



**Committee** Directly to Council  
**Staff:** Ludeen McCartney-Green, Legislative Attorney  
**Purpose:** To introduce agenda item – no vote expected  
**Keywords:**

AGENDA ITEM #5A  
November 9, 2021  
**Introduction**

## SUBJECT

Resolution to Support Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Endorsing Equity Emphasis Areas as a Key Planning Concept and Tool to Inform Decision Making and Action.

Lead Sponsor: Councilmember Navarro and Co-Sponsors: Councilmembers Katz and Friedson

## EXPECTED ATTENDEES

NA; Introduction of Proposed Resolution

## COUNCIL DECISION POINTS & COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

- None

## DESCRIPTION/ISSUE

- Whether the Council will align and support the goals of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's (COG) resolution by endorsing Equity Emphasis Areas as a Key Concept and Tool to Inform Decision Making and Action.
- Equity Emphasis Areas are locations with high concentrations of low-income individuals and/or racial and ethnic minorities.

## SUMMARY OF KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

- Website Link to Equity Emphasis Areas Map:  
<https://www.mwcog.org/maps/map-listing/equity-emphasis-areas-eeas/>

### **This report contains:**

Proposed Resolution

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COG's Equity Emphasis Area Memorandum

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Resolution No.: \_\_\_\_\_  
Introduced: November 9, 2021  
Adopted: \_\_\_\_\_

**COUNTY COUNCIL  
FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND**

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Lead Sponsor: Councilmember Navarro and Co-sponsors: Councilmembers Katz and Friedson

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**SUBJECT:** Resolution to Support Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments’ Endorsing Equity Emphasis Area as a Key Planning Concept and Tool to Inform Decision Making and Action

**Background**

1. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) comprises the region’s 24 local governments and their governing officials, including Maryland (Montgomery County) and Virginia legislatures and U.S. Senate and House of Representatives where COG provides a forum for discussion and action on issues of regional concern; and
2. COG convened for an Annual Leadership Retreat in July 2021. The Board took an in-depth look at the Transportation Planning Board’s Equity Emphasis Area (EEA) designations and engaged in discussions on how EEAs can be used to: 1) advance racial equity in local and regional planning; (2) project implementation; and (3) decision making across all sectors of COG’s work.
3. The most recent analysis revealed that 351 of the 1,222 census tracts across the region meet the adopted low-income and racial or ethnic minority concentration thresholds and have been identified as Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs).
4. These 351 EEAs constitute about 10 percent of the region’s land area and house about 30 percent of the region’s population, with 214 EEAs located within one-half mile of High-Capacity Transit Station Areas (HCTs) and 340 located within one mile of a Regional Activity Center (RAC).
5. The COG Board passed Resolution R26-2020 in July 2020, affirming that its work together will be anti-racist and will advance equity, and that equity will be woven into COG’s Region Forward Vision to ensure a more prosperous, accessible, livable, sustainable, and equitable future for all area residents and throughout COG’s analyses, operations, procurement, programs, and priorities.

6. Given COG's commitment to integrate equity considerations in all of its work activities, the EEA planning construct, along with the RACs and HCTs, is a way to enable equity considerations in land use and environment and transportation planning to advance the region's housing, transportation, and climate change goals.
7. In the same vein with purpose and consideration, the COG Board passed Resolution R47-2021 on October 13, 2021, Endorsing Equity Emphasis Areas as a Key Planning Concept and Tool to guide future growth and investment decisions related to infrastructure investment, planning program, education, health care, land use, housing, economic opportunities, and other areas of interest that will enhance and build on making regions and local communities more racially equitable.
8. COG recommends member jurisdictions to use EEAs in a wide range of their jurisdictional activities and services including housing, education, employment opportunities, environment, and livability, to cultivate a deeper understanding of the nature and magnitude of equity disparities across their jurisdiction and help inform important policy discussions that seek to address disparities.
9. The Montgomery County Council has demonstrated its commitment to promoting racial equity, social justice, and inclusions in all aspects of County government to narrow disparities in opportunities by race and ethnicity. This commitment is exemplified in the development and enactment of Racial Equity and Social Justice Act and the established Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice.
10. There are 49 of the 351 EEAs identified in Montgomery County with a total population of 259, 093 people.
11. The approved COG resolution for EEAs is helpful and impactful to provide a framework for local jurisdictions to address racial equity disparities, not only with addressing low-income or underserved community needs, but necessary to promote prosperity and development in Montgomery County and elsewhere.

### **Action**

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland approves the following actions:

1. The Council will support Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Endorsing Equity Emphasis Area as a Key Planning Concept and Tool to Inform Decision Making and Action.
2. The Council will work to adopt the commitment and integration of equity considerations by prioritizing EEAs identified within the County in local planning, project implementation, and decision making as a means to support COG's shared vision for an accessible, livable, sustainable, and prosperous metropolitan region.

