

# This is no little plan

By: [Joe Nathanson](#) February 28, 2019



“Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work ...”

Those are the words of Daniel Burnham, the architect and city planner best known for planning the World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893 and later his “Plan for Chicago,” published in 1909.

Those words certainly seem to have been heeded by the leaders of the Greater Washington Partnership. This group, founded in December 2016, has set its sights on the broad swath of metropolitan growth including the Baltimore, Washington and Richmond regions. The leadership of the organization is drawn from the private corporate community, civic and educational institutions. Among the high-profile names on the group’s board from the Baltimore region are Kevin Plank, founder and CEO of Under Armour; Ronald Daniels, president of Johns Hopkins University; and Kenneth Samet, president and CEO of MedStar Health.

The partnership has now issued its Regional Transportation Report, which was helmed by the aforementioned Samet, along with Thomas F. Farrell II, the leader of Dominion Energy, and Mark A. Weinberger, global chairman and CEO of EY (Ernst & Young). The group’s director of transportation policy, Joe McAndrew, recently presented the plan to Transit Choices, a local transportation advocacy group organized by Jimmy Rouse. I subsequently had a chance to interview him by telephone,

“Imagine if moving through the corridor from Baltimore to Richmond was so convenient, affordable and fast that the Capital Region was respected around the globe for its leading, interconnected transportation system,” the report said. That’s the vision that animates the Blueprint for Regional Mobility, as the planning document is named. There is much to be admired in an effort that has taken such a panoramic view of this mid-Atlantic conurbation.

To make any headway to move the plan from broad concept to an operational reality will require heavy lifting. For example, in Baltimore there is the matter of the replacing the 145-year-old B&P Tunnel, which has the potential to “create long-term jobs in West Baltimore and triple

capacity in the Northeast Corridor for (Amtrak), reducing travel times and increasing MARC ridership to 70,000 per day,” according to the report.

Little mention is made of how to raise the \$4.5 billion estimated as necessary to bring about these gains.

### **‘Run-through’ systems**

Another big-ticket item, calling for major infrastructure investments in and around Union Station in the District is the so-called “run-through” capability that would allow MARC commuters to continue trips originating in Maryland into the Northern Virginia suburbs. A similar capability would become available to riders on the VRE commuter trains starting on the Manassas and Fredericksburg lines.

Heavy consumer education and political persuasion would be needed to realize other essential elements of the plan. This would include the introduction of “decongestion pricing zones” in the central business districts of the region. Imposing fees upon entering such zones by automobile “could reduce congestion by 25 percent, increase personal and transit vehicle speeds by 25 percent, and reduce carbon pollutants by more than 10 percent – as was witnessed in Stockholm,” the report concludes.

So far, such pricing zones have not been successfully implemented in the U.S.

That is not to say that some long-held views cannot be changed to the benefit of some transportation system users. According to McAndrew, one of the improvements being championed by employers in the partnership is the extension of the Richmond area bus system into suburban Henrico and Chesterfield counties. Advocates were able to overcome long-held public resistance to this notion. The Greater Richmond transit agency in June 2018 was able to launch GRTC Pulse, a modern, high-capacity bus rapid transit system that serves a 7.6-mile route from Richmond into Henrico County. With promising ridership levels, county supervisors are eyeing further expansion of the service.

McAndrew noted that the partnership has already secured another major win in the matter of gaining funding for the region’s transportation infrastructure. He cited the group’s role in helping to obtain the \$500 million in dedicated federal funds for the Washington Metro subway system.

These are positive steps in what must realistically be viewed as a multi-decade enterprise. To the extent that the corporate-led Greater Washington Partnership can sustain its commitment to a world-class transportation system for the Baltimore-Washington-Richmond region, future generations will be the beneficiaries.

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