

Appendix 1: Focus Groups

VISION 2030: SHAPING OUR REGION'S
FUTURE TOGETHER
FINAL REPORT

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January 2003

RESEARCH GOALS

The goal of the focus group research was to listen to the region's resident's talk in their own words about transportation planning in the region, and the array of issues this topic encompasses. The focus group discussions explored the following areas:

- ✓ The public's perceptions of living, working and getting around the Baltimore Metropolitan region.
- ✓ How residents define the region geographically, and their perceptions of Baltimore City's role.
- ✓ Attitudes about transportation in the region. Specifically, how they move around -- drive versus public transportation -- and their experiences with each; the condition of regional transportation systems; how transportation affects their quality of life; reactions to various regional transportation statistics; and projections for the future.
- ✓ Opinions about growth and development in the region: trends and changes in recent years, attitudes about the region's economic prosperity on several different indicators, pros and cons of the growth, impact on quality of life, and projections for the future.
- ✓ Perceptions of the impact of transportation and development on the environment: top environmental concerns, and economic versus environmental tradeoff.
- ✓ Feelings on the social implications of transportation and development, and the impact of current trends on Baltimore City and the region's poor.
- ✓ Solutions for the future.
- ✓ Potential messengers for this effort.

The focus group findings will be used to help frame stakeholder interviews, as well as the telephone survey.

METHODOLOGY

Three focus groups were conducted for Vision 2030 in various parts of the Baltimore Metropolitan Region. One group of suburban residents from Baltimore, Howard and Anne Arundel Counties was conducted on July 11, 2001; one group of small town/rural residents from Carroll, Harford and Baltimore Counties on July 12; and one group of urban residents from Baltimore City and county neighborhoods inside the Beltway on July 13, 2001. Each group had 10 participants, for a total of 30 focus group participants. Respondents met the following criteria:

- ✓ Mix of gender
- ✓ Mix of years in the region
- ✓ Mix of ages
- ✓ Mix of education
- ✓ Household income to reflect range and average in that area
- ✓ Racial mix in urban and suburban groups; rural group all white
- ✓ In urban group, mix of transportation means (i.e. drive, public transportation, walk, etcetera)
- ✓ Those in the fields of marketing/market research, transportation, and local or state government were excluded from participating.

Because the number of participants in these groups is limited, the data presented in this report cannot be projected to any larger universe of individuals, and should be considered in a qualitative frame of reference.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Focus group participants had mixed sentiments about life in the Baltimore Metropolitan Region. They think it is a nice place to live, because of its diversity and close proximity to water, mountains, and major metropolitan areas. However, they are concerned about the amount of growth and development that has occurred in the counties in recent years, impacting everything from traffic, to open space, to loss of a way of life in the rural areas. City residents, conversely, are worried about urban decay. While the rest of the region grows and prospers, much of the city has been left behind.
- Everyone in the focus groups agrees that Baltimore City is the region's core: it is not only the center of culture and tourism, but whatever problems happen in the city eventually bleed into the surrounding counties. Thus, any effort to improve livability in the region must address the city first.
- These residents describe the region's transportation as "average" – not ideal, but better than other areas that they have lived in or visited. While traffic congestion has increased in recent years, it is still better than neighboring D.C. and Virginia, and certainly superior to that of other cities on the Eastern seaboard. Though most think the roads are well kept, there were some complaints about the outdated Baltimore Beltway. Suburban residents in the focus groups also believe that the counties are not well linked, and connectivity could be improved.
- Participants across groups concur that public transportation in the region is poor; and few actually take advantage of that which exists. However, most admit they would not use it, even if it were more accessible. They say that it would take an ideal system (incredibly convenient and safe), as well as a major marketing campaign, to change the current car-dependent culture. Even then, many in the rural group say it would still not be practical.
- Residents believe, in varying degrees, that transportation affects their quality of life. For some it just dictates schedule and affects their mood. For others, particularly some of the low-income urban participants, lack of mobility has meant lost job opportunities.
- In terms of growth and development, many say that some sections of the region are almost unrecognizable from just a few years ago. There has been exponential growth in the number of housing developments, malls and businesses that have sprung up in the suburban, and some of the rural, parts of the region. Many feel the growth is out of control, with no vision or planning associated with it. Rural respondents, in particular, worry that their way of life is at stake. In the suburbs, however, this growth has also meant great economic opportunity.

- As the counties have flourished, much of Baltimore City has deteriorated. There are pockets of prosperity around the Inner Harbor – Canton, Federal Hill, Fells Point, and the Digital Harbor. But in most sections of the city, crime and drugs are rampant, and houses are left vacant. The blue-collar base has eroded, and there are few opportunities for those who are not professionals to learn a living wage. The sense is that all of the good jobs have migrated to the counties.
- The focus groups suggest a disconnect on the environmental impact of transportation and development. Few participants volunteered environmental problems as a consequence of this growth. When probed, some mentioned the impact on air quality, water quality (particularly on the Chesapeake Bay and its crab population), and loss of open space. Few, however, mentioned “sprawl” or “smart growth” by name, which was surprising, given Maryland’s action on these issues.
- After some probing, participants understood the link between transportation/development and social equity, though there will probably need to be some public education on this to make the connection more apparent. Focus group respondents came to the conclusion that mobility allows for more economic opportunities. They bemoaned the fact that many city workers cannot get to the better jobs in the counties because of poor public transportation. They postulate that while county employers want these low-wage workers, they do not want them as their neighbors. And even if city workers moved out to the county, they would have a hard time getting to nearby jobs without public transportation. Participants describe the situation as a viscous cycle that keeps city residents in poverty.
- When asked to come up with ways to solve the region’s problems, participants in every group concur that any solution must first focus on revitalizing the urban core. Development, sprawl and traffic in the counties will continue to worsen unless more is done to improve the economic health of the city, attracting more of the region’s population and businesses. And participants believe that the city’s problems will eventually infect the entire region. Within this context, participants suggest first improving Baltimore’s schools, followed by curbing crime and drugs, and infilling dilapidated areas of vacant homes with refurbished, affordable neighborhoods. Finally, respondents say that the city workforce must be trained to fill jobs with living wages.
- Area residents also want development curtailed – not stopped, but slowed and hopefully, redirected at the city. They had some vague suggestions: from imposing impact fees on new construction, to renovating boarded-up businesses rather than building new ones in open spaces. Some participants also want to improve connectivity between the counties through better public transportation.
- Focus groups respondents believe that any “vision” for the future of the region must begin at the top, starting with the Governor and Executive Branch. This must then filter down to local leaders and planners. Participants were somewhat cynical about the notion of regional cooperation, which is why they believe the Governor must

unite the county executives, mayors and residents. They also feel a sense of shared responsibility in any effort to improve the region's livability. They believe that they, as citizens, must get involved.

- Several local celebrities and politicians were named as potential messengers on behalf of this effort. While no person emerged as the quintessential regional visionary, participants mentioned politicians from Mayor O'Malley to Kweisi Mfume to County Executive Ruppertsberger. They also thought a media personality or local businessperson could be a credible source. In particular, they thought a local developer with "vision", like a Jim Rouse, would be an inspiring spokesperson.