3. The Council will support prioritizing transportation investments that improve access to High-Capacity Transit stations as a means to enhanced mobility and accessibility options to the traditionally underserved population groups in the EEAs.
4. The Council will explicitly consider equity impacts in community planning, such as housing, health, job training, education, and environmental quality.
5. The Council and the County Executive and staff should work together to explore and implement strategies, as appropriate, to further incorporate the consideration of EEAs in planning areas including but not limited to transportation, land-use, housing, climate, and water resources and the County should elevate the conversation around these topics to provide regional thought leadership and demonstrate the connection between equity and greater prosperity for all.

This is a correct copy of Council action.

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Selena Mindy Singleton, Esq. Clerk of the Council



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** COG Board of Directors  
**FROM:** Kanti Srikanth, COG Deputy Executive Director for Metropolitan Planning  
Paul DesJardin, COG Community Planning and Services Director  
Timothy Canan, COG Planning Data and Research Program Director  
**SUBJECT:** Equity Emphasis Areas  
**DATE:** July 19, 2021

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## SUMMARY

The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) approved the region's long-range transportation plan, *Visualize 2045*, in October 2018. As part of that update, the TPB considered the effects of the plan's proposed projects, programs, and policies on low-income and minority residents in accordance with new federal regulations.

To perform this assessment, the TPB developed a methodology to identify census tracts in the region that contain higher concentrations of low-income or minority residents compared to the rest of the region. The methodology revealed that approximately 350 of the 1,222 census tracts across the region met these criteria and were identified as **Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs)**. Figure 1 identifies the location of the EEAs throughout the region.

Beyond the long-range transportation plan, EEAs can be applied in various additional ways to consider equity and inform regional decisions and actions. For example, the TPB also uses EEAs as selection criteria in all its grant programs that fund planning for access to transit stations, improving roadway safety, alternative modes of travel, and connecting land use and the transportation system.

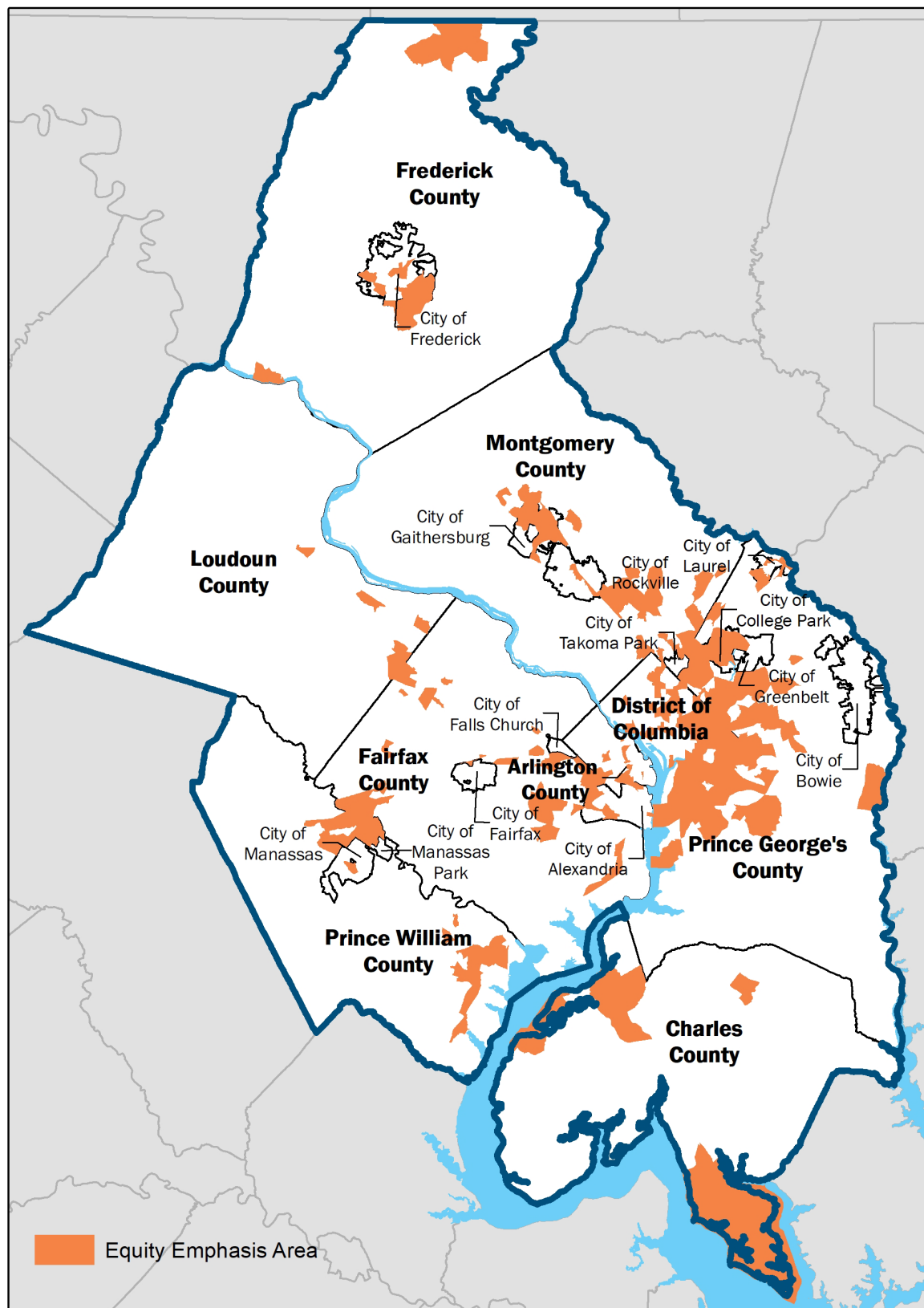
During the 2021 Leadership Retreat, members will consider how EEAs can be used to advance racial equity in additional planning and program areas. Staff will demonstrate how EEAs can be used to examine other equity factors, including educational attainment, economic independence, housing, language proficiency, transportation accessibility and safety, among others.

