

Priorities for a Growing Region

A Comprehensive Survey of Residents Conducted for the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition



GreaterWashington2050

Members of the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition

Sharon Bulova (Chair), Fairfax County
Board of Supervisors

Marcel Acosta, National Capital Planning Commission

Chuck Bean, Nonprofit Roundtable of
Greater Washington

Brent Blackwelder, Friends of the Earth

Sam Black, Washington Smart Growth Alliance

David Bowers, Enterprise Community Partners

William Bronrott, Maryland General Assembly

David Costello, Maryland Department of Planning

Brian Cullen, Urban Land Institute,
Washington District Council

Judith Davis, Mayor, City of Greenbelt

Tom Dernoga, Prince George's County Council

Al Dobbins, M-NCPPC, Prince George's County
Planning Dept.

Jim Dinegar, Greater Washington Board of Trade

Don Edwards, Washington Regional Equity Network

Barbara Favola, Arlington County Board

Nancy Floreen, Montgomery County Council

Terri Freeman, The Community Foundation for the
National Capital Region

Kate Hanley, Secretary of the Commonwealth
of Virginia

Tom Harrington, Washington Metropolitan Area
Transit Authority

Catherine Hudgins, Fairfax County
Board of Supervisors

Alan Imhoff, City of Frederick

Uwe Kirste, Prince William County

William Lecos, Lecos & Associates

George Leventhal, Montgomery County Council

Amy Liu, Brookings Institution

Deron Lovaas, Natural Resources Defense Council

Martin Nohe, Prince William County
Board of Supervisors

Jeffrey Parnes, Fairfax County Federation of
Citizens Associations

Kristin Pauly, Prince Charitable Trusts

Lee Quill, Cunningham + Quill Architects

Lee Schoenecker, American Planning Association

Stewart Schwartz, Coalition for Smarter Growth

Harriet Tregoning, District of Columbia
Office of Planning

Dear Colleague,

The Greater Washington 2050 Coalition brings together leaders from across our region to lay the foundation today for the kind of region we all want to enjoy in the years to come.

Our work includes discussion and long-term planning by leaders. But as a critical part of this process, we also needed to hear from the region's citizens.

This report provides the public's report card of the region's performance on sixteen basic priorities – things such as quality schools, housing that people of all incomes can afford, and respect for people of all backgrounds. Then it places these priorities on a scale of intensity, to determine where the public most wants to see this region make progress. The survey ends with citizens telling us what kind of a region they want to leave for their children and grandchildren.

This is not a poll on hot-button issues. Rather, it is a studied effort to hear from average citizens about their timeless priorities and aspirations for Greater Washington.

We all know the individual jurisdictions across our region have unique personalities and needs. This report examines some of those differences. But what sets this effort apart is the identification of ideas that are held in common by citizens all across the region, areas where they are urging greater regional effort to make this a better place to live for years to come. That's where we believe this report makes a unique contribution.

Thanks for reviewing this information. I know you will find it as useful as we have at the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition.

Sincerely,



Sharon Bulova
Chairman, Greater Washington 2050 Coalition

What is Greater Washington 2050?

Greater Washington 2050 is a new regional initiative to improve the quality of life for Washington area residents by developing a vision for the future and inspiring leadership to enhance our region.

Led by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and a coalition of civic, business and environmental stakeholders, Greater Washington 2050 will build an increasing level of agreement on the big issues of growth, transportation and the environment. Coalition members will identify specific steps to advance regional goals, assess progress and measure performance over the coming years.

This effort will follow a history of inspiring visions for the Washington region. Two hundred years ago, Pierre L'Enfant laid out the basic design for the nation's capital. At the turn of the century, a commission proposed the addition of the National Mall, the memorials, and our park systems. In the late 1950s, a joint House/Senate Committee on Washington Metropolitan Problems set in motion the forces that led to Dulles Airport and the Metro transit system.

Sharon Bulova, Chair of Fairfax County's Board of Supervisors and Chair of the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition, has said her goal is to ensure that today's residents participate in shaping the region for future generations. The intent is to plan for needs that are likely to evolve over the next 40 years and fundamentally affect our economy and the environment.

The future of metropolitan Washington is in your hands. Please join us in this exciting endeavor.

The Goals of Greater Washington 2050

The Greater Washington 2050 initiative is seeking regional coordination and commitment towards a shared vision based on goals for the National Capital Region. To create a comprehensive vision, broad public consensus is needed by government, business, and nonprofit organizations. A goal framework is being drafted by the Coalition and will be a key component of an initial public outreach effort designed to include public preferences about addressing growth, transportation, energy, and the environment. Based on the survey results and existing regional policy, the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition will propose regional goals for public discussion.

The Greater Washington 2050 Coalition's goals will seek to address new and existing challenges, advance regional collaboration and leverage our assets to compete in the new global economy.

Goal Categories

- Land Use
- Transportation
- Environmental
- Climate and Energy
- Economy
- Housing
- Health and Human Services
- Education
- Public Safety

Greater Washington 2050 goals will form the basis for a public discourse on coordinating land use, transportation, housing and environmental decisions. The aim is to balance growth, improve our quality of life and maintain a vibrant economy.



Priorities for a Growing Region: Executive Summary

Greater Washington 2050 commissioned this public opinion study to understand residents' priorities and aspirations for the long-term future of the region. The study reveals a public that is engaged and appreciative of the region's core strengths, while clearly indicating where they want the most emphasis by the region's leaders over the coming decades.

OpinionWorks, an independent research firm, conducted this research. They convened four focus groups of citizens from across the region in December 2008, followed by a comprehensive regional telephone survey of 1,313 interviews in February 2009. These are the key findings of the study.

The public in metropolitan Washington is engaged and connected.

Nearly three-quarters of residents have a "strong feeling of connection" to the metropolitan Washington region as a whole, despite being a region that crosses state boundaries and has many transplanted residents. In fact, residents demonstrate those connections by traveling around the region frequently for work or leisure, with six in ten crossing state boundaries at least once a week.

Nearly all citizens are actively seeking information about happenings in the region through television or radio, newspapers, or online. Almost four in ten have contacted an elected official or attended a local public meeting in the past year.