CONTEXT: LIFE IN THE BALTIMORE METROPOLITAN REGION

“America In Miniature”

Baltimore metropolitan residents believe that Maryland is “America in Miniature”, and it is one of the reasons they enjoy living in this area. When asked what they like about the region, many said its diversity and close proximity to the water, mountains, and several major metropolitan regions.

“I would say that I like how everything is close, that if I want to go to the city I can, it’s not a three-hour drive. I can go to the mountains, I can go to the beach and I don’t have to leave Maryland.” Rural resident

I like the fact that there’s a lot to do around here, pretty much you can do whatever you want. (suburban)

What I like about the city is its close proximity to everything, to DC, to the ocean, Philadelphia. It’s pretty centrally located to just about anything. Because Maryland is a small state you can get just about anywhere in a relatively short period of time. I’m somewhat of a history buff, and there’s a lot of history. (urban)

I hit 95 in Maryland and go “oh, thank God.” I’ve lived several different places all over the country and I really like it here. I think it’s real family-oriented, I think that’s real important. There’s a lot to do. The weather is sort of in the middle; you get a little taste of everything. (suburban)

I would say that I like how that everything is close, that if I want to go to the city I can, it’s not a three-hour drive. I can go to the mountains, I can go to the beach and I don’t have to leave Maryland. (rural)

It’s easy to commute into the city, or if you need to get to anyplace. It’s pretty convenient. (rural)

Concern About County Growth

At the same time, there is a lot of concern about growth in the counties. Suburban residents believe their area has grown a tremendous amount in just five years, to the point where it is almost unrecognizable. Many participants say it is much busier than it used to be, and people have a greater sense of urgency. At the same time, this growth has been a cause and effect of great economic prosperity, which they appreciate.

Rural residents are uneasy about these changes. Most of the participants in the focus group say they chose the outlying areas to escape the city and growing suburbs, and insulate themselves from urban/suburban problems. Explained one typical rural participant, “I was born and raised in Baltimore City. When I got married we lived in Baltimore County for about five years. Then I lived in Harford. I keep going further out. I like it where I am now. I like further out better. It’s more laid back style of living, not

quite as hectic.” Now the growth is creeping into their area and changing their way of life.

They realize, however, that as they move further out, they are producing an environment that they were trying to escape. Said one respondent, “It’s kind of like they’re creating what they’re moving from in a certain sense as the population grows and more people get access to the income that allow them to move out there. A lot of them don’t realize that’s what caused this urban belt.”

Urban Decay

While county residents worry about growth, city residents ponder decay. They are very concerned about the proliferation of crime and drugs, and its affect on urban neighborhoods. The majority

“At one time Baltimore was comfortable, now it's like - just like being behind the curtain, you have to be careful - everywhere you turn you don't know who's been watching you.” Urban resident

of participants in the urban focus group said they are scared to go out in their own neighborhood at night. While your block might be safe, two blocks down is a bastion of crime and drugs. Some of them are so scared and frustrated, that they are ready to give up and move out to the counties. These participants explained that Baltimore City used to be a place where you felt “comfortable,” but that sense of comfort is gone, and has been replaced by fear.

At one time Baltimore was comfortable, now it's like - just like being behind the curtain, you have to be careful - everywhere you turn you don't know who's been watching you. It's like when you go in a store you have to watch what you pull out; you can't pull out your money because you don't know who's lurking behind you or who is in there to check you out. It's getting really bad, it's not as comfortable as it used to be, you know? (urban)

When I first moved here I used to feel comfortable cruising around and looking at neighborhoods, and I rarely do that any longer, which makes me very sad because I think the various neighborhoods are really interesting. But they're becoming more and more inaccessible as the crime is spreading. (urban)

I don't let my daughter go out, I have a 6-year-old daughter and I don't let her go outside in the neighborhood by herself or play out in the back yard or the front yard, anything like that because you just can't trust (anyone). (urban)

I don't go out, it's too dangerous, and I've been stopped. I have fun at home now. (urban)

I'm not ready to move but I think we're in a bad situation here, I think we're going in the wrong direction. (urban)

Defining the Region

When asked to define the Baltimore Metropolitan Region, there were three slightly different definitions from the three different groups of residents. Suburban residents had the broadest view. Those who live in Anne Arundel County think of the region as extending between Baltimore and Washington, even stretching into Northern Virginia. Others said it is a triangle between Baltimore, Washington and Frederick. Rural/small town residents were a little confused by the question, but after some probing, guessed that it is Baltimore and the counties that touch it. Baltimore City residents had the narrowest definition, assuming it includes Baltimore City and those neighborhoods inside the Baltimore Beltway that touch the city. Described one urban participant, “I’d say Anne Arundel County and then your Baltimore County that’s immediately surrounding. You don’t tend to think of Harford as Baltimore. When you’re talking about the city and the core of the city, that gets way out in the country. You talk Reisterstown and all that, yes, that’s a Baltimore suburb but that’s not really Baltimore.”

As Goes Baltimore, So Goes The Region

Although definitions vary across groups, Baltimore is still seen as the region’s core by most (with the exception of a few participants from Anne Arundel County who feel closer ties with the District). There are several reasons why urban, suburban and rural residents across counties hold this belief:

“The City is the hub, it’s the center, it’s the core. People know Baltimore, that’s what they associate. They may know Howard County, they may know the little surrounding counties, but they all call it Baltimore. So whatever happens in Baltimore is associated with everything close to that.” Suburban resident

- Outsiders know Baltimore, and thus associate the outlying areas with the city.

It’s like the hub, it’s the center, it’s the core. People know Baltimore, that’s what they associate. They may know Howard County, they may know the little surrounding counties, but they all call it Baltimore. So whatever happens in Baltimore is associated with everything close to that. (suburban)

Baltimore is the center of this area, and that’s how we’re thought of. (rural)

- Baltimore is the center of tourism and culture for the region. In addition to tourists, many county residents still enjoy the city for ball games, the Aquarium, the Zoo, museums, Harbor Place, and the occasional night out for dinner.

It’s the cultural center, of this whole area. When you look for culture in this area you go to Baltimore. You go to the museums, you probably go to the shows, the ballgames. (suburban)

Big businesses that locate in the Baltimore area are drawn here by a big city. It offers museums and opera, symphony, baseball teams, football teams. Baltimore City is the core of what draws people to come here. (rural)

And I take my children to the zoo and other activities, the museums. So it has cultural things. (rural)

We go to Orioles games. We occasionally pop down to the harbor for like dinner and ice cream. Whenever anybody comes to visit us we always go to the Aquarium, we belong to the zoo. So it's probably the place we go as a family. (suburban)

- Many county residents are originally from Baltimore. They have escaped to the counties because they could afford to do so, but still feel ties to the city. But more importantly, the problems of the city eventually creep out to the counties. Thus, everyone in the region has an interest in the health of the city.

