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2035 Regional Transportation Plan

Critical Comment



DON'T BLINK!! ??

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2035 Regional Transportation Plan Critical Comment

There are a number of concerns, both minor and major, with the draft of the 2035 Plan. The major concerns are sufficiently large to require major revisions.

A. The major concerns.

These stem from the overall approach taken, which may fairly be characterized as 'more of the same'. This approach is ill considered, based not only on existing trends, but also from a historical perspective.

- a. The historical perspective: first, it is difficult at best, and perhaps a fool's errand, to prognosticate the needs of the next generation, recognizing a regulatory obligation to undertake the same. The difficulty in assessing transportation needs decades in the future can be measured in some respects by simply considering the changes that have occurred since 1990, 23 years before this process began.
 - i. The internet: this essential component of contemporary living and the economy was in its infancy, such that features which are taken for granted today were not foreseen. For example, email did not exist; e-commerce (Amazon and Ebay, e.g.,) was not on the horizon; mp3 players and formats did not exist.
 - ii. Electric vehicles were not on the horizon. Elon Musk had not made his first million; the grounds for his subsequent millions (PayPal), as noted immediately above, did not exist.

- iii. My own home, constructed in 1993, has a feature in nearly every room that my grandchildren do not understand nor need to: 'phone jacks'. In contrast, the grandkids understand 'smart phones' and their apps and benefits, beyond the extent to which the existing owner of the same does not yet fully appreciate. There was no such thing as a "smart" phone in the '90's.

These few examples emphasize that *primary* reliance and emphasis on historical data for 'visions' of transportation demands and requirements more than two decades in the future is a mistake.

- b. Modern trends. There are a number of phenomena that cannot be ignored. They highlight the need for the Plan, or perhaps more accurately, the Forecast, to identify those matters and to discuss them and incorporate them as a material planning element.
 - i. The electronic vehicle (E/V). There are many 'apps' (see also, a. i-iii, immediately above) that identify the location and nature of charging stations for use by street operators of electric vehicles. Electric transportation is given short shrift in the Plan, yet it is reasonable to predict that it should and likely will be the major mode of individual transportation by 2035. See discussion, *infra*, at p. 6.
 - ii. The internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle and global warming. It can and should be a cornerstone of the Plan to

address pollutants from ICE's, and incentives to reduce public reliance on such modes of transportation. The Plan gives lip service to the concern, but concludes that 'it's not our problem'.¹ Lamentably, a quick use of a common word search engine does not reveal the existence of the words 'pollution' or 'emissions' in the RTC's *Congestion Management Process 2013 Monitoring Report*. If accurate, that omission is short-sighted, glaring and in error in that report. This problem, although global in scope, demands attention at the local level.

iii. Changes in private transportation. Millenials, the primary and intended beneficiaries of this undertaking, clearly show evidence of a decline in reliance on cars. The indicia of this are several. Consider, for example, the following:

1. Two AP articles published in *The Columbian* noting the decline in interest shown by millenials in use of ICE's, and all private motorized transport (See Exhibit A hereto);
2. The prominence of Clyde Holland, commercial real estate developer, who has bet and made millions on projects² situated "on direct (mass) transit lines," [quote of Holland] *Columbian*, 1/15/2012.

¹ See discussion, *infra*, p. 3-4.

² South Lake Union Project, abutting the South Lake Union Trolley line; and Orenco Station, served by Metro's Hillsboro Max light rail.

3. And we cannot ignore Google, which is developing and testing 'self-driving' vehicles today. What plans are in place to consider the impact on commuting of such vehicles?³

iv. An obvious decline in gas tax revenues, foreseeable for both the near and far future. See, *e.g.*, ODOT's announced experiment to substitute a mileage tax for gasoline taxes.⁴

The foregoing concerns regarding undue reliance on historical data, and disregard of existing and emerging trends in transportation in turn highlight problems with the forecast, and the Plan based thereon.