Residents appreciate the region as vibrant, diverse, and interesting.

When asked to grade the local area across sixteen key performance indicators, a picture emerges of an interesting region that the public sees as diverse, vibrant, and connected to the natural world. Receiving the highest marks are these attributes: a community that respects people of all backgrounds, interesting arts and cultural opportunities, recreational opportunities for people of all ages, enough parks and green space, and a clean environment.

As residents imagine the type of region they want to leave for their children and grandchildren, they hope for quality schools, public safety, and good jobs. But just behind those bread and butter concerns, large numbers hope this region will celebrate its cultural and ethnic diversity, a vibrant arts community, equality of opportunity, and neighborhoods that are friendly and green.

There is a sense that some people are being left out of the region's success, and several key shortcomings of the region seem related to poor planning.

Residents give lower grades to the region for helping people who are in need, ensuring that all residents have access to health care and good jobs, and providing housing that people of all incomes can afford. Citizens also give particularly low scores to the region for how it plans for growth and development, for the presence of jobs that are easy to get to, and for having neighborhoods that are mixed-use and walkable.



The public supports more regional solutions to problems.

More than four residents in ten would “like to see more problems addressed regionally across state and county lines.” The number who want regional action rises even higher among people who want specific priorities addressed such as housing and the economy. Fewer than half of the region’s residents would “prefer to address most problems on a local level.”

While traffic is a leading irritant, it is not where the public would place the most effort over the long term.

In one of the study’s more challenging findings, residents do not place great emphasis on solving the region’s transportation problems. By a large margin, traffic and transportation are listed as the top “long-term issue or challenge facing the Washington region.” The concern is particularly acute in parts of Northern Virginia. But when asked how much of a priority they would place on transportation if they were making decisions for the region, citizens rank transportation ninth out of a list of sixteen broad items tested – in other words in the middle of the pack. With this finding, residents are *not* saying “do not solve it,” but they are identifying a number of other pressing priorities that need greater attention in their view.

The public has a clear set of long-term priorities for the future, led by quality schools and safe neighborhoods.

First among these priorities is producing good quality schools. It is the most urgent of the sixteen items tested. There are enormous differences from jurisdiction to jurisdiction within the region about how residents rate the performance of their public schools today. But even in high-performing school districts, most residents want to increase the attention their schools receive.

The second leading priority for the long term is producing safe streets and neighborhoods. On safety as well as education there are strong differences in performance among jurisdictions, but near total consensus that public safety is a high priority.

Rounding out the public’s most intense priorities are good jobs for everyone who wants one, better access to health care, more help for people who are in need, fostering a cleaner environment, making housing more affordable, and better planning for growth and development.



Priorities for a Growing Region: Findings of the Study

Background on the Study

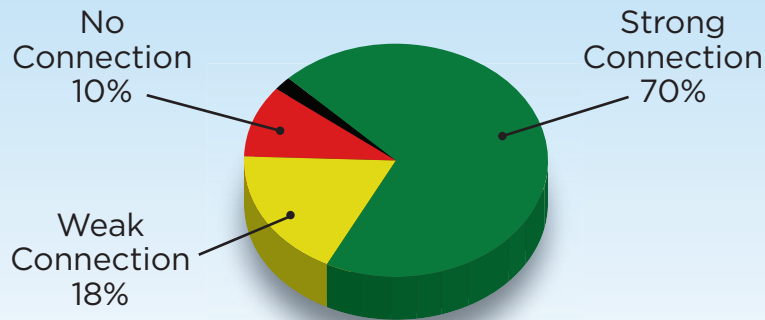
This two-part study began with focus group discussions in December 2008. OpinionWorks, an independent research firm based in Annapolis, Maryland, held the discussions in Fairfax, Virginia and Greenbelt, Maryland, and drew participants from across the metropolitan Washington region. These discussions identified the full range of challenges and priorities that are on the minds of citizens as they look at the future of the region.

Phase two of this effort was a regional telephone survey. The survey questionnaire grew out of the ideas that emerged in the focus group sessions. Interviews were conducted among 1,313 randomly-selected adults February 10-20, 2009. Results of this regional survey have a margin of sampling error no greater than $\pm 2.7\%$, at the 95% confidence level. A full methodological statement is found at the conclusion of this report.

Connections to the Region

For a region that crosses multiple state boundaries and has many transplanted residents, metropolitan Washington enjoys strong feelings of connection as a region. Nearly three-quarters of residents (70%) feel a “strong connection” to the metropolitan Washington region. Another one-in-five (18%) feel a weak connection, leaving only 10% who feel no connection to the region.

Feelings of Connection to the Region



“Just in terms of how you feel, do you have a strong feeling of connection to the metropolitan Washington region, a weak connection, or no connection?”