A lot of people from the city move out to the counties and even though they're in the county they still have a certain mentality. They still do the same things, have the same kind of traffic, and have the same kind of problems, they just bring it to a different neighborhood. (urban)

We certainly care what goes on in the city, although like what we were saying, I don't want to live there. But it's close enough to home that it is going to affect me whether or not I do want to visit. (rural)

We're on the outskirts but really that still affects us because somehow that crime still eventually filters into these other counties and everything. When you see it first hand you really know it's there. You can't get away from it just by hiding out in another county. (rural)

At the same time, most believe that Baltimore is no longer the economic core of the region. Most of the "good jobs" are now in the counties. In fact, only a couple of people in the focus groups actually worked in the city. Even in the urban group, less than half of participants worked in the city.

"We're on the outskirts of the city, but really that still affects us because somehow that crime still eventually filters into these other counties and everything. When you see it first hand you really know it's there. You can't get away from it just by hiding out in another county." Rural resident

In the end, regional residents have a dichotomous view of the city. On the one hand, everyone is worried about the proliferation of crime and drugs. On the other hand, there is some sense that Baltimore has improved in recent years. County residents, in particular, note that there has been revitalization in areas like Canton, Fells Point, around

Hopkins, and the Digital Harbor. They think that there are some professionals moving back into the city to live in these chic places. Urban residents, on the other hand, point out that these are only “pockets” of prosperity, and much of the city is being left behind.

TRANSPORTATION

Not Ideal, But Better Than Other Regions

"I don't think traffic is bad here because I travel to Virginia a lot and I tell you, it's like as soon as you cross the line it's like pure hell on the road." Suburban resident

These regional residents give their transportation system and infrastructure average marks. In a written exercise, ratings averaged a "C" – not

great, but better than other regions in the country. Participants explain that the area is more congested than it was in the past, especially as more jobs have moved out to the county. Hours of heavy traffic have expanded, so that rush hour lasts two or three hours on each end of the day, when it used to be more like one hour. "I think it's getting busier," said one suburban resident. "Over the years I saw the volume of traffic increase, the urgency of everyone to get to everyplace, and that's kind of concerning to me, that everybody is in a hurry all the time." "When I moved here 25 years ago there was no traffic at all and now - now the traffic is really bad," lamented another.

At the same time, they note that their problems are not as bad as many other areas they have lived in or traveled to. They compare their congestion and roads to those in the nearby Washington, DC region, Atlanta, New York and many parts of California, and feel that the Baltimore that region is relatively tame.

I don't think traffic is bad here because I travel to Virginia a lot and I tell you, it's like as soon as you cross the line it's like pure hell on the road. (suburban)

I was born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts and traveling up there is twice as bad as it is here. (suburban)

I've been in the military I've lived over in Europe for four years, I've lived in New York City, and I've lived in Detroit. I've seen different transportation systems and believe me, they are a lot worse in other places than they are here, so that's why I gave it a C. (urban)

My closest friend lives in Atlanta and if you want to see a horrendous beltway go around Atlanta, or go over to Washington and go around there. I think that the Baltimore beltway is as bad as some of the other big city beltways, but I've seen much, much worse. (rural)

They also think the roads are pretty well kept. Said one rural respondent, "I've been in several other big cities, and I think that in the Baltimore area the roads are far better maintained than the roads in the big cities. Except for certain areas in Baltimore City, they're clean, they're well maintained and I don't think there's a big problem."

There were, however, some complaints that the Baltimore Beltway is outdated, particularly around the Towson area. Participants believe that there was not a lot of foresight when the Beltway was expanded; there should have been more room to grow.

When they expanded the Beltway a lot of years ago, they went from the little two-lane Beltway to supposedly a four-lane. But you still have sections of the Beltway that's two lanes. They should have just gone four right off the bat and even planned to go six. (urban)

The beltway could use improvement, that's for sure. I don't know what they can do, it's so outdated. I guess they never thought that the area would build up like this so fast and to the outer skirts, you know, people coming in to work and the traffic, it's just horrible. The accidents and the people, it's the stretch of Towson, it's like they sightsee in Towson. (rural)

At the same time, several noted that even if the lanes were expanded, congestion would probably not improve, because more cars would funnel onto the Beltway. Several suggested expanding the Smart Tag program statewide, so traffic throughout the region would move more quickly.

Residents in the suburban group also complained that the area is not well linked. They say that while it is easy to get to Baltimore and DC, it is hard to get from

“The transit system is based on feeding to Baltimore. If you're in Howard County and want to go to Anne Arundel County, you have to come into Baltimore and then make the choices.” Suburban resident

county to county. “There are no inter-county connectors and trying to get Route 100 through was like pulling teeth,” said one suburban participant. Others said that while there is a lot of connectivity North and South, it's harder to move in other directions. “The transit system is based on feeding to Baltimore. If you're in Howard County and want to go to Anne Arundel County, you have to come into Baltimore and then make the choices,” explained another. This connectivity is important to them because they are moving from county to county.

Urban and rural focus group participants did not share these views. “The highway structure is excellent,” said one urbanite. “You have 83, 95, I mean there's so many different ways you can get around.” “If you know the routes, I think it is (well-linked),” explained a rural participant. “We've got 97 going towards Pennsylvania or down towards Harford County. You've got 32; you've got 27, 26. Granted there are only sometimes two lanes, one going each way, but on the whole it is connected.” The issue of connectivity should be further tested in the survey to obtain clarification.

Public Transportation Is Poor

Very few people in the groups actually use public transportation for work or for entertainment. Some who have easy access to a light rail station use it to get into Baltimore for entertainment. A couple of city residents have used the metro sporadically, and a few use the bus system, and one or two walk to work.

There are a couple of reasons for the lack of use. One, all agrees that the public transportation system in the city is inadequate. The subway goes nowhere. Many areas have been left out of the light rail system. It takes forever to get anywhere on a bus in the city, and most suburban and rural areas do not have adequate public transportation.

Doesn't seem to be a very extensive system, the light rail. (suburban)

The subway doesn't go anywhere, the distance it goes north/west or east/south is not actually going in places that you really need to get to. (urban)

There is no public transportation in Howard County that I know of. Just Columbia's bus system. (suburban)

Two, people are car-dependent. In the suburban and rural groups, the average household has three cars, with numbers ranging from two to five. Everyone drives to work and primarily uses cars to get to entertainment and shopping. In the urban groups, most people have cars. About half of the participants in the urban group work outside of the city, and thus, need a car to get to their job. Those with small children also said it is too difficult to use public transportation when transporting kids. Participants explained that cars afford them freedom, flexibility, accessibility and safety, and thus, are hard to live without.

