

New Visions 2030
Draft Report of Working Group A
Effects of Alternative Development Scenarios in the Capital District
A SAFETEA-LU Requirement

Background

Consideration of different growth scenarios is required by SAFETEA-LU (The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Act: A Legacy for Users).

The New Visions 2030 Working Group A prepared a draft report that developed and examined four growth scenarios for the Capital District. These include:

- 1. **Status Quo Trend-** CDRPC's baseline forecast (9% growth in population, 15% growth in households by 2030, current development patterns continuing);*
- 2. **Concentrated Growth-** the baseline growth rate with more concentrated development patterns resulting from urban reinvestment and suburban planning;*
- 3. **Trend Hyper-Growth-** hyper-growth (29% population growth and 35% household growth by 2030), with in trend patterns of dispersed development;*
- 4. **Concentrated Hyper-Growth-** hyper-growth occurring in a concentrated pattern resulting from more urban reinvestment and suburban planning.*

The Working Group A draft report, "Effects of Alternative Development Scenarios in the Capital District" has been posted for public review since September 2005.

As part of CDTC's participation in the Center for Economic Growth's (CEG) Economic Modeling/Benchmarking Study, CDTC staff prepared an analysis of the transportation impacts of the four alternative growth scenarios. This analysis will be incorporated into the CEG study, and has also been added to the Working Group A Report. The new material for the Working Group A report begins on page 49.

The new material in the report is described as follows. The CDTC STEP Model was used to evaluate the impacts of each scenario to the transportation system. In addition to this quantitative analysis, qualitative assessment was made of some performance measures, such as quality of life. The work of Working Group C was included to consider the impacts of Big Ticket Initiatives on transportation performance. The Big Ticket Initiatives are not funded in the existing Plan. However, the likelihood of implementation of these initiatives is affected by the alternative growth scenarios.

Issues Explored

- **Demographic Analysis**—CDRPC conducted an in depth analysis of the demographic distributions and land use patterns that current trends indicate (the Status Quo Trend), and developed and analyzed demographic and land use patterns that could result from the other three growth scenarios. The latter three growth scenarios were presented as “what-if” concepts in order to allow Capital District Policy makers to consider the regional impacts of alternative growth scenarios.
- **Transportation Impacts**—The impacts of the four different growth scenarios were evaluated using the CDTC STEP Model. In addition, the work of Working Group C was included to consider the impacts of Big Ticket Initiatives on transportation performance.

Performance Measurement

The results of the evaluation of transportation impacts under the four alternative growth scenarios is summarized as follows.

Status Quo Trend-

- 9% increase population
- 15% increase households
- 65% growth in congestion
- Transit service comparable, larger proportion has no access to transit

Concentrated Growth-

- 9% increase population
- 15% increase households
- 28% less congestion than status quo
- Transit service improves: frequency, ridership, Bus Rapid Transit
- More transit oriented development on transit or BRT corridors
- Higher likelihood of managed lane on the Northway
- Segments of regional greenway
- Better pedestrian access due to proximity of development
- less mileage of new residential streets (vs. status quo) therefore lower town maintenance costs
- greater protection of open space

Trend Hyper Growth-

- 29% growth in population
- 35% growth in households
- 200% growth in congestion (triple) compared with year 2000
- 65% to 95% traffic growth on roads that are currently rural collectors
- Same transit service as today, with greatly reduced access for 29% more people

- Highest total vehicle operating costs, fuel consumption, and vehicle greenhouse gas emissions (35% growth over 2000)
- Highest consumption of open space

Concentrated Hyper Growth-

- 29% growth in population
- 35% growth in households
- 18% less congestion than Trend Hyper Growth; still a 92% growth in per capita congestion from 2000
- Highest transit service and frequency
- Strongest option for BRT, Fixed Guideway Transit, Transit Oriented Development
- Most of the Big Ticket Initiatives would have the highest feasibility: greenways, managed lanes
- Highest quality of overall transportation service

Summary of Findings

The big ticket initiatives represent an investment tool that will help manage growth in a way that will sustain the Capital District as a quality region. Investments in the big ticket initiatives can catalyze a more concentrated development pattern under any growth scenario. The caveat is that the big ticket initiatives are currently unfunded, and by themselves will not induce high growth.

The New Visions Plan already calls for transportation investments that support urban reinvestment and high quality suburban planning. The New Visions for a Quality Region process has confirmed a consensus that seeks to use transportation policy (and other public policy) in the region to:

- Encourage sustainable economic growth with good-paying jobs
- Revitalize urban areas
- Help build community structure in growing suburbs
- Preserve open space and agricultural land
- Make communities more walkable and livable
- Provide meaningful transit options;
- Connect all residents with job opportunities and,
- Mitigate growing congestion and maintain reasonable mobility on the highway system.

Under any growth scenario, the benefits of concentrated development patterns are significant for the transportation system and for regional quality of life. The New Visions Plan supports and encourages concentrated development in the Capital District. The urgency for coordinated, high quality planning is even greater under a scenario of high growth. This urgency will be necessary because the impacts of a high growth scenario with dispersed development patterns would threaten to make the region's quality of life unsustainable.

Achieving the benefits of the concentrated development scenarios will require continued strong public support and much concerted regional and community leadership. The opportunities presented by the big ticket initiatives will also require proactive leadership and determination.