

“Framework vs. Fabric”

Statement of Robert O. Chase

To National Capital Region Transportation Board

November 18, 2015

Congratulations to the TPB for 50 years of contributions to regional mobility. As an observer, participant and contributor to this organization for more than half that time period, I offer some personal observations.

The TPB’s formation coincided with the area’s emergence as urbanized region. Significant initial focus was on the region’s transportation framework in recognition that a strong framework is essential to better mobility and land use. Plans reflected both strategic suburbs to core and suburb to suburb connections.

Over time and particularly the last two decades the TPB’s focus shifted from completing that regional highway and transit framework to promoting local fabric including complete streets, neighborhoods, pedestrian systems and bicycle networks, subjects historically the purview of local governments.

Some attribute this shift to this body’s composition mostly of local officials who are not accountable for the regional framework’s performance.

Whatever the reason, a quick glance at a regional map and past and future growth trends shows the obvious failure to build planned Potomac River Bridges and suburb-to-suburb connectivity framework or to upgrade major failing corridors including the Maryland Beltway.

Regrettably, key needs such as these are seldom addressed in this room as illustrated by the TPB’s recently adopted Regional Transportation Priorities Plan failure to designate specific project priorities.

The report leaves this to states and localities which, of course also are not held accountable for the overall operation of the National Capital Region’s regional transportation network.

In short, lack of accountability for the regional transportation framework just might be why it is the nation’s most congested and why every adopted CLRP shows congestion only getting worse.

This raises the fundamental question as to, if the region’s officially designated transportation planning body and no other entity are responsible for the regional network’s performance, perhaps it’s time for a new entity composed of appointees of the three states with a professional staff that can objectively identify, evaluate, prioritize and advocate for highway and transit projects of greatest regional significance.

Such an entity would not replace the TPB but could provide a level of regional examination, discussion and advocacy that has proven difficult to achieve in this room.

Bottom line: Be it here or elsewhere getting the local fabric that we want requires achieving the regional transportation framework we need. It’s not an either/or proposition. We need to do both.