“We rely on our cars totally.” Suburban resident

We rely on our cars totally. (suburban)

Cars offer you more freedom. (suburban)

I think there are a lot of jobs today, just like many of us are talking about, where people have to go different places. You don't go the same place every day. I would guess at least half the jobs, maybe more, require that you be at different places. So you need a car to do that. (suburban)

Aside from just getting to work, if you want to go shopping there's nothing you can buy, in terms of necessities of life, downtown. You have to go to a mall or go out of town. There's no way of getting there except in a car. (urban)

I want to have my car. I want to be able to have that control. I want to be able to know that I've got a blanket in the back in case my daughter falls asleep or it's cold. I want to know that I can go home any time I feel like it. (rural)

It's hard to take a bus with a child. I have to carry my kid, my bags. I've even taken a stroller, the little fold-up ones. I'll probably never ride a bus with her. (suburban)

I think as you get older I think you feel the importance of safety and being able to have your car and not have to worry about crime and things like that. (urban)

I think as we get older I think we want convenience. It is convenient to have your car, and I'm the same way, if I want to leave, I want to leave. I don't want to have to worry about the next time the Metro is coming. (rural)

Respondents lament the poor regional public transportation system, saying that it is ridiculous that a major metropolitan area does not have better infrastructure. Some had lived in New York, Boston and Chicago, and explained that it was easy to get by without a car. They feel that public transportation would afford them more options for moving around.

You don't have a lot of options as far as alternatives on how to get to different places, depending on where you're going. The District, I like the way their Metro system is set up, you can get pretty much anywhere on that. I thought, at one point, that's what Baltimore was trying to do with their system but I don't see that happening right now. (suburban)

I also lived and worked in New York and you can hop on a train, subway, whatever, and get somewhere. You don't have to worry about driving. The thing I don't understand is why that does not exist here. The light rail goes here and here and then there's a subway, which I've never been on, I don't think anybody has been on it. (suburban)

I grew up around Boston where they have excellent public transportation; you don't even need to own a car. I just can't believe they don't have anything like this in a major city. (urban)

I lived in New York City for about five years and I used the subway all the time and I thought it was nice, very convenient to almost anything there. You didn't need a car. That was more convenient. (rural)

Few Would Use Public Transport

Though participants bemoan Baltimore's poor public transportation, when challenged and asked if they would use it if it were more accessible, most admitted they would not. Few could give up all of the benefits of a car, as outlined above. Said one rural man, "Gas would have to go to \$5

"Gas would have to go to \$5 a gallon before people would change their driving habits. I think it would take a tremendous leap in gas prices for people to change their driving habits." Rural resident

a gallon before people would change their driving habits. I think it would take a tremendous leap in gas prices for people to change their driving habits.”

Participants said it would take a lot to change their attitudes. A public transportation system would have to be extremely convenient, and run on time 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Safety was definitely a concern. In the non-urban groups, there was a stereotype that poor, urban people ride public transportation, and thus, there is fear of using it. They also worry that if these people have more access to the non-urban areas through public transportation, crime will spread more quickly.

I would think that the crime would just follow it right along because I've seen it happen. It's just too easy. They come from the city, and I'm not saying they're all coming from the city, but it's an easy access because the Metro is right by Owings Mills Mall. There's been a lot more crime at Owings Mills Mall especially during the daytime, I mean they don't care if it's broad daylight or at nighttime or whatever. There's a lot of crime there and it's just easy access to get out of there. There's no car to have to follow to get on the light rail or the Metro and get out and go back home and everything. (rural)

“Frankly, public transportation doesn't really affect my life a whole lot. It's not anywhere near where I live. It could be, but I don't want it to be. Would I use it? It would have to go where I'm always going and it would have to be super, super convenient and super, super cheap, and super, super clean and crime-free. It would have to be nearly idyllic.” Rural resident

A couple of respondents in the suburban group said that in addition to making it convenient, timely and safe, they would need to be convinced by a major marketing campaign expounding the

benefits of public transport. Those in the rural groups had little, to no, interest because they live so far out. Urban respondents were most interested in having more public transportation options, but most of them would still not give up their cars.

It would take a tremendous cultural shift and marketing campaign to get the minds of the people who have lived here all these years and relied on their cars to move to public transportation. It would take a lot of patience and a lot of marketing to get that to happen because that's not the way we think. (suburban)

I think it has to be really convenient because it's beautiful when you can drive up, get on the light rail or whatever system it is, go to your destination, shop, and not have to worry about the traffic. So if it was convenient and if it was marketed properly, if it was a no-brainer then I think people would love it, I really do. You don't want to have to drive all the time. (suburban)

I think it would have to be safe, flexible, and inter-connected so you could get here and get over here, be able to get two or three places. We all go several places in the day, we don't just go to one place. So I think those things would

have to be really important. You'd have to be convinced that was true. You're not going to be convinced until you do it. So part of the marketing is giving you the ability to do it. (suburban)

A lot of the people that work at the hospital in medical school happen to live near one of the five metro stops and it's great for them. A lot of my classmates don't have to have a second car. That would great. But when we work on the wards, we have to be there at 4:00 in the morning. So public transportation would work only if it were 24/7. (urban)

Frankly it doesn't really affect my life a whole lot. It's not anywhere near where I live. It could be, but I don't want it to be. Would I use it? It would have to go where I'm always going and it would have to be super, super convenient and super, super cheap, and super, super clean and crime-free. It would have to be nearly idyllic. (rural)

Transportation Affects Quality of Life

Residents believe that transportation has a minor to significant impact on their quality of life. A couple participants in the suburban group said they picked the area in which they live based on access to jobs in both Baltimore and Washington. There were two or three people who live in Odenton because it is so convenient from a transportation perspective. Said one man, "My wife still hasn't found a job yet. Not knowing where she was going to work, Odenton just happens to be perfectly in between Baltimore, DC, and Annapolis. That's why we lived in Odenton." (suburban)

Others say that traffic determines their entire schedule – when they leave in the morning and when they come home at night. It also affects their disposition. Bad traffic equals bad mood. Finally, commuting is an energy drain and takes away from valuable personal and family time. However, average commute time of these respondents did not seem that bad.

My husband has to commute, so I complain every day about how it increased from 40 minutes to an hour and half. I mean it's true, it's been a real burden in our lives because it's made such a huge difference in the last five years about how long and complicated the commute has gotten. (suburban)

I think when I commuted a longer distance it impacted my life a lot because I had to leave early. But it took away from my family life and I would come home and not really feel like doing anything. I mean if you sit in traffic two hours it sort of just wipes your whole spirit away. It's kind of hard to get that back up again to go out and enjoy the weekend. (suburban)

I've even thought about getting a job in Baltimore so I wouldn't have to drive all the way back and forth because that's hectic, that's a pain getting home so late and leaving so early. When you live right here and you can just have a half-hour commute or something like that. (urban)

If I'm not okay with it, then it's going to set the tone for the rest of my day, like if you're stuck in traffic because of a bad accident that can make you very tense that you're late, that it gets out of your control. But if your transportation means is smooth and convenient and everything you expect then you're on time, it's fine. (rural)

For some in the urban group, transportation has had an even greater impact on their quality of life. Lack of mobility has meant lost opportunities. There were a couple of people from Baltimore who were forced to quit their jobs in the county or purchase a car they could not afford because they could not get to work on time using public transportation.