A. The Vision. The Vision (Chapter 1) is largely limited to reliance upon historical data to forecast the future. It is insufficiently broad to include likely or desirable alternative scenarios. Query: what does RTC 'see' for millenials in 2035? Does this Plan draw a true picture? Where are the concrete details of what the future holds?⁵ The RTC 2035 Vision (Ch.1, p 4) of the Plan is as bland as unseasoned watery oatmeal, which does not articulate any concrete goals beyond a rosy future for ICE's. Failure to entertain a broader view, based on existing and reasonably foreseeable

³ See <http://www.google.com/about/careers/lifeatgoogle/self-driving-car-test-steve-mahan.html>.

⁴ The nature of this experiment is known to this writer only through reports in the print press. If totally accurate, the experiment from the perspective of promoting a reduction in pollution is lamentable, as it purports to issue 'rebates' exceeding revenues for gas guzzlers. It nonetheless highlights a clearly-foreseeable trend away from gasoline tax revenues.

⁵ Appendix B to the Plan is limited to an exhaustive description of plans for ICE's at locations other than the Columbia River I-5, which is unfortunately abbreviated.

alternatives, unfairly limits the scope of the Plan. The claim that “[t]he transportation system is funded with sustainable sources of revenue” is highly debatable. A ‘not-so-rosy’ picture needs to be expanded beyond a forecast of continued congestion and potholes. A ‘do nothing’ scenario must include reference to the impact of air pollution on the environment, the air shed, and global warming.

B. Air quality: The Plan should address Vancouver’s responsibilities to address air quality (See, e.g., Chapter 3, p. 8 graphic re: Air Quality Maintenance Area). The Plan notes the obvious: “Mobile source emissions are a significant source of air pollution”. Ch.6, p. 3. Lamentably, however, the Plan proposes that RTC need not lead or exceed minimum standards, and recommends a passive role [“the region no longer needs to demonstrate (Ozone) air quality conformity” ... and “for carbon monoxide, regional conformity is presumed...”.] Air pollution is a material component of global warming.⁶ It is the responsibility of every adult to address this problem, now. The RTC should not accept a passive role but instead require that the Plan actively address specific steps to reduce emissions.⁷ Reduction of air pollutants should have a prominent place in the ‘Goals’ section of Chapter One.

C. Financing: The Plan recites, “Federal provisions require that the RTP must be ‘fiscally constrained’ meaning that ‘revenues are reasonably expected to

⁶ See, e.g., Exhibit B hereto. See also, <http://www.learner.org/courses/envsci/unit/text.php?unit=11&secNum=11>

⁷ A key goal of ‘commuter trip reduction’ is to reduce air pollutants.

be available' ...in the 24 year time frame". Ch. 4, p.1. The forecast is then predicated solely upon gas taxes. This economic model is simply untenable, and the Plan should so expressly state. E/V's are mentioned, but given short shrift. They comprise virtually no part of the revenue Plan. Instead, "[f]unding sources that have been historically available are extrapolated into the future to provide an estimate of the resource reasonably expected to be available." No plan or forecast should proceed when the forecaster can candidly state that they simply 'don't know', and should not plan based on assumptions that are known to be invalid.⁸ The approach should simply note that future forecasts of revenue sources are obscure, and that plans should address three alternatives: (a) a 'baseline' of financing, (b) improved and more stable financing, and (c) a decline in future revenues, with elaboration upon plans contingent for each.

D. ICE Alternatives. E/V's deserve a much more prominent place in the Plan.

Promotion of E/V's as a preferred mode of personal transit is a matter of public policy at both the Federal and State levels.⁹ The RTC must plan on the impacts that this policy will generate. The policy is integral to other factors which also require development in the 2035 Plan, namely, reduction of air

⁸ E.g., the Plan takes the current fuel efficiency standard of 27.5 mpg into account; however, "it does not account for the recent announcement [of an] increase ... to 54.5 mpg by 2025", a full ten years before the end of the Plan. Ch.4, p. 19.