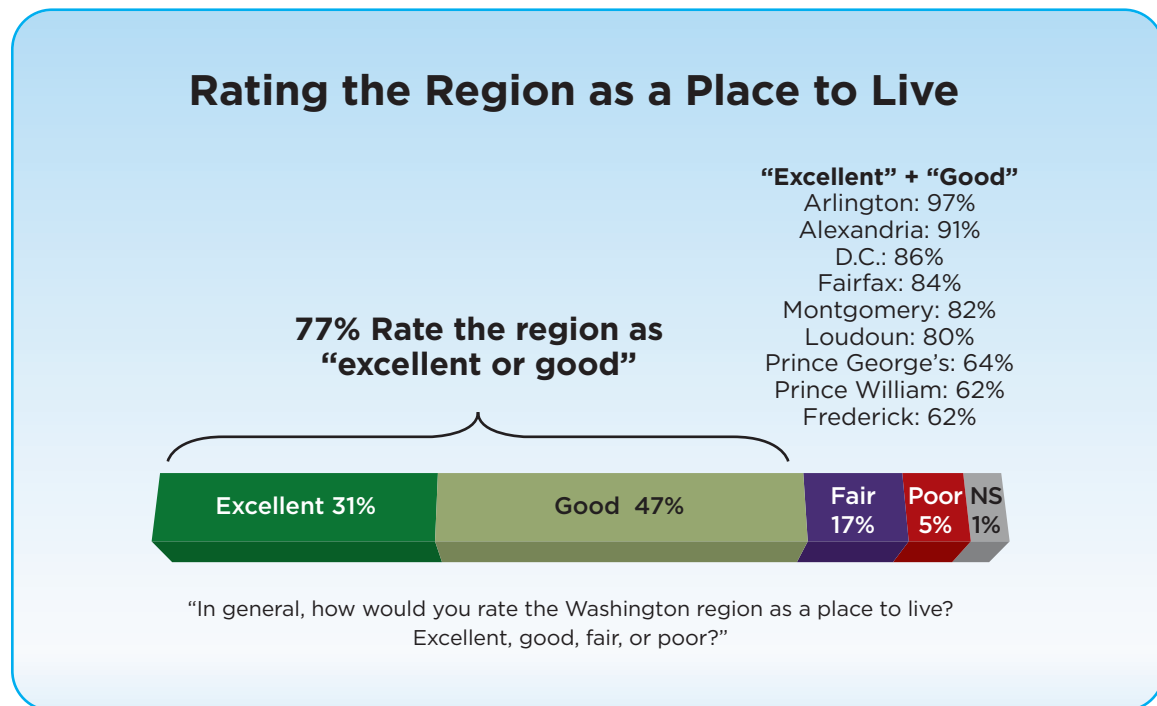
These connections are stronger in the core of the region, defined as the District of Columbia, Arlington, and Alexandria, where the “strong” number rises to 85%. That number is 73% in the first-ring suburbs of Fairfax, Montgomery, and Prince George’s Counties, and 47% in the outer suburbs of Frederick, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties.



Socio-economics drive this number, as well. People with the lowest levels of personal education and household income are more than 20 percentage points less likely to feel a strong connection to the region, compared to their neighbors who are at the highest ends of those scales.

Residents are moving around the region in significant numbers, with one-third crossing state lines at least weekly to visit close friends (33%), commute to work (32%), or shop or eat out (31%). A quarter of residents visit close relatives (25%), and one in ten attend leisure activities like sporting events, museums, or concerts. Overall, 59% of the region’s residents are crossing state lines at least once a week for one or more of these reasons.

Furthermore, residents have a very positive view of the Washington region as a place to live. Three-quarters (77%) call the region an “excellent” or a “good” place to live. Only 22% call the region “fair” or “poor.”



Residents of Arlington County are the most satisfied, offering an extraordinary rating of 97% excellent or good. That is followed closely by the other jurisdictions in the core of the region. Here again, socio-economics are a key indicator of satisfaction, with high-school-educated residents only one-third as likely as those with graduate-level education to call Greater Washington an “excellent” place to live.



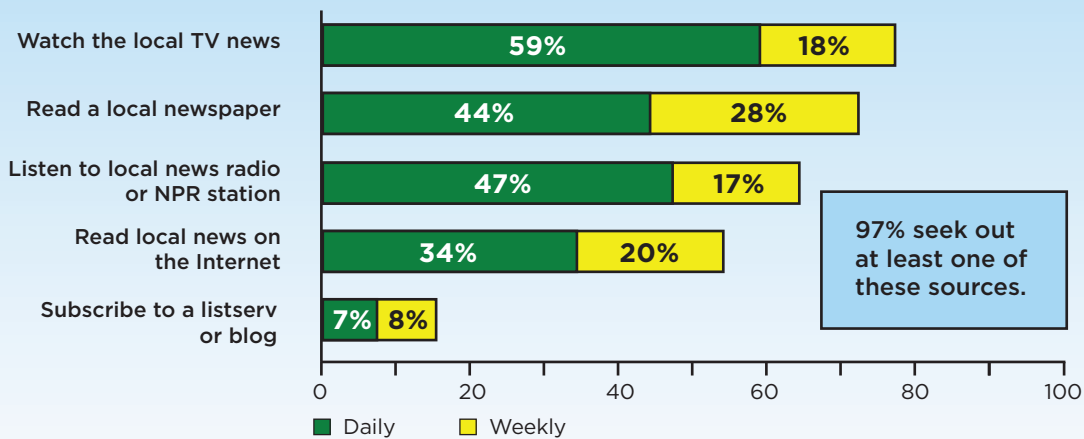
An Engaged Public

Ninety-seven percent of the region’s residents seek out local information at least weekly through television or radio news, a newspaper, or online.

- The leading information source is local television news, watched by 77% of the region’s residents at least once a week, and by 59% “almost every day.”
- Newspaper readership, though declining nationally, remains strong in the Washington region with 72% reading a newspaper weekly, and 44% saying they read one almost every day.
- Two-thirds (64%) listen to “local news radio or an NPR station” at least weekly, with 47% doing so almost every day.
- One-half (54%) read local news online, 34% daily.
- Fifteen percent subscribe to a listserv or read a blog at least weekly for local news and information.

Seeking Information about Local Happenings

Seek this Information Source at Least Weekly



When you want to stay in touch with what is going on in your area, do you... ?

Residents are civically-engaged, as well. More than one-third of the region’s residents (38%) said they have attended a local public meeting or contacted a public official on an issue that is important to them in the past year.

Nearly half – or 17% of the region’s residents overall – would describe themselves as an “activist” on a particular issue that affects (their) neighborhood, community, or the broader region.” Leading the list of issues are schools, traffic and transportation, growth and development, health care, and crime.

Most Important Long-Term Challenges

It is no surprise that residents rate traffic and transportation as the number one “long-term issue or challenge facing the Washington region.” In response to this open-ended question, more than one-third (38%) put transportation first, and another 16% mention it as the second most important issue, totaling 54% of the region’s residents who would put transportation among the region’s top two most pressing challenges.



One's commuting choice heavily impacts this number. Compared to the 54% overall number, only 38% of people who typically commute to work or school by driving alone mention transportation as a top regional challenge. The number is 50% among people who commute by mass transit, carpooling, or another means like walking or biking. Among those who do not commute regularly, the number jumps to 71%. Despite daily frustrations, commuters who drive alone are the least concerned about the region's transportation challenges.