"I just resigned from a job in Harford County for lack of reliable transportation. I had to come back in town to fix my situation." Urban resident

I was getting to work late (taking the bus). My boss ain't going to have that all the time. He thought it was a redneck excuse I have. (I drive now.) I had to do something or I was going to lose my job, you know? (urban)

I just resigned from a job in Harford County for lack of reliable transportation. I had to come back in town to fix my situation. (urban)

I had an opportunity to work in DC, I turned it down. The gas was too expensive to drive back and forth every day. I would have to get up too early in the morning to drive, and I'm barely making that much money if I catch the MARC train or public transportation, and would it get me to work on time? Is it really worth it? No, I already have a job so I'll stay where I am. It wasn't worth the hassle. (urban)

DEVELOPMENT

Real Growth In The Counties

Focus group participants explain again and again that the area outside of Baltimore City has grown a tremendous amount in the last five years. Some say that it is unrecognizable from just a few years ago. They point to the exponential growth in suburban housing developments, stores and malls; the number of businesses that have grown or moved to suburban areas (Howard County, I100, BWI corridor); and the loss of farms and open space in rural areas.

I couldn't believe how much the area had grown, it's incredible. I didn't even recognize that one stretch between Laurel and Fort Mead. I couldn't even recognize it, where did all these stores come from? Who is going to all these stores? (suburban)

The population has really increased. When they put in 795 it's incredible how it brought people from the city and further counties out to that end, it's just incredible. Once they put 795 in, it just seems like it really flourished, that Baltimore county area. Even the people that lived in Baltimore County felt like they needed to get a little further and they go to Carroll County. Now Carroll County is starting to get really built up. There's a lot of new construction. (rural)

I remember when Owings Mills used to be nothing but green grass and now it's the mall, three or four hotels, all these new food restaurants in this one little area. They have really developed that area to the point it's kind of overcrowded. But I remember years ago none of that was there in Owings Mills. (suburban)

Many feel that the growth is out of control, with no vision or planning associated with it. One respondent said the mantra is, "If there's a

"If there's a vacant spot they'll build on top of it." Suburban resident

vacant spot they'll build on top of it." Participants explain that there is a formula for the development, "It's a group of town homes and definitely a supermarket like a Super Fresh. Then you build a Wal-Mart and you make everything close so you can go from the townhouse to Wal-Mart and the market, so you have to have all those things right there."

If you can afford the land, build on it. (suburban)

The problem is that they're taking up space just to take up space. It's just like houses. These builders, I mean up in Harford County, wherever there's a space there's a house. They've got to build these houses. (rural)

I moved to Harford County 25 years ago and McDonald's was the only place to eat in Bel Air and a little restaurant up there on Main Street. They had Harford Mall and there was two cow pastures across the street. Now it's just, I mean that's the big problem at Harford County, that's the big concern, over-development. It's moving from the city, then it moved to Baltimore County, and now it's moving to Carroll County. There are malls on every corner. You can't go two blocks without a restaurant or a bagel store. (rural)

You put over 100 houses in one little area right on 30. If you take three cars per household, that's another 300 cars on 30, commuting up and down 30. I don't know how they can do it. It's too quick, too fast, and too much too fast. Slow it down. I'm not saying stop it, just slow down a little bit. (rural)

Suburban Housing Development Is Attractive

Participants in the suburban group, however, believe that the new housing developments are generally attractive. Although there are more and more of them, these new developments are nicely kept and landscaped, and thus, do not degrade the beauty of the region.

I think it's pretty, I mean just around down in Piney Orchard, Seven Oaks, I think they're very pretty. I think it looks nice. I do miss the land, I miss the farms, but it looks really pretty. I think the roads are pretty wide, well built, lit, pretty nice. (suburban)

I think it's a sense of beautification, it's very inviting, it's a sense of community, and it's very attractive and it makes you feel good about the area. (suburban)

The landscaping, which is a must, I'm excited about that, and just development and just how it has changed that area and how it looks so inviting and interesting. (suburban)

Growth Means Prosperity

"The county is where the money is." Urban resident

Although these participants are concerned about growth, suburban residents like the economic opportunities it has afforded them. Many businesses in the area have thrived, and new ones have moved in. This means more jobs for area residents. The growth has also made their lives more convenient in some ways. County residents no longer have to drive far to go shopping or eat out at a restaurant. This prosperity also makes some proud.

I think this growth has been really good for this region. I think people in this area should be proud of the fact that people want to live here and that you're expanding. I look at it as pride. A lot of cities are diminishing; Baltimore is growing and I think it's a good thing. (suburban)

It's doing really well, obviously, a lot of businesses are moving into the area. I guess I shouldn't say it's so much like the Baltimore County area but into Montgomery County and Howard County, that kind of area, there's a lot of business, a lot of growth. (suburban)

I would say it's good where I live. There were a lot of jobs created in the area. I had a job working in Westminster, which wasn't that far from where I lived, and there are a lot of job opportunities there. My husband works there. He used to work down in Bethesda. He used to commute. He had the opportunity to work in Westminster now. There's a lot of jobs in the area if you know where to look and how to find them, and there's a lot of good jobs, good high-paying jobs. (rural)

I think it's very competitive and I think a big piece of that is Baltimore/Washington International Airport. It's accessibility and the increased traffic in there has allowed it to be a very competitive region for businesses. I think that's good. (suburban)

The county is where the money is. (urban)

We just have a new Wal-Mart, and I think it's great not having to run over to Westminster, and plus there's a lot of people in my area where I live that it's great. They have new jobs, new opportunities, and people don't have to commute all the way down to Baltimore and have a job now. They can work right there. (rural)

In The Country, Losing A Way Of Life

In the rural areas, there is more concern about growth. Again, many of these people left Baltimore City or Baltimore County to escape the congestion. Now they are concerned that their quiet life is in jeopardy as more

"It's ironic. People have moved out of the metropolitan areas out in the country like Carroll County and Harford County to escape this, and what they've done is they've created the same thing." Urban resident

people move out to the outlying counties to leave the burgeoning suburbs behind. Farms are quickly disappearing and traffic is increasing. "It's ironic," said one urban participant, "People have moved out of the metropolitan areas out in the country like Carroll County and Harford County to escape this, and what they've done is they've created the same thing."

It's been too much. There was a farm across the road from me and on my way to where I work, I think there's only one farm left and it used to be all farmland. Now it's just houses. I look out my windows of my house and it's just like everything is closing in on me. Too much. (rural)

I think a lot of the residents don't want that kind of growth. I mean, I don't want another housing development in my area. Now, granted I live in an area that is largely rural and my neighbors are a cow farm, but I don't want him to sell that and put houses up. (rural)

Rural participants also explain that the pattern of growth is alarming. Once an area gets slightly built up, immediately a few chain stores go in. Soon competitors build a franchise nearby. They worry that there are still not enough rural residents to support two drugstores and two grocery stores. Again and again, they have seen these businesses fail and been boarded up. Eventually, however, a new competitor builds down the street. Participants want merchants to reuse unused space before building on another cornfield.