The memo provides a more in-depth look at the methodology used to develop EEAs and highlights opportunities for using the EEAs in other local and regional planning, project implementation, and decision making.

At the retreat, members will consider EEAs as an analytical framework for local and regional decision making in the areas of land use, transportation, and much more.

EEAs can potentially assist member governments with weaving equity into all that they do and help realize our shared vision for a more prosperous, accessible, livable, and sustainable region for all area residents.

Figure 1: Equity Emphasis Areas



## BACKGROUND

### Methodology

The methodology developed by TPB to identify EEAs is an enhanced approach to what is required for the Title VI/Environmental Justice Analysis, and relies on the most recently available five-year data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) on income, race, and ethnicity to determine which census tracts have concentrations of low-income populations, minority populations, or both, higher than the average concentration in the TPB planning area. Data from the ACS for each of the following four population groups is used:

- Low Income<sup>1</sup>
- Black or African American<sup>2</sup>
- Asian<sup>3</sup>, and
- Hispanic or Latino<sup>4</sup>

Federal guidance defines the following three fundamental Environmental Justice (EJ) principles that serve as the guiding principles for EJ analysis:

- To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations.
- To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision making process.
- To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.

Executive Order 12898 on US DOT's EJ analysis further defines a "disproportionately high and adverse effect on minority and low-income populations" as an effect that:

1. is predominately borne by a minority population and/or a low-income population, or
2. will be suffered by the minority population and/or low-income population and is appreciably more severe or greater in magnitude than the adverse effect that will be suffered by the non-minority population and/or non-low-income population.

The above could serve as the minimum framework for outcomes of an equity analysis within any area of local or regional decision making.

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<sup>1</sup> Individuals with household income less than one-and-a-half times the federal government's official poverty threshold, depending on household size.

<sup>2</sup> A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

<sup>3</sup> A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent.

<sup>4</sup> A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race

The metropolitan Washington regional planning area covers slightly more than 3,500 square miles and includes 24 jurisdictions. This planning area includes dense urban areas, such as the District of Columbia, and relatively rural outer suburban locations, such as Frederick County. In addition, the demographics and built environment vary widely throughout the region.

Given the variation in land area, its use, and population among the various census tracts within the planning area, Index Scores were developed and assigned to each tract to help provide a standard basis to determine areas with high concentration of the four population groups previously identified. Index scores are assigned to each population group by first calculating the proportion of these four groups within each census tract and then determining the ratio of the tract's concentration to that of the region's <sup>5</sup> concentration for the group. Tracts are identified as EEAs if one of three criteria are met:

1. Tract has a concentration of individuals identified as low-income more than one-and-a-half times the regional average.
2. Tract has high concentration for two or more minority population groups.
3. Tract has high concentration of at least one minority population group and the concentration of individuals identified as low income that is at or above the region's average.

## The Region's EEAs

Figure 1 displays the EEA map developed by the TPB as part of its 2018 long-range transportation plan using ACS 5-year estimates from 2012-2016. Of the 1,231 census tracts in the TPB planning area, 1,222 were analyzed (nine were not as they did not have people residing in them or had no reliable population estimates, ex., Dulles Airport, National Mall, etc.) and 351 met the criteria and were designated as EEAs. The 351 EEAs occupy 341 square miles of the total 3,558 square miles covering the TPB planning area.