⁹ The Federal Government offers an incentive in the form of an income tax credit of up to \$7500 for qualifying E/V purchases (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009); the State of Washington waives sales tax on the purchase of qualifying E/Vs (WAC 458-20-279; RCW 82.08.809).

pollution, and preferences of millenials regarding mass transit and adjacent housing.

- E. More of the same housing developments. “In the regional transportation planning process the forecast growth in housing and development for year 2035 is converted into projections of future travel demand.” (Ch.2, p.9). Unfortunately, housing and development may only have marginal relevance to the nature and extent of ‘future travel demand’ in 2035; reference to alternative modes¹⁰ and locations is critical. The Plan must contain an express caveat that reliance upon the forecast factors it has identified may cause the analysis to be significantly skewed, if not wholly erroneous. The City of Vancouver may yet evolve into something other than an urban area where its residents are dependent upon the automobile for the basics, i.e., food and routine medical care, and for access to Portland, the area’s urban center. This prospect merits reference in the Plan.

Summary

As a consequence of undue reliance upon the past, the Plan’s crystal ball fails to address key factors that are either reasonably foreseeable, or to acknowledge which key factors cannot be reasonably foreseen.

The Plan can and must address air pollution as a Goal; with plans to reduce the same. The Plan must consider and address the likely failure of gasoline taxes as a reliable source of transportation funding. The Plan must describe and plan for E/V’s as a primary mode of transportation, considering support

¹⁰ For example, E/V’s and the possibility of light rail serving urban Vancouver.

infrastructure for the same; as well as the prospect that self-driving automobiles, currently being tested, may prove to address many of the congestion concerns referenced in the current draft of the Plan.

The Plan should be something that is adopted, not as a matter of 'business as usual', with salient details left for some other day, but rather, in the words of Mr. John Ruskin, something that impels millenials in the future to remark with favor, "See. This, our fathers did for us", instead of noting in dismay, what we failed to do.



Clark County Public Service Building Parking garage. Free parking for E/V consumers @ Blink stations

Respectfully submitted, Steven B. Tubbs

Millennials leave car behind when hitting road

By Froma Harrop

Young Americans are just not into driving the way their elders are or were at their age. They are less likely to own cars or use cars. The drives they do are shorter. Meanwhile, the bus is looking good to them.

A new report confirms this trend and offers reasons why millennials — we're talking 14- to 31-year-olds — seem less drawn to the automobile thing. They're sure not singing car songs as the baby boomers did. No "Little Deuce Coupe," no "G.T.O.," no "Hot Rod Lincoln."

But the report, by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group and the Frontier Group, misses what I see as the biggest factor. Driving is no longer a coast down the great American open road. It's become a pain and a drag — drag as in "a boring or tire-

some thing."

From 2001 to 2009, the average number of miles driven by 16- to 34-year-olds fell by an astounding 23 percent. There are economic reasons, for sure. The Great Recession whacked millennials especially hard in the job area. They are therefore shorter of cash — and less likely to get married, have kids and pursue other activities conducive to car ownership than previous generations at their age.

They've also shown a greater passion for living in urban or otherwise walkable communities. These are neighborhoods where automobiles are not the only way to get around and at least remnants of a public transportation system survive.

What really killed the American love affair with the car? The hell of American driving.

Oh, there still exist some heavenly road experiences in this country: drives at dawn through West Coast wine country, two-lane dreamscapes in rural regions sprawl has yet to wreck.

But the typical car experience takes place in the exhaust of suburban congestion. What younger adults recall as children is being strapped in the back seat as Mom lurched the vehicle through a soulless crudscape of drab chain retailing. They've done the six lanes of stop-and-go — bored out of their skulls and worried about Mom's frazzled nerves.

They don't want to do this anymore. And if it means sharing a 700-square-foot apartment downtown, so be it. The more young people — or any people — establish their nests downtown, the faster

America's long-suffering town centers will mend.

So yea, millennials.

