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OUT OF THE OILY SLIME – FOR A MOMENT

A RECENT JOINT FORUM BY FEDERAL AGENCIES AND SUBREGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS INDICATES THAT THE NATIONAL CAPITAL SUBREGION HAS WASTED THE LAST DECADE BY NOT IMPLEMENTING A BROAD CONSENSUS CONCERNING THE PATH TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

THE OILY SLIME IN THE GULF DOCUMENTS THAT THERE WAS NOT A DAY – MUCH LESS A DECADE – THAT CITIZENS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS COULD AFFORD TO SQUANDER ON THE PATH TO FUNCTIONAL AND SUSTAINABLE HUMAN SETTLEMENT PATTERNS.

WHILE AGENCIES, ENTERPRISES AND INSTITUTIONS ATTEMPT TO CONTAIN THE BP BLOW OUT, LET US TAKE A MOMENT TO CONSIDER HOW TO DISENGAGE THE HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE OF CITIZENS IN THE WASHINGTON-BALTIMORE NEW URBAN REGION FROM *LARGE, PRIVATE* VEHICLES. DISENGAGEMENT WILL DEMONSTRATE HOW TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF MASS CONSUMPTION OF PETROLEUM. IT WILL ALSO BE A MAJOR STEP TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE TRAJECTORY FOR URBAN CIVILIZATION.

On 3 May, for the first time in a long time, EMR rode METRO to the Wash COG headquarters near Union Station for a Joint Federal / SubRegional Forum. See End Note One. The forum was intended to showcase on the new Federal Agency (US DOT, US HUD and US EPA) emphasis on ‘sustainability.’ There was much good talk at the forum but not much to inspire confidence that the overarching unsustainable trajectory of society will change any time soon.

EMR was invited to the forum because he is an alumnus of the turn-of-the-century “Group of 40.” (Sounds ‘old school,’ right?) The Group of 40 was a broad based coalition from which The [Greater] Washington Smart Growth Alliance emerged. This Alliance is made up of Agency, Enterprise and Institution representatives and got off to a good start in the early 00s.

VOICES FROM THE PAST

In the post-forum communications that always spring up between old acquaintances after such an event there have been a number of useful observations and suggestions put on the table. Several of them will be addressed in this venue in the near future. Perhaps most often enunciated is the call to restate the consensus of the early 00s that has was over-washed by the feel good BOOM that ended in 2007.

One lightning rod at the 3 May forum was a statement by the Northern Virginia Transportation Alliance (NVTA). The leader of NVTA called for those present to support Roadways to access ‘the places people want to live’ – aka, remote land in which sponsors of NVTA have speculative interests (aka, direct and indirect speculative ‘investments’).

For those who do not know, NVTA is an Institution sponsored by Roadway / Developer / Builder Enterprises. See End Note Two. (Full disclosure: Twenty plus years ago when building and improving SOME Roadways made economic, social and physical sense, EMR was the Chair of the NVTA Technical Committee and served on NVTA Board of Directors.)

The rational response to these statements of outrage about ‘places people want to live’ outside the logical location of the Clear Edge around the Core of the National Capital SubRegion is this:

The leader / spokesperson of NVTA had no choice.

What the spokesman says is what the owners and officers of the Enterprises who sponsor his Institution want to hear. It is also what they want Enterprise Media (aka, MainStream Media) repeat and citizens to believe for as long as possible. See THE ESTATES MATRIX – PART TWO of *TRILO-G*

THREE KEY REALITIES

The NVTA wish list for new Roadways and the cries of outrage about ‘places people want to live’ puts a spotlight on three key realities about the National Capital SubRegion:

1. If quantifiable location-variable costs were fairly and equitably allocated within a well-informed market context, then the places to which NVTA lobbies to have Agencies build Roadways would NOT be popular, feasible or even seriously considered by builders OR buyers.

Trust the market, but FIRST, the playing field must be leveled with valid data, analysis and quantification. A fair allocation of costs would eliminate hidden and misguided subsidies and unintended externalities.

2. The Region and its SubRegions must achieve Balance of Jobs / Housing / Services / Recreation / Amenity in each of the Beta Communities that make up the Washington-Baltimore New Urban Region and its SubRegions.

The FIRST STEP to achieve Alpha Community Balance is Affordable and Accessible Housing NEAR Jobs.

3. In 2002, Radial Analysis of the National Capital SubRegion ‘Activity Centers’ documented that Job locations were center weighted in the SubRegion. The vast majority of the Jobs were INSIDE the logical location of the Clear Edge around the Core of the SubRegion. Nothing has happened since 2002 to alter that reality.

The centrality of Job locations has not been impacted by:

- The residential settlement pattern impacts of the Wrong Size House / Wrong Location caused by the Housing Bubble from 2002 to 2006,
- The Over-Servicing of scattered residential land uses by Agencies, Enterprises and Institutions, and
- The derivative and speculation and fraud driven financial meltdown from 2007 to ? that has resulted in a distinct pattern of foreclosures and short sales in the outer Radial Band beyond the logical location of the Clear Edge around the Core of the National Capitol SubRegion.

On the question of Job locations in the future:

Newswire is published by “Planetizen” www.planetizen.com an omnivore ‘planning’ web site owned by Urban Insight. Urban Insight is a Los Angeles based Enterprise that describes itself as a “web design, content management and Internet strategy” corporation. The 3 May issue of *Newswire* summarized a *Harvard Business Review* note of 28 April 2010:

"The Suburbanization of Business Headquarters May be Coming to an End."