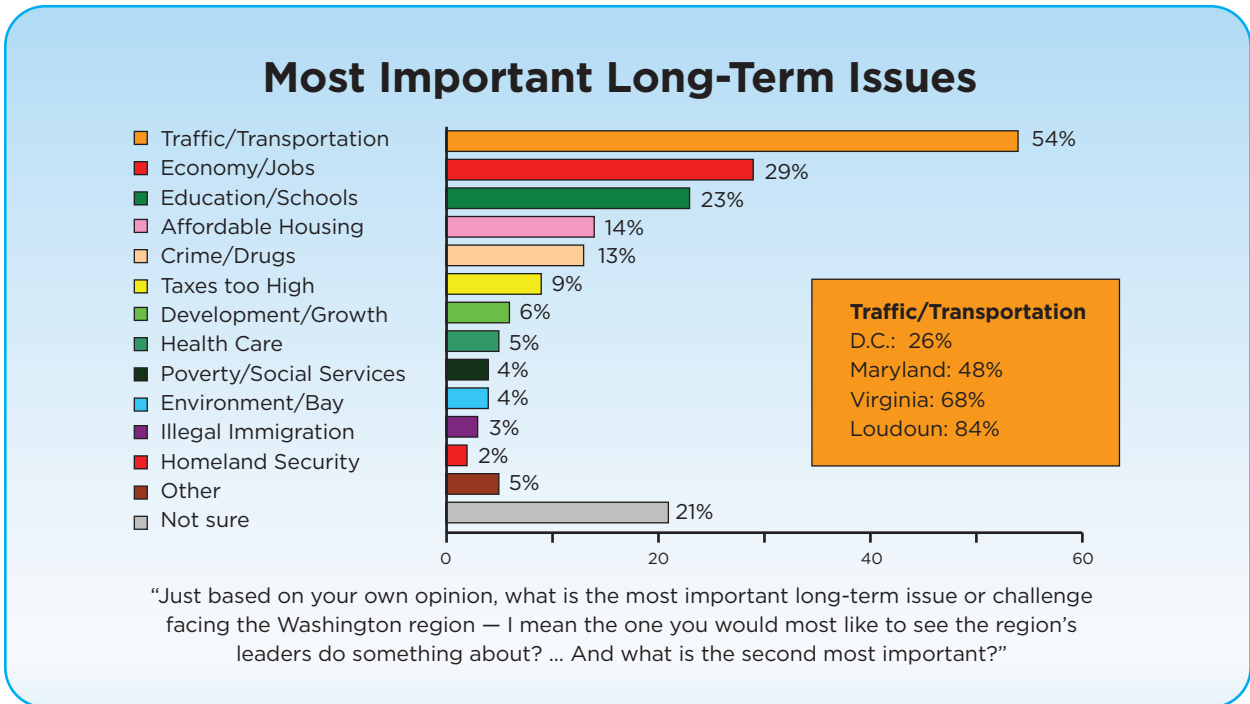
See Traffic and Transportation as a Top Long-Term Regional Challenge

Commute by driving alone	Commute by transit, carpool, walking, biking	Do not commute
38%	50%	71%

At least in part, based on focus group discussion this seems to be due to the fact that commuters who drive alone have the greatest feeling of taking control of their transportation needs by developing one or more preferred routes and sticking with them.

Transportation woes appear to be much more severely felt in the Virginia suburbs. While 26% of D.C. residents and 48% of Marylanders place transportation among their top two long-term concerns, the transportation number rises to 68% in Northern Virginia and 84% in Loudoun County.

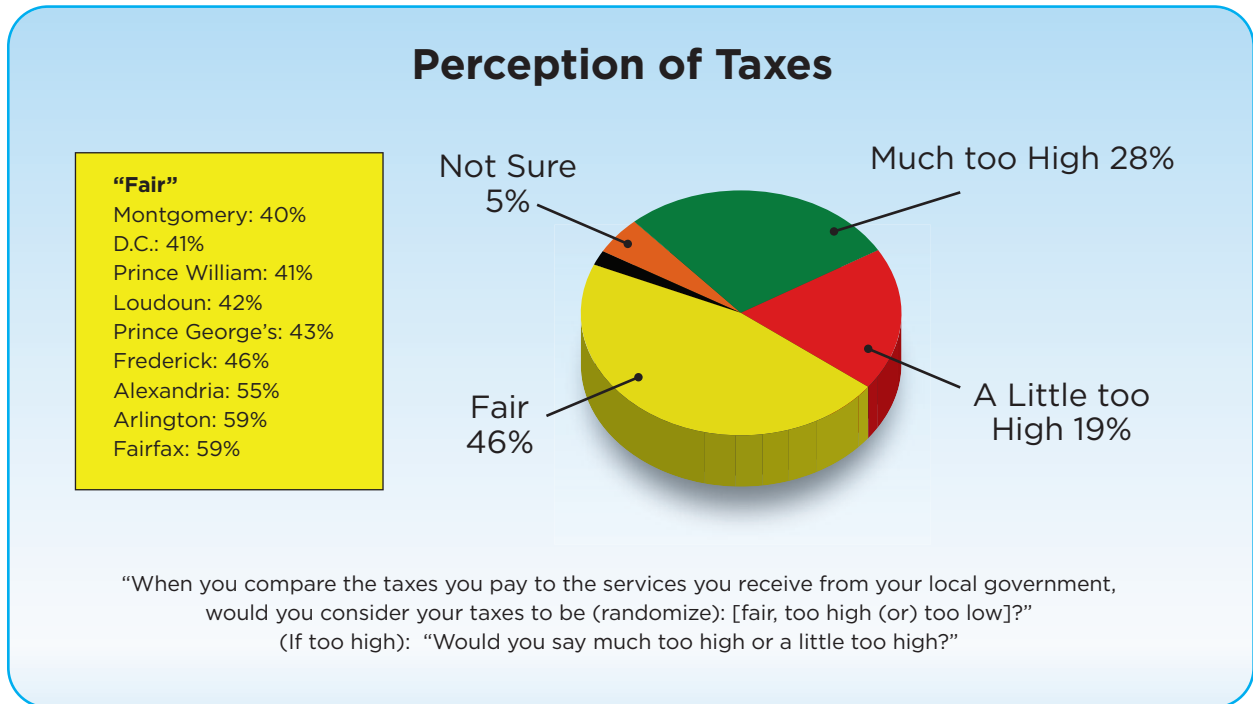
Partly a sign of the times, the economy and jobs are in second place on the list, mentioned by 29% as the first or second leading challenge for the region. The quality of schools is third at 23%. Housing that is affordable for all (14%) and crime and drugs (13%) round out the top five challenges.



