

**New Visions 2030**  
Working Group C: Big Idea/Big Ticket Initiatives

## Background

*This report presents the findings from the review of seventeen big initiatives in other metro areas as cases studies of circumstance and process for the Capital District. What they have in common is that each one is bigger in scope or bolder in commitment to addressing an issue than any current effort to address that issue in the Capital District. To understand the general nature of how these “big” initiatives developed, the working group selected six of the case studies for more in-depth examination by staff. These six initiatives represent those that are most probable for serious consideration in the Capital District. The time may not have come yet for serious implementation of these initiatives which range to the billions of dollars in cost, but a sense of urgency for action could emerge quickly and unexpectedly. The region is well advised to know how it will choose to respond.*

## Issues Explored

- How and why big initiatives in other metro areas came to be. Seventeen big initiatives were initially reviewed with an additional in depth review of six, leading to the articulation of the following regional conditions that appear to be pre-requisites for these initiatives:
  - A sense of *urgency* is typically present.
  - The initiative reflects the sensibilities and community values of the region, producing a strong *community consensus*.
  - A *champion* is typically a critical element as catalyst and sustainer of the initiative.
  - Commitment to a major initiative is as much related to a *subjective rationale* as to objective analysis.
  - Funding is achieved through a combination of local sources and state or federal funds – reflecting a *willingness to pay*.
  - In the absence of the conditions to support big initiatives, it is difficult to attain comparable impact through incremental changes.
  
- Fourteen regional long range plans were reviewed from other metros leading to the following conclusions:
  - System expansion plans in growing areas are very substantial and expensive.

- Major expansion plans rely on substantial revenue programs beyond federal aid.
  - Most rapidly growing areas expect to lose ground in terms of overall system quality and performance, despite significant system expansion.
  - CDTC's New Visions 2025 plan represents a reasonable budgetary and enhancement "reach", but system performance would be challenged by rapid growth.
- The implications of these findings for the Capital District were reviewed and concluded that not all the pre-requisites for big initiatives are present in the region but this could change in the future.

### **Policy/Budget Implications and/or Recommendations**

The implications for CDTC's planning process and its long-range regional transportation plan are that CDTC and its members and participants will:

- Continue to clarify, document and secure broad buy-in to statements of community values and regional objectives.
- Explore in a sketch manner the potential Capital District application of those hypothetical "big initiative" concepts outlined in Table 1 (see page 3 of this summary) rated as being consistent with community values and standing a good chance of achieving a regional consensus for implementation. CDTC's Regional Greenway Concept Plan is a model effort in defining the "visionary" or "what if" initiatives at a level of detail that allows public thought and discussion. (See *Tech Valley Trails*, <http://www.cdtcmpo.org/rtp2030/c-greenways.pdf> )
- Incorporate "visionary" or "what if" transportation elements, associated with alternative future growth and development scenarios in the long-range regional transportation plan. The treatment of alternative futures includes a discussion of the increased feasibility of big initiatives under conditions of rapid growth and/or more structured development patterns.
- Monitor the emergence of a sense of urgency and of potential champions that are necessary to generate support and financial resources for implementation of the consensus concepts from Table 1.
- Be prepared to initiate serious consideration of the consensus concepts as soon as warranted by urgency and other conditions. Urgency can come from desire as well as need. The region may choose to pursue ideas because they are good, not just because they seem necessary.

**Table 1**  
**Maximum Twenty-Year Scale of Hypothetical “Big Initiatives”**  
**In the Capital District (Implementation between 2010 and 2030)**