The mission going forward is to build up the public transportation system to serve Americans' changing needs. Conservatives of yore framed public transit as a devious plot to force Americans from their five-bedroom spreads to apartment houses along bus lines.

But a bus-and-rail boom was not the big thing accelerating multifamily home construction during the Great Recession and beyond. It was market forces, guys. And the Americans leading that market are the millennials, yearning to hang up the car keys.

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10/19/2014 ↑

Study: Millennials' shift away from driving is 'more than temporary'

KEVIN RECTOR
Baltimore Sun

The nation's largest generation the so-called "millennials," born between 1983 and 2000 — have own less dependence on driving get around in recent years and aren't likely to change their ways, according to a new study released recently by the Maryland Public Interest Research Group Foundation and the Frontier Group. Young people are pushing down driving mileage per capita in the country for the first time in decades, and are more likely to live in urban centers and to bike walk to work, the study found. They are getting driving licenses less frequently, are using public transit more and are delaying

forming families — all things that, along with a weak economy in recent years, have pushed them away from relying on vehicles.

The benefits of the shift vary, from less congestion to less pollution, and transportation policymakers across the country should be taking note, the study's authors found.

"Millennials are trying to send a message to policymakers: We want convenient, walkable neighborhoods with many options for how to get around," Tony Dutzik, senior analyst at Frontier Group and one of the report's authors, said in a statement. "Unfortunately, many of our nation's transportation policies work to ensure just the opposite result."

Federal data on transportation behavior in the United States has shown that between 2001 and 2009, vehicle trips per capita by those aged 16 to 34 declined 15 percent, the study found. During the same period, per capita trips by transit among the same age group increased 4 percent; walking trips increased 16 percent; and biking trips increased 27 percent.

The report found millennials are not likely to change their attitudes toward transportation as the economy continues to improve, and that their shift away from driving is "more than temporary," Maryland PIRG said.

"Millennials are different from their parents, and those differences aren't going away," Maryland

PIRG Director Emily Scarr said in a statement. "After five years of economic growth with stagnant driving, it's time for federal and Maryland government to wake up to growing evidence that millennials don't want to drive as much as their parents did. This change has big implications and policymakers shouldn't be asleep at the wheel."

The report calls for greater investment in public transit and biking infrastructure, and for highway funding to be used to repair existing roads rather than build new ones.

It follows a U.S. PIRG Education Fund study released last year that found young professionals and others across the country were driving less.

SECTION D | FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2014

U.N. climate report conclusion offers stark warnings, hope

COLUMBIAN 11/3/2014

By KARL RITTER
Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Climate change is happening, it's almost entirely man's fault and limiting its impacts may require reducing greenhouse gas emissions to zero this cen-

tury, the U.N.'s panel on climate science said Sunday. The fourth and final volume of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's giant climate assessment offered no surprises, nor was it expected since it combined the

findings of three reports released in the past 13 months. But it underlined the scope of the climate challenge in stark terms. Emissions, mainly from the burning of fossil fuels, may need to drop to zero by the end of this century for the world

to have a decent chance of keeping the temperature rise below a level that many consider dangerous. The panel did not say exactly what such a world would look like but it would likely require a massive shift to renewable sources

to power homes, cars and industries, combined with new technologies to suck greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. The report warned that failure to reduce emissions could lock the world on a trajectory leading to "irre-

versible" impacts on people and the environment. Some impacts already being observed included rising sea levels, a warmer and more acidic ocean, melting glaciers and Arctic sea ice, and

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more frequent and intense heat waves.

"Science has spoken. There is no ambiguity in their message. Leaders must act. Time is not on our side," U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said at the report's launch in Copenhagen.

Amid its grim projections, the report said the tools are there to set the world on a low-emissions path and break the addiction to burning oil, coal and gas, which pollute the atmosphere with heat-trapping CO2, the chief greenhouse gas.

"All we need is the will to change, which we trust will be motivated by knowledge and an understanding of the science of climate change," panel chairman Rajendra Pachauri said.

EXHIBIT B