Perception of Tax Burden

Across the region, 46% consider their local taxes to be “fair” while 47% say their taxes are “too high” when comparing the taxes they pay to the services they receive from their local government. Stratifying it further, 28% believe their taxes are “much too high,” and 19% just “a little too high.”

The “fair” number is notably higher in Arlington and Fairfax Counties, where it reaches 59%, and the City of Alexandria, where it is 55%. Perceptions of tax burden are only weakly-related to household income, with lower-earning households being only slightly less likely to say their taxes are fair.



Desire for Regional Action

A significant number of the region’s residents would like to see more problems solved regionally. More than four residents in ten (43%) would “like to see more problems addressed regionally across state and county lines,” roughly the same number (47%) as those who would “prefer to address most problems on a local level.” Seven percent volunteer that the answer depends on the problem, and the rest express no view.

The desire for regional action rises higher among those who see housing (61%) and the economy (58%) as top challenges for the region. It also rises higher among frequent users of mass transit (53%). Residents of Arlington County are notable as offering the strongest endorsement of regional action by residents of any jurisdiction (52%).

Most skeptical of regional action today are residents of the District of Columbia (57% would prefer to see problems solved locally) and commuters who drive alone (55%).

More than four residents in ten (43%) would like to see more problems addressed regionally across state and county lines.



Report Card for the Region

In focus groups, we learned just how difficult it can be for citizens to try to visualize a Washington region forty years down the road. The immediacy of their current situation, and the uncertainty of future events can make it difficult to envision the long term. There is a tendency in the general public, as well, to think that technology will solve all problems, leading some for example to describe a world with infinite bandwidth where everyone will telecommute and there will be no traffic.

To anchor the second phase of the research and produce realistic, actionable findings for the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition, we grounded the survey questionnaire in respondents' underlying priorities – concepts that are not likely to change dramatically in the coming years.

Step One was measuring residents' perception of the performance of the region on sixteen key priorities, drawn both from the focus group discussion and from the Coalition's far-reaching Regional Planning Principles document. We asked respondents to grade the area's performance on each priority on a scale of A to F as a child would be graded in school, and we converted that to a numerical "grade point average" on the traditional 4.0 scale.

Report Card for the Region

	Grade Point Average (4.0 scale)	Rating (A or B)
A community that respects people of all backgrounds	2.95	72%
Interesting arts and cultural opportunities	2.93	69%
Recreational opportunities for people of all ages	2.90	71%
Enough parks and green space	2.80	68%
A clean environment	2.71	64%
Emergency preparedness to deal with terrorist threats	2.66	54%
Enough transportation choices to get around the region	2.61	57%
Safe streets and neighborhoods that are free of crime	2.50	56%
The quality of the public schools	2.50	51%
Help for people who are in need	2.47	49%
Good access to health care for all residents.	2.43	48%
Jobs that are easy to get to	2.35	46%
Growth and development that is well-planned	2.25	43%
Neighborhoods where people can walk to activities*	2.19	42%
The availability of good jobs for everyone who wants one	2.17	40%
Housing that people of all incomes can afford	1.81	25%

*Neighborhoods where people can walk from home to work, shop, and leisure activities

“Turning now to the issue of schools, students are often given the grades of A, B, C, D, or Fail as a way to rate the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves in your community were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools: A, B, C, D, or Fail?”
 “I would like to ask you to grade the area where you live for a few other things on that same A to F scale.” (Read and randomize list.)

As summarized in the accompanying table, the public identifies the region's five greatest strengths as these:

- A community that respects people of all backgrounds
- Interesting arts and cultural opportunities
- Recreational opportunities for people of all ages
- Enough parks and green space
- A clean environment

Averaged across all residents of the region, each of these attributes earns a grade of “B” or “B-Minus,” with more than 60% of respondents giving each of them a grade of “A” or “B.” Based on these top five strengths, a picture emerges of an interesting region that the public sees as diverse, vibrant, and connected to the natural world.



In a second tier are these four ideas, each performing at or above the median, and each representing a more concrete concept of security or service delivery. Each of these attributes receives a “B-Minus” or “C-Plus” grade from the public:

- Emergency preparedness to deal with terrorist threats
- Enough transportation choices to get around the region
- Safe streets and neighborhoods that are free of crime
- The quality of the public schools

On the issue of transportation, it must be noted that this proposition was intentionally framed in the context of “transportation choices.” Its relatively positive grade contrasts with the strong verdict discussed earlier that traffic and transportation are the region’s top long-term challenge. One can conclude, at least in part, that the region scores relatively well for providing transportation choices, but many residents may not feel those choices are working well enough for people like them.

The table summarizes seven other priorities that are performing below the median on this list, each scoring a grade of “C-Plus or lower. Noteworthy are two economic concepts at the very bottom of the list – good jobs and affordable housing – both of which may well have been impacted by the current global economic crisis. Across these seven low-performing indicators, there is a sense that some people are being left out of the region’s success, or that many residents see the region as inconvenient or poorly planned. Several of these low-performing indicators relate directly to planning, as well.

Priorities for the Region

Step Two is ranking these same sixteen priorities by how urgently the public wants to see them addressed. Respondents used a 1 to 10 scale where ten meant the item “is such a high priority you would pay more taxes for it.” The concept of paying taxes is used to build into the question the concept of a tradeoff or a sacrifice a citizen would have to undergo to bring improvement in each of these areas. It is also meant to identify areas where the public wants an *increased* effort; when an item scores lower on this scale, it does not mean the public wants to cut back on its commitment to that priority. Respondents were encouraged to use numbers up and down the scale “because not everything can be a top priority.” The result is a clear ranking by the public of which priorities deserve added attention.

Topping the list is “higher quality public schools,” which earns a rating of 7.77 on the 10-point scale. Two-thirds (67%) of the region’s residents rate improving the public schools an “8” or higher on this scale. Even among households without school-aged children, this priority ranks relatively high at 7.45 – with only 23% of these childless households rating the schools “5” or lower.