	Hypothetical “Big Initiative”	Approximate Maximum Twenty-year scale in the Capital District	Twenty-year cost estimate	Comments
	<b>Regional greenway program</b>	10 miles per year; 280 total including existing	\$150 M	Scale reference is Seattle’s plan for 800 miles of paths. Cost at approximately \$500 K/mile based on local experience.
	<b>Riverfront access and urban development program</b>	Implementation of a majority of existing plans	\$1,000 M	Could draw from multiple fund sources, not just transportation. If significant Interstate redesign is included, could approach \$3 B - \$4 B based on Boston’s Central Artery precedent.
	<b>Street Reconstruction and Reconfiguration</b>	40 lane miles per year; 800 total	\$2,400 M	New Visions intended to address 25 lane miles per year; this is 50% more aggressive. Cost at approximately \$3 M per lane mile.
	<b>Roadway widening and connections program</b>	10-15 lane miles per year; 200 total	\$1,000 M	Scale comparable to double the intended ten-year implementation in New Visions 2021 plan. Mix of modest (\$2.5 M per lane mile) and costly (\$7 M per lane mile) projects.
	<b>Major highway system construction</b>	Approx. 20-25 arterial and 5-10 lane miles of expressway annual	\$3,000 M to \$5,000 M	Not consistent with community values or public policy (such as the State Energy Plan, State Transportation Plan and the New Visions Plan).
	<b>Suburban town center development</b>	5-10 lane miles per year; 150 total	\$175 M	Cost at approx. \$1 M+ per lane mile as mix of access and collector roads. Developer-built or financed connections not included in the total.
	<b>Bus service expansion, BRT program with transit oriented development</b>	100 route miles total including NY 5	\$200 M capital \$400 M add’l oper.	Scale and cost estimated at 5-10 times that for NY 5 BRT.
	<b>Guideway transit system with transit-oriented development</b>	50 route miles guideway with 50 route miles of non-guideway BRT.	\$2,100 M capital \$1,450 M add’l oper.	Scale comparable to planned expansion in Portland over 20 years; capital cost of \$40 M/mile derived from Portland, Phoenix, and Columbus plans. Operating cost estimated at \$1.25 M/year per linear mile. Includes ½ of BRT non-guideway plan also.
	<b>Managed lane program</b>	50 route miles total with approx. 75 lane miles	\$750 M \$10 M operating	Scale at one or two lanes per center-line mile where physically feasible in Interstate system in Albany County, extensions north, east, west. Cost at \$10 M per lane mile.

	Hypothetical “Big Initiative”	Approximate Maximum Twenty-year scale in the Capital District	Twenty-year cost estimate	Comments
	<b>Take-a-lane program</b>	No feasible implementation for contra-flow lanes. Tolling existing toll-free facilities in theory could reach 100 route miles	more than supported with toll revenue-	Not supported by traffic dynamics; no excess capacity in off-peak to yield a lane. Tolling existing toll-free facilities not yet politically plausible.
	<b>Highway noise program</b>	40 locations on expressway system	\$40 M	Scale addresses all existing warrants; noise mitigation costs for widenings are included in guideway and managed lane budgets above.
	<b>Demand management program</b>	40,000 participants	\$50 M (public)	Scale at 10% of regional workforce; Cost estimated at \$20/month for ¼ of participants, self-financed by employers for remaining participants. \$20/month is derived from CDTC experience.
	<b>Clean, efficient vehicle program</b>	public transit fleets, private vehicle incentive to double hybrid sales (2010), declining incentive to 2030	\$550 M	Scale at 30% purchase price incentive in 2010 to double hybrid sales to 2,800; incentive declines as hybrid market expands. Estimated \$100,000 price increase for 300 transit vehicles of varied sizes.
	<b>Intelligent traffic management program</b>	Full ITS deployment on priority network; including real-time traffic info on entire system	\$135 M	Working Group B estimates as continuation of current \$6.7 M/yr; purchases more as costs decrease. Cost does not include rapidly-expanding private investment (vehicles, services)
	<b>Video surveillance and enforcement program</b>	Full deployment on priority ITS network	Supported by fines	Red light running cameras and possibly, speed enforcement cameras
	<b>Comprehensive Traffic Safety program</b>	Capital investment at several times the set aside in SAFETEA-LU, plus other features	\$200 M	Capital improvements, driver education, traffic enforcement, improved community and site design.