It seems like you build a Rite Aid. Well, then there's a Rite Aid and then right next door they've got to build a CVS. Now you know they both can't be kept in business for too long. One of them has got to go. I don't understand this. I know it's competition, but it's ridiculous. You can't tell me both of those stores can stay in business and do business. (rural)

They have supermarkets that are closed down that are sitting there for rent, for lease, whatever, yet they're building more. I can never understand that why they have these big buildings that they could renovate or reuse. Why do they have to build, buy up three or four cornfields and build something else when they have available space somewhere? (rural)

Many of these rural participants were not as enthusiastic about the job opportunities in their area as those in the suburban groups. Some say most of the new jobs are low-wage service jobs at drugstores and grocery stores. These are not living-wage jobs with which you can support a family.

For this area it seems like there's more service oriented positions and I don't feel like they're adequate, because you can have kids right in high school to be able to get those types of jobs because it seems like it moved from, like everybody is saying, industrial to more service oriented economy, especially in this area. These aren't the kind of jobs that are going to be supporting families. (rural)

Lower-paying jobs. There are jobs, there's work, but the pay is not (great). (rural)

Lack Of Vision

"Too many people, not enough planning. Where are the kids going to go to school? Too many cars. Definitely no planning with the traffic signals and lights." Suburban resident

this growth. Participants in each group said that it is clear local and state governments

Although there are mixed emotions about growth and development, there is consensus that there has been no vision and planning associated with

and planners did not anticipate the type of growth that would occur in the outlying counties. This is evident from the congestion, the over-crowded schools, and the loss of open space. Most believe that government supports this growth, no matter what form it takes.

It's just been poorly planned. Too much growth too soon. Too many developments, too many shopping centers, just everything. Nothing five years ago and now everything, just like that. (rural)

Too many people, not enough planning, where are the kids going to go to school? Too many cars. I can't get out of my development in the morning to get on the road to go to work and it's like 15 to 20 minutes because there are so many people coming up and down. Definitely no planning with the traffic signals and lights. (suburban)

I agree that I don't think they planned real well for the schools, especially in Anne Arundel County, it's really overcrowded. When they built Seven Oaks, they were supposed to put a school in there and then they just axed it out of the budget. Now they just put it on for like seven years down the road. But there's a real need because you have kids going to school in trailers. So they basically built developments but they didn't build the schools and the other things to support all the people. (suburban)

They build these big communities. Our schools are overcrowded. I deal with that personally myself everyday. Our water where I live is sky-high and now they're going to solve that problem by taking one of our lakes and turning that into reservoir. What is up with that? It's just everything is so backwards and they don't want to cooperate with state regulations. (rural)

I don't think whoever was planning it really thought enough ahead to anticipate that more people would be driving, and that we would need more options and things like that. So I think they lose income, revenue, when that happens, when you don't have options. (suburban)

Our local government. We have these problems because they want to be able to build wherever they can and they don't want to set standards or regulations or support the sewer, the water, and the school systems for these changes. But yet they're willing to anybody has a dollar, sure got to build. (rural)

Growth is a big problem and the county government won't do anything about it. It's almost embarrassing to the average resident that you talk to Carroll County people who have lived there all their lives, you talk to people who have moved out within the past 15 years, and everybody says the same thing, "we moved here, we're here because we like it the way it is," but yet the county government doesn't do anything to support the people as far as regulations. There are not regulations. They don't care, that you can build anything anywhere. (rural)

Some Revitalization, But Much Of The City Has Been Left Behind

While the counties have experienced an influx of residents and, in some areas, jobs, for the most part, much of the city has been left behind. There has been some revitalization and prosperity in certain areas in recent years, which make some believe that Baltimore is doing well.

“People are going into Fells Point, Canton, and this whole Digital Harbor. That whole area is going to be built up. It's just a place that people are gravitating to, especially people from DC because they know it's cheaper to live, and they can be on the water. So I think a lot of people are coming to Baltimore.” Suburban resident

I think Baltimore is starting to come alive, and they're doing so much downtown. I work downtown at BG&E and all the plans they have - it's to the point that BG&E can rebuild a mega-complex right down on Pratt Street because they got in early knowing that the Cordish Brothers were going to build the Power Plant and all those other things. So that's going to be a major player for conventions and conferences. (suburban)

People are going into Fells Point, Canton, and this whole Digital Harbor. That whole area is going to be built up and they built new high-rises right in Harbor View. It's just a place that people are gravitating to, especially people from DC because they know it's cheaper to live, and they can be on the water. So I think a lot of people are coming to Baltimore. (suburban)

Baltimore City I think has seen a slight increase in people in areas like the Fells Point/Canton and Federal Hill. A lot of people who were moving out are now moving back in because I guess the beltway, the traffic, you know, if you live in Bel Air and work in Baltimore City it's probably a horrendous drive everyday. (rural)

Ten to 15 years ago, people were moving out. Then as the computer world starting getting more intense, people found their careers and it's as if it's sort of reinventing itself in those areas of Canton and Fells Point. Certain areas are coming back to life again. (rural)

Urban participants lament, however, that most of the city has been left out. There was some resentment in the group on the level of attention to the Harbor, when so much of Baltimore is in disrepair.

I think it's all the city officials really care about, is the Harbor Place. (urban)

All the money goes to the harbor. (urban)

The only thing I see developing is the Inner Harbor. (urban)

"The major areas are declining. You've got those little pockets of affluence, and then you've got the diseased rest. I mean if you go up Calvert Street it breaks my heart. Ten years ago there were nice houses, now they're all boarded up, they're falling apart, and it's creeping over to St. Paul Street. Those are major thoroughfares, it looks terrible." Urban resident

While the Harbor thrives, so many homes in Baltimore are vacant. City residents described the boarded up homes: from the major thoroughfares, like Calvert and St. Paul Streets, to those in Section 8 housing developments that become havens for rats and junkies.

But the major areas are declining. I mean you've got those little pockets of affluence and then you've got the diseased rest. I mean if you go up Calvert Street it breaks my heart. Ten years ago there were nice houses, now they're all boarded up, they're falling apart, and it's creeping over to St. Paul Street. Those are major thoroughfares, it looks terrible. (urban)

You have influx into certain areas of the city like the Federal Hill and the Canton areas, but then you have the other areas with a mass of empty houses. (urban)

The vacant houses, they have a lot of rats. I live right next door to a vacant house that burnt down. Instead of the owner taking it and doing something with it, he's just letting it sit there. All it does is keep those rats in there. (urban)

Some also say that housing prices and taxes have increased, while services have decreased. In addition, there is no decent shopping for essentials within the city limits, bemoan participants. At some point, it will no longer be worth it to live in the city.