This brief article from *Harvard Business Review* suggests why major Enterprises are abandoning the “office campus.” The reasons run parallel to the notes that Groveton (an Enterprise insider and new BaconsRebellion Blogger) provided recently in his comments summarizing the parameters impacting the evolution of Balance in the Greater Fredericksburg SubRegion on this Blog.

Based on SYNERGY’s analysis of Loudoun and Prince William County “employment” patterns over the past 18 years, the trend toward ‘subUrban’ office campuses was ‘ending’ long ago. It does not take a rocket scientist to understand why AOL and WorldCom made bad location decisions or how these bad decisions impacted Enterprise performance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVITY CENTERS

Those outside the National Capital SubRegion may not be familiar with the importance of the ‘Activity Centers’ noted in Key Reality #3 above.

There is a long story – too long for this item – about the rise, demise and apparent resurrection of Activity Centers in the Wash COG sphere of influence. EMR only has first hand experience concerning the rise and demise. Somehow the idea of Activity Centers has had a revival since 2003 as suggested by the report:

“Region Forward: A Comprehensive Guide to Regional [SubRegional] Planning and Measuring Progress in the 21st Century”

This document was approved by the Wash COG Board of Directors on 13 January 2010 and handed out at the 3 May forum.

EMR intends to find out more about the revival of interest in Activity Centers and the need for Quantification but in the meantime, why are 'Activity Centers' important?

With a robust Vocabulary, a comprehensive Conceptual Framework and science-based Quantification – via Regional Metrics or other reality-based conceptual frameworks – Activity Centers could put citizens on the path to functional and sustainable patterns and densities of human settlement in the Washington-Baltimore New Urban Region.

It was good news that the Activity Center concept is not dead. It is also good news that ideas presented in "Blueprint for a Better Region" are still on the table. Graphics from "Blueprint for a Better Region" showed up in the EPA PowerPoint presentation on Federal Agency initiatives at the forum on 3 May. See End Note Three

WASTED DECADE

While there were a number of useful exchanges at the Forum, from the perspective of one who helped forge the general consensus achieved by the Group of 40's efforts and put content into the articulation of the Activity Centers, the 00s have been a lost decade.

The consensus that employment was center-weighted and the consensus on the need for the evolution of Balanced Urban enclaves focused on the existing employment and transport system inside the Clear Edge around the Core of the SubRegion has been honored in the breach.

One need go no further than pages 1 thru 6 of the Metro section of *WaPo* for 9 May 2010. NB: The Vocabulary to articulate the early 00s consensus has evolved since that time but the substance has not changed as conversations on 3 May confirmed.

It is in fact appalling that NVTA can STILL talk about 'the places where people want to live' – code for scattered Urban dwellings – in a public forum and have those who know better sit quietly.

The majority of the participants said in 2002, and many of those who returned for the reunion still agreed, on the basic parameters of a sustainable trajectory but Agency, Enterprise and Institution ACTION. They have been distracted by propaganda, Geographic Illiteracy and Autonomobility Myths. The 9 May *WaPo* articles and commentaries focus on the problems generated by relocation of military personal and the 'demise' of METRO but there are many other indicators of dysfunction.

BACK TO THAT OILY SLIME IN THE GULF.

That slimy goo and those dead birds and turtles should remind us that there must be renewed, concerted effort to evolve functional and sustainable settlement patterns that Do NOT depend on *Large, Private Vehicles* for Mobility and Access. See End Note Four

Relying on *Large, Private Vehicles* for Mobility and Access in the Cores of New Urban Regions results in dysfunctional settlement patterns. No one can disagree the *Large, Private vehicles* and the settlement patterns they generate create demand for VAST quantities of energy – especially petroleum.

The effort concerning *Large, Private* vehicles must be similar to the Hartwell consensus on the response to climate change which is, of course, closely related to that effort. See End Note Five

There can be no more lost decades or there will be a much, much more than that lost. As important as Bayou ecosystems and economic stability are, the consequence of continuing an unsustainable trajectory will be far worse.

EMR

END NOTES

1. Now that *The Shape of the Future*, 4th Printing and *TRILO-G* are wrapped up and the new website is evolving with professional guidance, EMR has started to step outside Greater Warrenton-Fauquier. This is the first of the items that will appear from time to time under the heading ‘Current Perspectives’ at www.emrisse.com
2. The key supporters are individuals who TMT and Groveton love to hate. TMT has alerted readers of BaconsRebellion Blog that these same Enterprise and Institutional players have formed ‘The 2030 Group’ which is attempting to build support for the same goals as NVTa under the guise of ‘regionalism.’ Much more on that effort soon.
3. Reminder to BaconsRebellion Blog denizens, Google the title “Blueprint for a Better Region” to access a streaming video of the “Blueprint...” PowerPoint.
4. See “THE PROBLEM WITH CARS.” As is the case with “Blueprint...” cited in End Note Three, THE ESTATES MATRIX (noted in the text above) as well as many of the components that have been revised and included in *TRILO-G*, can be accessed on the web. There is a very early version of THE PROBLEM WITH CARS are accessible on line by Googleing the title. The version of THE PROBLEM WITH CARS that makes up PART THREE of *TRILO-G* includes the complete argument for the abandonment of Automobiles as the primary strategy for Urban humans to achieve Mobility and Access in New Urban Regions.
5. BBC 11 May 2010.