step process to:

- 1) Inventory existing projects;
- 2) Inventory proposed projects, by talking with local jurisdictions to identify high-priority candidate projects;
- 3) Select eight to 10 regional priority projects;
- 4) Develop persuasive profiles for each project; and
- 5) Take the projects to the TPB board for final endorsement.

From an initial inventory of 150 projects, the greenways committee identified eight regional and 12 local priority projects totaling 264 linear miles. The committee used five qualitative criteria to evaluate each local priority project for inclusion on the regional priority list:

- Potential interjurisdictional connection;
- Crossing or filling a critical gap;
- Ecological benefits;
- Links to an existing or planned greenway; and
- Community access to the regional greenway network.

Regional Priority Circulation Systems Projects

1. Downtown D.C. Circulator
2. New York Avenue Metro Station Access
3. Union Station Bike Station
4. Montgomery County CBD Shuttle Package
5. Rockville Town Center
6. Suitland Metro Area Bus and Pedestrian Improvements
7. Old Town Fairfax Redevelopment
8. Rosslyn Circle Crossing
9. Tysons Corner Pedestrian Improvements

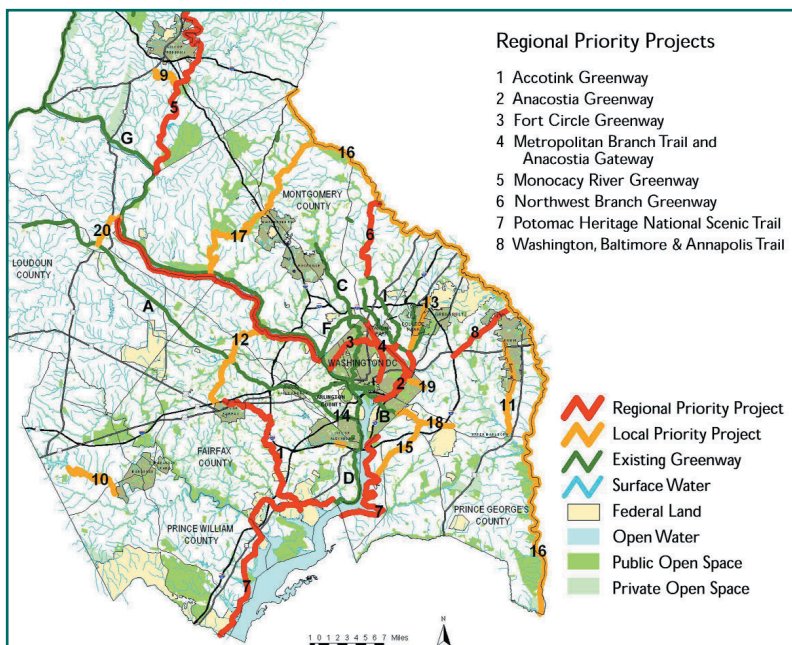
Similarly, the circulation systems committee identified nine regional priority projects from an initial list of 51 candidates. The regional projects include a combination of transit circulators, bicycle and pedestrian access improvements, and urban design improvements. Criteria for priority listing of the circulation systems projects included:

- Identification as part of a local plan;
- Location in an activity center;
- Potential air quality, safety, and economic development benefits (assessed qualitatively);
- Households and employees served;
- Cost; and
- Current status of the project.

RESULTS

The committees' recommended projects are described in two reports entitled "Priorities 2000." The reports include a two-page profile of each regional priority project. The profile describes the project and identifies its status, next steps, benefits, challenges, local stake-holders, and potential funding sources. The profile serves not only to stimulate interest in the project but also to serve as a starting point for pursuing implementation. The projects recommended by the stakeholder committees were endorsed by the TPB Board in February 2001.

The eight regional priority greenways will cost between \$100 and \$150 million to implement. The nine circulation systems projects are projected to cost approximately \$120 million in addition to transit operating subsidies. Two of the circulation systems projects—Rockville Town Center and Rosslyn Circle Crossing—have subsequently received TCSP funds for implementation and are underway.



Priority greenway projects. *Courtesy Transportation Planning Board*



REACTIONS

TPB's process was successful in involving a broad range of stakeholders, representing jurisdictions and interest groups from throughout the region. The evaluation consultant for the project notes that having elected officials chair the committees, and including relatively high-level staff positions from participating agencies, helped bolster the importance of the committees and promote participation. Participation was also facilitated by establishing a manageable and clearly defined set of objectives, process, and timeframe. Participants needed only to commit to four two-hour lunchtime meetings, and materials were prepared in advance of each meeting for review.

The broad range of committee members also helped participants adopt a regional viewpoint, rather than advocating narrowly for projects of local interest, and to come to agreement on recommended priorities. While participants would have appreciated additional quantitative information on the benefits of various projects, the qualitative rating process was nonetheless helpful in identifying projects that should be prioritized. Because of the success of this process, TPB is now applying a similar approach of using a broad-based stakeholder committee to address environmental justice issues in regional transportation planning.

The ultimate measures of success for this process will be the inclusion of prioritized projects in the Constrained Long-Range Plan (CLRP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the actual completion of these projects. TPB hopes that success will be demonstrated within two or three years. Local agencies must first identify funding for the projects as well as include them in their priority list of projects that they submit to TPB for inclusion in the TIP.

LESSONS LEARNED

TPB's project demonstrates how MPOs can advocate for and facilitate the implementation of adopted regional policies. The concepts of greenways and circulation systems were endorsed by the MPO's member jurisdictions—yet implementation commitments have been lacking. TPB's approach through this project is to encourage member jurisdictions to select specific projects that are consistent with regional policies, and to provide the tools to assist in doing so. Furthermore, TPB has helped to focus the project selection process by identifying projects that are of greatest importance and value from a regional perspective.