Three others score near the top, above 7.00 on this scale:

- Safer streets and neighborhoods that are free of crime
- More good jobs for everyone who wants one
- Better access to health care for all residents

Taken together, these four ideas represent a top tier of urgent issues that the public wants addressed.



Following closely behind in fifth place is a priority that may set Greater Washington apart from other regions across the country: more help for people who are in need. This is a region with a heightened awareness of its social divisions, and it is striking that it is the region’s youngest residents – those under age 35 – who are most moved by this priority.

These ideas round out the top ten:

- A cleaner environment
- More housing that people of all incomes can afford
- Growth and development that is better-planned
- Better transportation choices to get around the region
- Better emergency preparedness to deal with terrorist threats

Intensity of Public Priorities

Ranked by Willingness to Pay More Taxes for Each Priority

	Priority (10-point scale)	Rank
Higher quality public schools	7.77	1
Safer streets and neighborhoods that are free of crime	7.52	2
More good jobs for everyone who wants one	7.30	3
Better access to health care for all residents	7.19	4
More help for people who are in need	6.99	5
A cleaner environment	6.77	6
More housing that people of all incomes can afford	6.76	7
Growth and development that is better-planned	6.74	8
Better transportation choices to get around the region	6.61	9
Better emergency preparedness to deal with terrorist threats	6.60	10
Jobs that are easier to get to	6.48	11
A community that better respects people of all backgrounds	6.18	12
Neighborhoods where it is easier to walk from home to work, shop, and leisure activities	6.03	13
More parks and green space	5.75	14
More recreational opportunities for people of all ages	5.60	15
More interesting arts and cultural opportunities	5.00	16

“Now please tell me where each of those ideas would rank for you personally if you were setting the priorities for this region. We will use a 1 to 10 scale where 10 means it is such a high priority you would pay more taxes for it, and 1 means it is not a priority at all. Please try to use numbers up and down the scale because not everything can be a top priority. The first is...” (Read and randomize list.)

One should keep in mind that this question, formulated as a tradeoff, was constructed to identify areas where the public would place an accelerated effort. Items that appear lower on the list should not necessarily be scaled back. Four of the lowest-scoring priorities – respect for all people, parks and green space, recreational opportunities, and arts and culture – are among the highest performing attributes of the region, suggesting that in these cases the public feels these priorities are well in hand and may not need significant added attention.

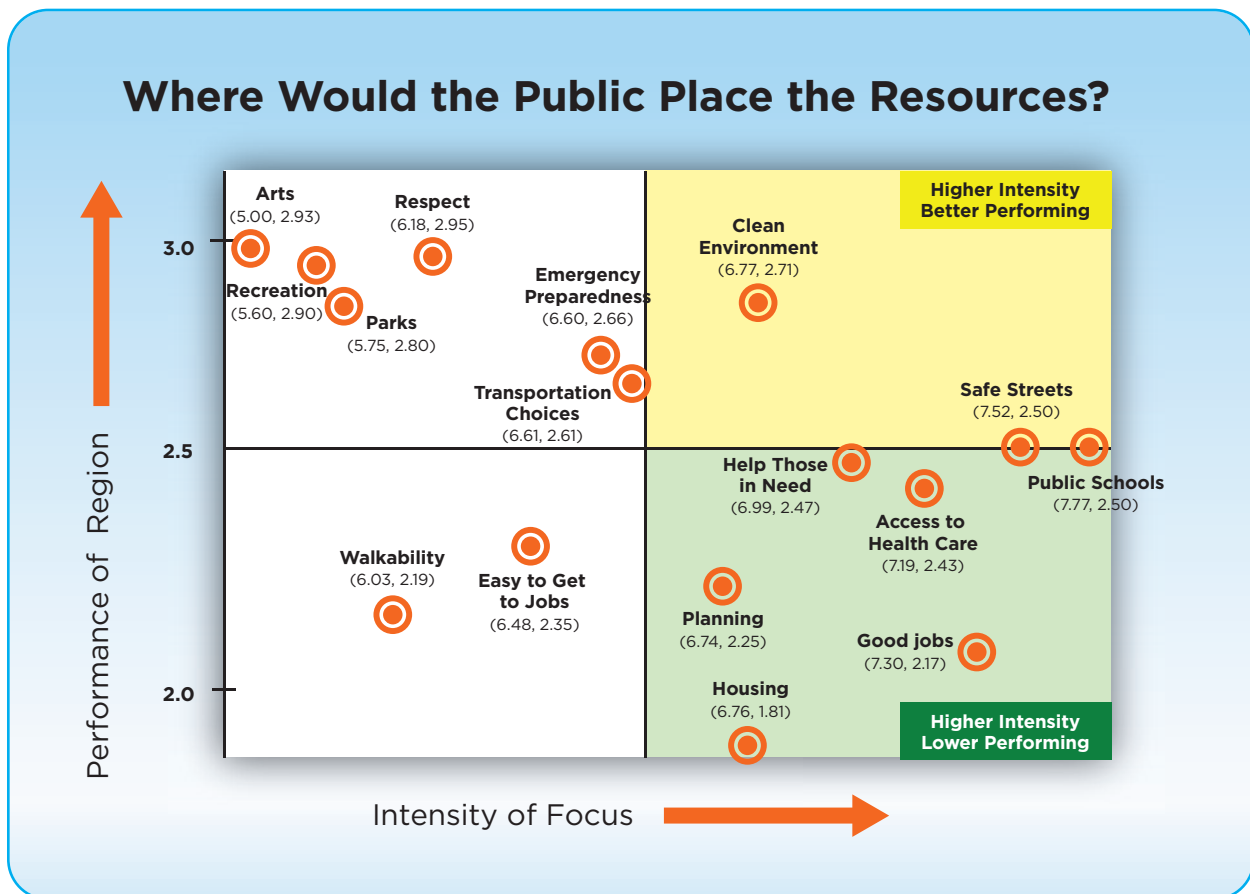


Making the Most Impact for the Region

Plotting these priorities creates a picture of just where the public most wants action. On this graph, the sixteen ideas are arranged both horizontally and vertically based on the ratings each one received in the survey.

