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Sharon Bulova, Chair
Greater Washington 2050 Initiative
c/o Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002-4239

RE: Comments on draft *Region Forward* report

Dear Ms. Bulova,

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) commends the Greater Washington 2050 (GW2050) Coalition for developing the draft *Region Forward* report and compact, which presents a unified vision for our region. As the federal government's planning agency for the National Capital Region, NCPC shares many of the report's goals related to promoting transit-oriented mixed-use communities, protecting the quality of our natural environment, and increasing affordable housing options for the region's workforce. We have been pleased to participate in the Coalition, and believe that the draft report and compact represent a significant, positive way for the region to successfully work together to achieve common goals.

NCPC looks forward to working with the Coalition during the next several months to share this information with a wider federal audience, and to identify opportunities for broader federal engagement. As you are aware, in July 2009, NCPC and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) co-sponsored *Building the Region Together*. This event brought together top federal agency representatives and local elected officials to discuss shared interests in developing a vibrant, sustainable region. Subsequently, NCPC has been working with COG to develop a set of meaningful, collaborative federal-local projects that can be implemented over the next 12-24 months. Securing long-lasting federal support for the work of the GW2050 Coalition is part of this effort. In addition, many of these projects—grouped around the broad goals of fostering regional cooperation, establishing the region as a sustainability leader, and fully utilizing federal activities to support regional development—offer specific ways to advance and implement the GW2050 goals.

In our attachment, we provide recommendations on the draft report for your consideration. We are pleased to note that many NCPC policies, executive orders, federal legislation, and new and existing federal programs and policies share common goals with those identified in the draft report.

We look forward to continuing our work with COG to develop and implement projects that will enhance the sustainability and livability of our region. Should you have any questions, or desire further information, please call Julia Koster, director of intergovernmental affairs, at (202) 482.7211.

Sincerely,



Marcel Acosta
Executive Director

Cc: David Robertson, Executive Director, MWCOG
L. Preston Bryant, Chairman, NCPC
Julia Koster, OIA

Attachment

General Comments

Given the significant presence of the federal government in the region, the federal government's actions – affecting facility location and design, workforce, procurement and operational activities – could play a large role in attaining the goals and targets identified in the draft *Region Forward* report. To the extent possible, we encourage developing targets closely aligned to goals and requirements established by the federal government. In particular, we recommend review of NCPC's *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements* that presents goals and policies to guide federal decision-making regarding growth and development in the national capital. Further, the 2007 Energy Security and Independence Act and Executive Order 13514 set aggressive goals for federal agencies to implement sustainability practices in their own facilities and operations. The federal government is collecting data to track many of these goals.

NCPC recommends that COG conduct a baseline analysis on targets and publish reports periodically thereafter to track progress towards meeting regional goals. Quantitative analysis will enable communities and the region to understand the impact of their decision-making and continually reinforce their commitment to the regional compact over the plan's long timeframe. To sustain commitment and continued awareness of the *Region Forward* vision and goals, we believe that reporting should occur on a bi-annual basis. Further, while tracking the targets may be appropriately conducted by an existing COG committee, we urge identification of a high-level, widely representative group to act as spokespersons and to work on next steps for the initiative.

Establishing measurable targets is critical to continued assessment of the region's ability to achieve the goals in the *Region Forward* report. In particular, we applaud the effort to identify targets that cut across inter-related issues. Even while jurisdictional support is sought for the report's overall vision and goals, we recommend an ongoing discussion to refine the targets in the draft report to ensure that they appropriately measure regional progress towards livability and sustainability goals. We believe the targets should also:

- Identify baseline levels, which would allow residents and elected officials to understand how aggressively the region must act to meet targets;
- Provide measurable indicators for all targets;
- Identify a 2050 target (several targets have dates preceding 2050) and potentially, interim targets; and
- Define terms, such as “sentinel watershed,” and providing references to data sources or reports.
- Explain how the target was determined.