The city is trying to move you out now because of what they're doing with the tax structure. It's getting so now I'm going to be ready to sell my house and move. It's gone up five times in value in the last five years. It's to the point where my husband and I are seriously saying, do we take the house now when we can get top dollar for it and sell it and move out to the county? I can buy a house totally paid for, for what I'm going to make off of the house here. It's almost not worth staying because of that. (urban)

Exactly. The services are being cut and it just doesn't make any sense. People are losing their jobs in the process. (urban)

You ain't making no money. You make money in the city and you're living in the city, you got to pay all this high rent. You have to live in the street or in the county, you know what I mean? (urban)

There's not anywhere, not even just downtown in the city, no mall or shopping center or Wal-Mart. (urban)

But you also don't want to pay for parking if you got to just run in. Just a regular Wal-Mart or something like that (would be nice). (urban)

Finally, almost all of the job opportunities are in the county. The blue-collar jobs in the city are gone. There are some white-collar jobs – in law and finance, as well as some of the new technology companies –

"I'm probably sticking my neck out when I say this but on the average of 1 to 100, I guess about 60% of the people in Baltimore city don't make over \$10 an hour." Urban resident

but most of the big corporations are in the counties. Most of the jobs in the city are minimum wage, which is not a living wage.

Other than financial and construction, there's just mostly service jobs in the city. (urban)

I think there's some white-collar down there if you look at the brokerage firms. (urban)

I'm probably sticking my neck out when I say this but on the average of 1 to 100, I guess about 60% of the people in Baltimore city don't make over \$10 an hour. (urban)

City Residents Are Frustrated

The sentiment in the urban focus group was one of frustration. There were several people in the group who said they were active in their community, but to no avail. Many are ready to give up.

It's very discouraging. I used to be the president of my neighborhood association for like two years in a row, and it's like no matter what you try to get done, there's so much bureaucracy in the way, there's very little you can do unless you go and throw gorilla raids on places. You just do it without any authority or whatever, and that's not always the safest way to go. (urban)

I live on the east side and they've got drugs and people don't come together when you try to do something, they don't want to try to help you. We were trying to get a house off our block for like two years and the stuff you had to go through, you can't even get it off. It's real frustrating because people come to meetings and they stopped because nothing happened in a year. They feel like it's a losing battle. I go to meetings; I'm tired of talking at meetings and nothing ever happens. (urban)

"Howard County belongs to Howard County but Baltimore belongs to everybody." Urban resident

These city residents did not believe that others in the region understand or care about their plight. Their sense is that county residents use the city for entertainment and jobs, and then leave

it behind at the end of the day. The other focus groups suggest this is not the case, which might be something to promote as the Vision 2030 effort moves forward. This might give some city residents a sense of hope.

I don't think they care at all about Baltimore city, and I think they're making a big mistake. (urban)

They come to Baltimore city, work at their jobs. Take their money back and spend it in the county. (urban)

They look at the people in the city like they ain't no good, they're stupid. (urban)

Howard County belongs to Howard County but Baltimore belongs to everybody. (urban)

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

There Is A Disconnect

Few in the focus groups volunteered the impact that traffic congestion and development have on the environment. Instead, when asked how these factors affect their quality of life, most bring up the economic impacts, or the changes to their way of life in terms of schedule, convenience, and etcetera. This suggests a disconnect on environmental issues. However, this topic should be further explored in the telephone survey.

Some Concern About Air Quality

When probed, respondents mention their concern about the impact on air quality, giving as examples the increased number of “Code Red” days and the rise in cancer rates.

“We have the highest cancer rate in the country. How can it not be related to the environment? What else could it be?” Suburban resident

I think it's had a negative impact both from the air quality and the water quality. (suburban)

I think we're (Anne Arundel County) like the fourth worst air quality in the country. (suburban)

They have a lot of really high ozone levels now. You never used to hear about ozone days where you heard don't go out if you don't have to, or don't run your lawnmower, don't drive when it gets too hot. Now we hear it all the time. (suburban)

We have the highest cancer rate in the country. How can it not be (related to the environment)? What else could it be? (suburban)

If you look at the generations of families that were growing up, everybody was passing away from some form of cancer or something. (urban)

I just read an article in the paper about six months ago where the cancer rate in the Baltimore area is like one of the highest in the country. Obviously (it's caused by) something you take internally, whether it's the air you breathe, the food you eat, the preservatives that are in the food. (rural)

The Bay

They also worry about the region's water quality, particularly the impact of development and transportation on the Chesapeake Bay and its crab population. Participants lamented the fact that crabs were now imported from Louisiana, and going for over \$100/bushel. They also brought up the recent pfisteria outbreak. At the same time, there have been

well-promoted efforts around successes with Chesapeake Bay cleanup. Thus, some believe the quality of the water is improving.

What about the Chesapeake Bay? The fish were dying last year. (urban)

The mascot for Baltimore is a crab, you can't eat a crab from Baltimore. All of our crabs come from Louisiana. It's gross water. If you ever look in there, it's nasty. (suburban)

I want to make sure we have crabs. I mean, considering the Chesapeake Bay ... the entire Bay, to make sure that that's preserved. (rural)

I think the water is cleaner now than it was in the '70s but it's not great. (suburban)

The Chesapeake Bay, I think just having to have the Chesapeake Bay study and investigation and working on trying to clean it up was not something that happened 25 years go. (suburban)

Loss Of Open Space And Habitat

"Howard County was traditionally known as a place that had a lot of open space, beautiful parks. Because they're building a lot of homes in Columbia, town homes, you're getting less space. It's really not a lot of open land like there used to be, and that's becoming a problem." Suburban resident

Very few mention "sprawl" or "smart growth" by name, which is surprising given Governor Glendening's work on these issues. Instead, several people talk about loss of open spaces and habitat, connecting it to the increased development.

A couple of people also point out that some areas in the region (particularly in Howard County), have been historically excellent at setting aside open space for recreation, though these efforts have dwindled somewhat given the growth.

It impacts the environment - because of urban sprawl we're losing all these open land spaces. (urban)

I think unless something is done to curtail the development, at the rate it's been going for the last 10 to 15 years, Harford County, Howard County, and Carroll County being excellent examples of that, we're losing all the farmlands and the woodlands. (urban)

I've lived here a long time, I really like the open space. I think Howard County does a particularly good job of trying to maintain that. But in recent years I've seen a real difference with a lot of crowding and a lot of changes to zoning. Just a lot of apartments and condominiums that have really encroached on both the roads and open space. (suburban)

Howard County was traditionally known as a place that had a lot of open space, beautiful parks, just wonderful activities and things that you could do. Just recently there was an article in the paper about there's really no place for the kids to ride the bikes. Because they're building a lot of homes in Columbia, town homes and things like that, so you're getting less space. It's really not a lot of open land like there used to be, and that's becoming a problem. (suburban)

The other thing nobody mentioned is the loss of habitat for all the animals around here, like the deer and everything else. It forces the deer to go to other parts that they shouldn't go because of the threat of people. (suburban)

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Mobility Allows For Opportunity

At first, it was hard to get focus group participants to make a connection between transportation/development and social equity, but after some thought, most understood and could articulate the social implications. However, the groups suggest that there will probably need to be some education on this issue, using examples and statistics.

Regional residents understand that mobility allow for more economic opportunity. If you cannot get to the good jobs, your opportunities are limited. Most think this mostly impacts the poor in the city, and that impact is a double-edged sword.