Per the ACS data, the total population in the TPB planning area was 5.6 million persons, of which 1.6 million persons resided in EEAs. The analysis will be updated, and the EEA maps revised in conjunction with each major long-range transportation plan update using the latest ACS data.

Table 1 provides the total population of TPB member jurisdictions and the population of those jurisdictions residing in EEAs using more recent ACS 5-year estimates. Additional information on EEAs and the methodology and analysis can be found here: [mwcog.org/equityemphasisareas](http://mwcog.org/equityemphasisareas).

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<sup>5</sup> Region is defined as the TPB Planning Area: [mwcog.org/TPB](http://mwcog.org/TPB)



**Table 1: Breakdown of Jurisdiction and EEA population**

Equity Emphasis Areas per Jurisdiction			
TPB Planning Area Jurisdiction	Number of EEAs	Total	Population within EEAs
District of Columbia	97	692,625	373,236
Charles County	5	159,428	17,979
Frederick County	9	251,422	40,271
Montgomery County	49	1,043,530	259,093
Prince George's County	103	908,670	413,340
<b>Maryland Subtotal</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>2,363,050</b>	<b>730,683</b>
City of Alexandria	9	157,613	45,274
Arlington County	12	233,460	47,013
Fairfax County	43	1,145,857	215,246
City of Fairfax	0	23,531	0
City of Falls Church	0	14,128	0
Loudoun County	5	395,134	27,437
City of Manassas	1	41,174	7,609
City of Manassas Park	1	16,986	7,291
Prince William County	17	467,886	103,940
Fauquier Co. UZA portion	0	35,928	0
<b>Virginia Subtotal</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>2,531,697</b>	<b>453,810</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>5,587,372</b>	<b>1,557,729</b>

Source: ACS 2015-2019 Data

## **BROADER APPLICATIONS OF EEAS**

Advancing equity among traditionally underserved communities is a key principle for many working in local and regional planning and decision making in the region. Racial equity is a fundamental value for COG, affirmed by the Board of Directors in a resolution in July 2020:

*“The Board affirms that our work together as the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments will be anti-racist and will advance equity; and The Board affirms that Equity will be woven into COG’s Region Forward Vision to ensure a more prosperous, accessible, livable, sustainable, and equitable future for all area residents and throughout COG’s analyses, operations, procurement, programs, and priorities.”*

The 351 EEAs can be useful in informing discussions on equity in other social and community planning activities in housing, health, public safety, education, economic opportunities, and more.

For example, the impact on EEAs could be used for determining the best location of additional housing, climate planning initiatives, tree canopy planning, and food security programming. Moreover, additional data can be examined inside EEAs and in areas outside of EEAs to cultivate a deeper understanding on the nature and magnitude of equity disparities throughout the region and help inform important policy discussions that seek to address them.

While the TPB is required to examine disproportional impacts of long-range transportation plans on low-income and minority residents, there are numerous other equity considerations that can be taken into account. Other data sources are available at the census tract level. These include information on factors such as households on food stamp assistance programs, persons with limited proficiency in English, single-parent households, levels of education achieved, and the cost of rent as a percentage of annual income. In addition, the TPB recently conducted a study on traffic safety in the region. As part of the study, data on fatal crashes were compiled and analyzed at the census tract level, providing information on traffic safety inside and outside of EEAs.

These additional factors can provide much broader understanding of the disparities present in the region’s communities and signal a need to take actions that address them.

## **WORKING TOGETHER TO ENHANCE EEAS**

At the retreat, members will consider whether EEAs should be used in local and regional decision making as means to achieve their shared vision for a more prosperous, accessible, livable, and sustainable region for all, including addressing inequities in the areas of accessibility, quality of life, safety, and more.

As part of the retreat briefings, staff will highlight opportunities for optimizing land use and transportation in High-Capacity Transit Station Areas (HCTs), including by completing the National Capital Trail Network (NCTN), which can help improve accessibility of residents to jobs. When considering these opportunities, better understanding the relationship between EEAs and HCTs can further assist and inform decisions that will cultivate improved access of residents in EEAs to these jobs through investments in infrastructure like the NCTN.

More information on HCTs and the NCTN have also been provided to board members for the retreat. When considered together, taking actions to optimize HCTs, further examining and addressing equity using the EEA framework, and investing in the completion of the NCTN can result in meaningful progress for the region in achieving its priorities and goals.

**MORE:** [mwcog.org/equityemphasisareas](http://mwcog.org/equityemphasisareas)