We encourage consideration of additional targets to assess progress towards important areas of concern:

- Regional gaps in income, education and/or resources, first described in the Brookings Institution's “Region Divided” report.
- Regional jobs/housing balance.
- Preservation and development of parkland and open space, an important environmental and quality of life component.

- Regional job opportunities for the entire workforce, in addition to targets for the workforce with advanced skills.
- Additional environmental targets to track the protection of natural resource areas and stormwater management.

Since many of the targets are linked to Regional Activity Centers (RAC), the report should clearly define and describe the process for establishing new RACs. Should the definition of a RAC change, it may then affect the information being tracked to show progress towards a target.

Federal law, executive orders or other policies may now, or in the future, establish specific standards that are more rigorous than the targets in the draft report. While we encourage the region to set targets to encourage improvements over existing conditions, NCPC and other federal agencies will support or enforce federal standards that are more stringent.

We are pleased that the report encourages the region to work closely with the federal government to achieve shared goals. With increased federal attention to metropolitan problem-solving, this region could have a unique role and significant opportunities as the seat of the federal government. We would like to work with COG staff to redraft the language on pages 35 and 38 to more precisely reflect the evolving role of the federal government in this region and the opportunity to work together more effectively.

Comments on Regional Goals and Targets

Accessibility Goals and Targets:

- In general, we see the draft report's goals as generally complementary to existing federal policies for locating federal workplaces, as outlined in the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital: Federal Elements* and Executive Order 13514 (E.O. 13514). These directives call for federal agencies to locate new facilities on sites that offer pedestrian and alternative transportation accessibility in established urban areas, in accordance with agency needs. We support the draft report's focus on improving multi-modal transportation options, and specifically supporting transit-oriented development. Policies in the *Federal Elements* prioritize maintenance of existing transportation facilities and improving transit capacity.
- NCPC supports the draft report's goal of promoting walking and bicycling; however, we suggest clarification of the "rate of construction" of these facilities as a measurable target (p. 18). Tracking the number of miles of bicycle lanes and sidewalks added to the regional network, perhaps in comparison to additional roadway mileage, could help to assess the regional priority placed on investment in pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- We are pleased with the more comprehensive combined housing + transportation cost target. As the targets are tracked in the future, it will be important to examine their broader context. Technical success in this indicator may not guarantee affordability for middle class or lower income households, but could instead mean that the area has gentrified to the point that only families whose income significantly exceeds their housing and transportation costs can afford to live there.

Sustainability Goals and Targets:

- The 2007 Energy Security and Independence Act and the recently issued Executive Order establish goals and requirements for federal agencies related to energy efficiency, greenhouse gas emissions, stormwater management and other sustainability issues. Beginning in 2020, all new federal buildings that enter the planning process must be designed to achieve zero-net-energy by 2030. Implementing these standards for federal buildings will complement the region's focus on energy efficient buildings. Executive Order 13514 requires federal agencies to develop a percentage reduction target for agency-wide emissions of scope 1, 2, and 3 greenhouse gases in absolute terms by 2020, relative to a 2008 baseline. Meeting these goals will support the draft report's target to reduce regional greenhouse gas emissions.
- NCPC supports compliance with EPA's determination and enforcement of air and water quality standards. Where federal requirements and/or guidance are more stringent than the targets provided in GW2050, NCPC will support or enforce the federal standard.

Prosperity Goals and Targets:

- As noted above, we encourage consideration of additional targets addressing economic and educational disparity across the region.

Livability Goals and Targets:

- While NCPC certainly recognizes the importance of reducing pedestrian and bicycle fatalities across the region, it is important to find ways to track this indicator in relation to the number of mode users. In absolute terms, a reduction in fatalities may actually indicate a decline in the number of pedestrians and bicyclists. Perhaps the target statement should also include encouragement of these activities to promote a healthy lifestyle (p. 47).