- They are positioned vertically according to the performance grades each one earned from the public. Better performing indicators are placed higher on this graph.
- They are placed horizontally based on the intensity of focus each priority would receive, if the public themselves were making the decisions. Items located further to the right are more urgent priorities for the public.
- Grid lines are drawn at the median, so eight ideas appear above (or on) the line, and eight below. Similarly, eight are to the right and eight to the left.

The result is four quadrants. Ideas found in the lower right quadrant are high-intensity, low-performing priorities, where the public would want to place the most emphasis. By focusing here, the region's leaders can do the most to improve Greater Washington as a place to live in the eyes of its residents.



Improving the public schools and ensuring safer streets and neighborhoods are clearly the most intense priorities for the general public. While both indicators earn respectable performance scores across the region, there are enormous differences in performance at the jurisdictional level. But even considering these differences in performance, schools and safety are top priorities in most jurisdictions across the region.



“More good jobs for everyone who wants one” is an extremely low-performing and highly-important priority, no doubt impacted by the current economic crisis. “More help for people who are in need,” while performing near the median, is also an extremely high priority for residents of the region, and is more acutely articulated by people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale.

Another concept with economic implications, “more housing that people of all incomes can afford,” is by far the lowest-performing regional indicator and among the more urgent priorities for residents. One is tempted to discount this finding a bit in light of the national housing crisis, but the severity of the housing ratings in this survey would indicate this may be a more enduring issue in the Washington region. Like others on the survey, this will be a particularly important one to track as the current crisis eases.

“Better access to health care for all residents” ranks very high in this analysis. Based on our focus group discussions, residents believe Greater Washington offers world-class health care, not to mention biomedical research and development, but that many average residents just do not have reasonable access to the quality care they need.

Rounding out the higher-intensity, lower-performing priorities for the region is “growth and development that is better-planned.”

Notable as a high-performing indicator that is a more-urgent priority for the public is “a cleaner environment.” Of those that perform above the median, the environment is the one priority where the public is looking for greater emphasis in the Washington region.

“Better emergency preparedness to deal with terrorist threats” receives a relatively good performance score from the public, and is not in an urgent category right now as far as residents are concerned.

Likewise, “better transportation choices to get around the region” scores near the median for both performance and urgency. In fact, people who typically drive alone to work or school view transportation choices as a much less urgent priority than do the region’s other residents – particularly transit users. And as discussed earlier, solo commuters see transportation generally as less of a regional challenge than do other residents of the region. In part, this helps explain why “jobs that are easier to get to” does not register with more urgency.

People who typically drive alone to work or school view transportation choices as a much less urgent priority than do the region’s other residents.

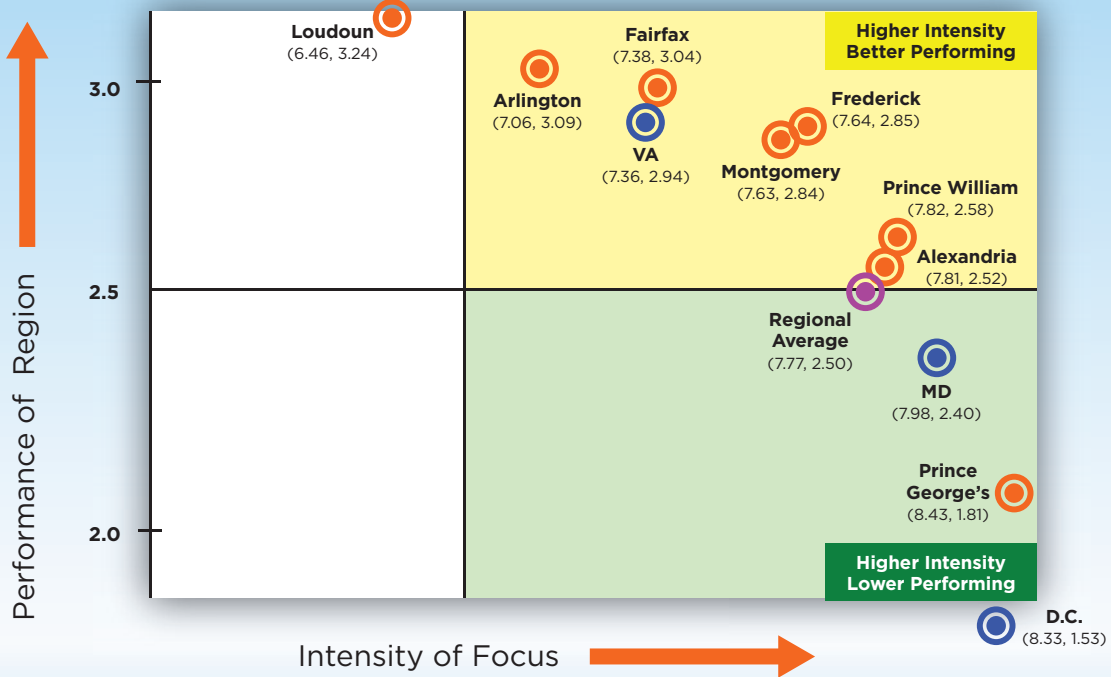
“Neighborhoods where it is easier to walk from home to work, shop, and leisure activities” – a mixed-use development concept – deserves special mention. It scores relatively low on the performance scale and also appears to be a relatively low priority for residents. While planners and leaders talk about the importance of mixed-use and walkable communities, in focus groups, residents had different perceptions of what constitutes mixed-use and struggled to visualize such neighborhoods. Therefore, it appears that the public might need a fuller explanation or visual depiction of these concepts. Other studies that provided visual depictions have shown a positive public reaction to those types of communities.

Four other high-performing attributes of the region – parks and green space, recreational opportunities for people of all ages, interesting arts and cultural opportunities, and respect for people of all backgrounds – score lower on the urgency scale. Residents believe these are already core assets of the region, and they believe efforts in those areas do not necessarily need to be accelerated.



Where Would the Public Place the Resources?

Quality Public Schools



Where Would the Public Place the Resources?

