

visualize
2045 A long-range
transportation plan
for the National
Capital Region

APPENDIX G

Environmental Consultation and Mitigation

Draft, March 2022



**ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTATION AND MITIGATION FOR THE VISUALIZE 2045 UPDATE (2022)
LONG-RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN FOR THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION**

March 2022

ABOUT VISUALIZE 2045 & THE TPB

Visualize 2045 is the federally required long-range transportation plan for the National Capital Region. It identifies and analyzes all regionally significant transportation investments planned through 2045 to help decision makers and the public “visualize” the region’s future. The plan is updated at least every four years, the Visualize 2045 update is scheduled for 2022.

Visualize 2045 is developed by the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB), the federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for metropolitan Washington. It is responsible for developing and carrying out a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process in the metropolitan area. Members of the TPB include representatives of the transportation agencies of the states of Maryland and Virginia and the District of Columbia, 24 local governments, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the Maryland and Virginia General Assemblies, and nonvoting members from the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority and federal agencies. The TPB is staffed by the Department of Transportation Planning at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG).

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ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTATION

The TPB's consultation process was developed during environment consultation initiatives completed between 2007 and 2009. This effort established relationships with environmental agencies to solicit input and comments on the draft long-range transportation plan and mitigation discussion. During this process, input from environmental agencies representatives concluded that agency staff would be challenged to provide meaningful comments on regional, system-wide long-range transportation plan due to lack of project-level details and resources. These agencies are intimately involved at project-level planning and/or during National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review processes for specific projects.

An activity that agency staff commented on as helpful is the development of maps identifying environmental and historic resources along with the transportation projects. An updated interactive map provides a regional-level resource to inform the relationship between the transportation and environmental concerns: mwcog.org/EnviroInventoryMap. The map allows the public and decision makers to view the natural resource data layers along with the transportation projects expected to be built by 2045 from the financially constrained element of this plan. By defining and inventorying environmental resources and data, the interactive map can be used to inform state and local agencies and the public about the relationship between the projects in the constrained element and environmental concerns at the regional scale.

Further, to keep agencies aware of transportation projects in the long-range transportation plan, the TPB staff maintains a list of agency contacts and includes them on all TPB public comment period announcements. Staff also present to and receive feedback from COG and TPB committees, including COG's Climate Energy & Environment Policy Committee on various planning activities that inform the plan, such as the TPB's Resiliency Study.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION ACTIVITIES

This discussion of potential environmental mitigation activities for Visualize 2045 provides an overview of mitigation activities being considered throughout the region. It also includes a new climate change mitigation and resiliency section in the plan, with companion reports documented in Appendices M and N of the plan. Federal regulations require that the TPB include: "A discussion of types of potential environmental mitigation activities and potential areas to carry out these activities, including activities that have the greatest potential to restore and maintain the environmental functions affected by the metropolitan transportation plan. This discussion may focus on policies, programs or strategies, rather than at the project level" (23 C.F.R. § 450.322(f)(7)).

VISUALIZE 2045 AND PROJECT-LEVEL ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The Visualize 2045 update includes projects expected to be built by 2045. Many projects are represented at early stages of project planning and development. Many project details, such as exact alignments and dimensions, are often under development and can often change. As an improvement approaches the preliminary engineering stage, detailed consideration of environmental resources is expressly conducted at the local, project-specific level through the NEPA review process.

The National Capital Region is composed of three states: the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia; all of which have their own approach and regulations on the environment and implementing transportation projects. Currently, with exceptions for regional ambient air quality, offsetting environmental impacts during the long-range transportation planning process is not required.

ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION OVERVIEW

Environmental resources and areas are generally impacted by transportation projects as a result of construction, increased traffic, stormwater runoff from paved surfaces, among others. Examples of these resources where mitigation efforts can be focused include:

- Neighborhoods and communities, homes and businesses
- Cultural resources (e.g., historic properties or archaeological sites);
- Parks and recreation areas;
- Wetlands and water resources;
- Forested and other natural areas;
- Agricultural areas;
- Endangered and threatened species; and
- Air Quality.

Environmental mitigation is the process of addressing damage to the environment caused by transportation or other public works projects. Actions taken to avoid or minimize environmental damage are considered the most preferable method of mitigation.

Potential environmental mitigation activities may include:

- avoiding impacts altogether;
- minimizing a proposed activity/project size or its involvement;
- rectifying impacts (restoring temporary impacts);
- precautionary and/or abatement measures to reduce construction impacts;
- employing special features or operational management measures to reduce impacts; and
- Compensating for environmental impacts by providing suitable, replacement or substitute environmental resources of equivalent or greater value, on or off-site.