TPB's experience provides a number of specific lessons, as described by the project evaluation consultant:

Priority Greenways Project: Metropolitan Branch Trail and Anacostia Greenway

The Metropolitan Branch Trail (MBT) will run 7.7 miles from Washington's Union Station to Silver Spring, Maryland, with the Anacostia Gateway providing an 0.7-mile connection from Fort Totten to West Hyattsville. The trail will be a hybrid trail: part off-road trail, part side-path, and part bicycle lanes with adjacent sidewalks. It will complete a bicycle beltway, linking with the Capital Crescent Trail and National Mall, and will provide a bicycle commuting corridor to Union Station. The first segment is finished, but additional planning, land acquisition, and funding are required to complete the trail.

The Priorities 2000 report identifies the following next steps: 1) identify the final trail alignment in the Fort Totten and Silver Spring sections; 2) negotiate land acquisition with CSX and other land owners in the corridor; and 3) build community support. Partial funding has been provided by Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) High-Priority/Demonstration Project funds, the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program, the Highway Trust Fund, Prince George's County, and corporate sponsors. Other sources for which the trail may be eligible are the Transportation Enhancement Program and the Recreational Trails Program. The project is expected to cost roughly \$18 million.



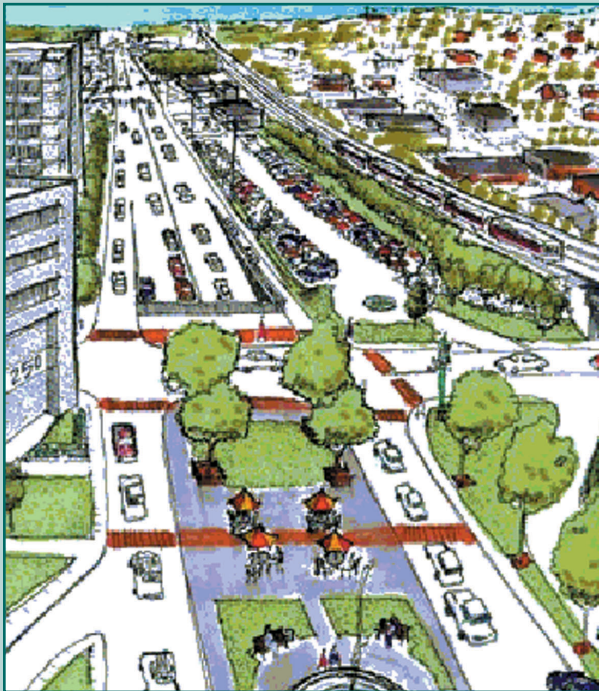
Courtesy Transportation Planning Board



Priority Circulation Systems Project: Rockville Town Center

In 1998, the Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) identified the need for major intersection improvements to relieve congestion at three intersections near the Rockville Town Center. Since these intersections are adjacent to a Metrorail and Amtrak station, the City of Rockville and SHA wanted to ensure that the improvements would preserve and enhance pedestrian and bicycle access in addition to improving traffic flow. To achieve these objectives, the city and SHA proposed a grade separation that would create a plaza over Rockville Pike. The plaza would connect the Rockville Metro Station with the Town Center and create a focal point for civic, business, and social activity.

Plans for the plaza are being coordinated with major property owners involved in the redevelopment of the Rockville Town Center. This redevelopment includes demolition of a former mall; construction of a grid street network, park, and pedestrian plazas; and the construction of retail, office, theater, restaurant, and residential space. SHA has initiated planning, design, and cost estimation for the grade separation project, and the city has received an FY 2001 TCSP grant of \$235,000 to assist in designing the plaza to connect the Metrorail station and the Town Center. The entire project is expected to be complete within 8 to 10 years.



Concept for plaza over Rockville Pike.
Courtesy City of Rockville

Adopt a project-focused approach, and draw on existing project ideas. TPB's approach was to focus on specific projects rather than general concepts, and to tap into a reserve of existing project ideas with a local base of support.

Involve elected officials. Involving elected officials as chairs of the advisory committees greatly improves the visibility and indicates support for non-traditional transportation projects.

Allow stakeholders to steer the project selection process. Giving stakeholder groups, such as local governmental entities, communities, business organizations, and advocacy groups, a strong role in choosing which projects to pursue can enhance support for new projects. As a result, these groups are more inclined to act as advocates for the projects.

Develop a well-designed final product. The basic product is a list of projects. The ultimate goal of the process, however, is to attract attention, raise visibility, and secure a place in the TIP for new projects. Well-written and succinct profiles of priority projects that also feature eye-catching maps and photographs are helpful in building support.

"Your report is a wise investment of federal funds (that) provides an overarching framework & blueprint for local jurisdictions... It should become a model for the nation."

—Tom Downs, former CEO, Amtrak

The Washington, D.C. region is already known for its greenways such as the Potomac River and Rock Creek Parkway, as well as its urban and suburban activity centers, many focused around Metrorail stations. The implementation of the Priorities 2000 greenways and circulation systems projects will further enhance transportation access within and between these centers and will contribute to the quality of life in the region.

For further information:

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National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board. *Priorities 2000: Metropolitan Washington Greenways* and *Priorities 2000: Metropolitan Washington Circulation Systems*. Washington, D.C.: February 2001.

TransTech Management, Inc. *An Evaluation of National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board's Transportation & Community & System Preservation Pilot Program Grant*. Washington, D.C.: April 2001.