Safer Streets and Neighborhoods



The Region's Best Hopes

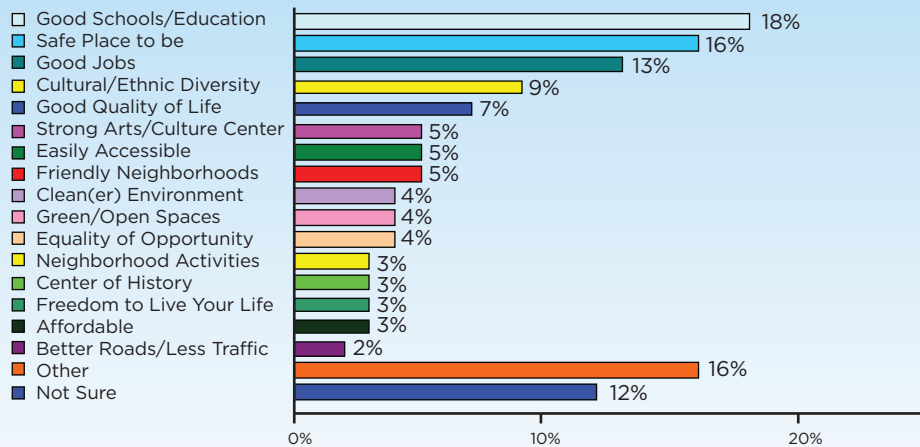
It adds an interesting layer of understanding to move from these hard measures of residents' priorities to asking about their hopes and aspirations for the region. In concluding the survey, we asked them "what would you hope your children or grandchildren will say is the greatest thing about living here" in the Year 2050.

Leading the list of hopes for the future are quality schools, public safety, and good jobs – all of which track closely with residents' public policy priorities. Following those, an interesting second tier of ideas emerges, celebrating cultural and ethnic diversity, overall quality of life, and the arts and cultural vibrancy of Greater Washington.

Accessibility, which includes the concept of being able to move around the region easily, may be a practical necessity and a current challenge for the region, but it ranks somewhat down the list of hopes for the future.

Other notable hopes include a region that is friendly, green, and offers good opportunities for all its residents.

Long Term Hopes for the Region



"... if you were to look out over the next 40 years, let us say to the Year 2050, what would you hope your children or grandchildren will say is the greatest thing about living here?"
(open-ended.)



Conclusions

Residents generally view the metropolitan Washington region as a good place to live. The region's citizens are information seekers with many connections across jurisdictional lines, and a substantial number of them are looking for more regional solutions to the area's greatest challenges. Among those is transportation, which is so often discussed in Greater Washington but emerges from this study as a complex picture.

Where there is strong consensus is on investing more in public schools and safe streets, addressing economic and social inequities where they exist, and making the region greener. Residents appreciate the diversity of the region's population and the interesting arts and cultural offerings they find here. They hope for a region that is vibrant, friendly, green, and accepting of all people.

On other issues leadership may be needed to engage the public in discussion about the benefits of choice, particularly around the vision of mixed-use neighborhoods that offer residents choices between walking, biking, transit, and using private vehicles.

This study provides great insights into Greater Washington's character and its citizens' priorities, and we commend it to the region's leaders for consideration and action.

About OpinionWorks

OpinionWorks is a full-service opinion research organization based in Annapolis, Maryland. It was founded in 2001 to serve mission-driven organizations and public sector agencies.

In the Mid-Atlantic region, OpinionWorks is the polling organization for The Baltimore Sun and has conducted research for the Maryland State Arts Council; Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation; Maryland's Center for Health Promotion, Education, and Tobacco Use Prevention; the Alice Ferguson Foundation; Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance; University of Maryland School of Medicine; Washington's Metro system; and a host of others.

Outside this region, OpinionWorks has conducted public studies for the City of New York and Onondaga County, New York; the City of St. Petersburg and the Florida Courts System; Weber State University in Utah; and others. Nationally, OpinionWorks has conducted research for Lutheran World Relief, The Wilderness Society, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, among others.

Steve Raabe, President

OpinionWorks

(410) 280-2000

www.OpinionWorks.com

steve@OpinionWorks.com



How This Research Was Conducted

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments commissioned OpinionWorks to conduct this study for the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition. The work consisted of focus groups convened to hear from the region's residents on their broad priorities and hopes, as a guide to developing a survey questionnaire. The second step was a scientific regional survey, conducted by telephone.

For purposes of this study, the Washington region is defined as the District of Columbia; Frederick, Montgomery, and Prince George's Counties in Maryland; and the cities and counties of Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax, Falls Church, Loudoun, Manassas, Manassas Park, and Prince William in Virginia.

Two focus groups were conducted in Fairfax, Virginia, on the evening of December 8 and two were conducted in Greenbelt, Maryland, on December 11, 2008. Approximately 12 citizens were recruited to participate in each group, drawn from across the region. We sought engaged citizens, meaning they take part in the political process by voting and follow local issues through print, online, or broadcast media on at least a weekly basis. People who consider themselves activists on any particular issue were excluded from the focus groups. Each discussion lasted approximately two hours and was facilitated by a professional focus group moderator, who is trained to elicit opinions from all members of the group. These discussions identified the full range of challenges and priorities that are on the minds of citizens as they look at the future of the region.

Following the focus groups, OpinionWorks developed a survey questionnaire working with a task force from the GW2050 Coalition. Interviews were conducted among 1,313 randomly-selected adults across all jurisdictions of the region February 10-20, 2009. Results of this regional survey have a margin of sampling error no greater than $\pm 2.7\%$, at the 95% confidence level, meaning the results would be accurate within that range at least 95% of the time if all residents of the region had been interviewed.

To produce a significant sample within each county-level jurisdiction, we stratified the sample, conducting approximately 200 interviews each in the District of Columbia and Fairfax, Montgomery, and Prince George's Counties; and approximately 100 each in the City of Alexandria, and Arlington, Frederick, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties and adjacent independent cities. After the sample was collected, the results were weighted to reflect the true distribution of the region's population geographically and by gender, age, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment. The source for this weighting was the latest data available from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2005-2007), and where necessary for the smallest municipalities the 2000 Decennial Census.



GreaterWashington2050

**Metropolitan Washington
Council of Governments**

777 N. Capitol Street, NE, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002

www.greaterwashington2050.org

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