"The jobs are all out in the counties. But city residents can't get the transportation or they don't have the opportunity to get their kids to childcare and get to their job, which they have to be there at 7:00 which means they have to get up at 4:00, get the kids on the bus. It's just difficult; they cannot do it. It's just not working." Suburban resident

Low-income city people cannot get out to the good jobs in the county, because there is limited public transportation. For some, this problem is exacerbated by the need for child-care. City workers cannot get to and from jobs outside of the city, and pick up their kids from child-care, in a timely fashion. And even if they were to move out to the county and closer to the jobs, they still would have a hard time getting to work because few county jobs are metro/bus/light rail accessible.

Historically, lower income families live and work where they can. The more affluent people live where they want to and work where they need to. Everybody else can choose where they live, pretty much, because they have money. (suburban)

If you live in the city and you don't have a car, it's very difficult to get to the surrounding areas where there are jobs. But the jobs are there. (suburban)

I think they're left behind, I mean they're kind of stuck because they can only go as far as public transportation is going to take them, which isn't going to be anywhere where any of us live, because it doesn't go out that far. (rural)

The jobs are all out in the counties. But they can't get the transportation or they don't have the opportunity to get childcare, to get their kids to childcare and get to their job, which they have to be there at 7:00 which means they have to get up at 4:00, get the kids on the bus. It's just difficult; they cannot do it. It's just not working. (suburban)

The way the architecture is in the suburbs doesn't really lend itself to public transportation, because the lots are so big and parking lots are so spread out. I

can't even imagine ... you drive through Columbia and there's a ton of office buildings. But if you actually get close to them you see that they're all really far away from each other. (urban)

There are some very inexpensive apartment complexes in the counties all over the state and I've often wondered, because of school system situations, why more people don't take advantage of that, because the schools would be so much better in Howard County and Anne Arundel County. But I think it's a transportation issue again, because you get to the apartment, and then what? Unless you can walk to a job you're out of luck if you can't afford a car. So I think that does have an impact on the social situation. (suburban)

"Most county employers will get you there to get you the job and hopefully you will do okay, but they don't want you to live in that area. And to be quite frank, most people who could get the job out there don't want to live out there. They want to be in Baltimore where the people are that they know." Suburban resident

Others explained the Catch 22 that exists. County employers want low-wage workers from the city, but they do not want those people to be their neighbors. Thus, subsidizing low-income people to live in these

suburban neighborhoods will be tough, because the residents do not want them there. Conversely, many city residents do not want to leave their homes in the city, and cannot get to and from their county jobs easily. It is a viscous cycle.

Then being very blunt, most employers will get you there to get you the job and hopefully you will do okay, but they don't technically want you to live in that area. It would be easy to live there and work there, and to be quite frank, most people who could get the job out there don't want to live out there. They want to be in Baltimore where the people are that they know. So it's not a win-win situation for the employers. And this whole transportation issue is not working because they're not trying real hard to make it work, because the people that they're trying to do it for aren't really receptive. (suburban)

If the government would subsidize the people, the neighborhood would not have it. If you live in that neighborhood you're going to feel I don't want people to be in this neighborhood if they can't afford to be here. Don't let them get a subsidy to be here when I'm paying full price, and that's just the way it is. So it's just not going to work. (suburban)

Baltimore Means Poverty

Non-urban residents hold the stereotype that most Baltimore inhabitants are living in poverty. Poverty breeds crime and drugs. Suburban and rural residents are increasingly more scared to come into the city for jobs and entertainment. Even city residents are afraid to walk the streets after dark. In addition, the city schools are in disrepair.

Without a decent education, city kids will never have opportunities, and the city will continue to decline.

In the city you have a different type of family unit. You have grandparents who are raising children from their children, because the children are either dead or they're drug addicts or they're not in the house. So you're talking about a different caliber of people. I don't think you can ride any rural area where there are poor people and then go look in Baltimore City and say it's the same thing. (rural)

I think the poor in Baltimore City are different than the poor in any surrounding county. I just think their condition is deteriorating, I mean the homelessness, the drugs, the crime. I think a lot of them would like desperately to get out of that situation and for whatever reason can't. (rural)

The infrastructure of the city is just falling apart and the drugs are getting worse and there's very little reason to come into the city. (urban)

It's the crime and the drugs. Those two main things right there are pulling it down. That's what's really doing it, you know. Because about maybe 10 or 20 years ago it wasn't like this. (urban)

This image exacerbates the region's problems. While everyone agrees that Baltimore is the region's hub and must thrive in order for the region to prosper, few want to take the first step. The statistics that were given to people in the focus groups just confirm their sense that Baltimore is dying.

More About Class Than Race

Obviously, stereotypes abound. However, when asked outright about racial issues, suburban and urban residents say there is more

"It's about what your pocketbook can buy you." Suburban resident

of a class barrier than a racial barrier in the region. Suburban residents feel that the suburbs are pretty well integrated, more so than other parts of the country. "It's about what your pocketbook can buy you," said one black suburban resident. The urban respondents agreed. The urban have-nots, whether white or black, have more in common with each other than they do with the haves in their racial group. In fact, many say it is a "city county thing" more than a "racial thing". It must be noted, however, that it is very hard to get people to honestly discuss race in a group, particularly in a mixed racial group.

If you have a high-powered job, Black or White, Asian, Caucasian, whatever, you can live wherever you want. So your pocketbook determines where you're going to live, and your mindset is basically the same because you're working hard and you're making that six-figure income and you know what to expect in that community. (suburban)

You see a definite cross-culture in the suburbs now that I don't think a lot of cities have. In a lot of cities, Boston, for instance, you can say, "This is a Black neighborhood, and this is a White neighborhood." You can't say that here anymore, I don't think. (suburban)

The development has led to more jobs, which has led to a better life, which has led to spreading out among all cultures, I think. (suburban)

It's not a Black and White thing, it's a county versus city thing. It's a known fact that the county education is a lot better. (urban)

There's plenty of people of all races that live in the county that don't want to come and associate with their own race in the city. (urban)

It needs to stop, the Black and White issue. We all are here trying to survive and we all want better things. I get so tired of hearing about a Black and White issue all the time. It's not really about that. We all want to live in a nice area where you can come out and sit on your porch or your steps and be safe. It's got to stop. (urban)

SOLUTIONS

The City Must Prosper

"I think that if you make major improvements within the city, that that would have a ripple effect in terms of transportation and the economy." Rural residents

Participants in every group believe that any solution to solve the region's transportation and development problems must first focus on revitalizing the urban core. Development,

sprawl and traffic will continue to get worse in the surrounding counties unless more is done to improve the economic health of the city, enticing more businesses and regional residents to locate there. In addition, the problems of the city will eventually spread to the outlying areas, pushing people further up and out. The region's reputation, at many levels, depends on that of the city.

I think that if you make major improvements within the city, that that would have a ripple effect in terms of transportation and the economy. (rural)

I think it would help congestion because you'd get people living in the city, taking public transportation in the city, to work in the city. (suburban)

The city has to do things to attract the people back. (suburban)

The better off Baltimore City is, the better off the surrounding areas would be to. The crime filters out, the drugs, I mean there are drugs in Harford County; there are drugs in Carroll County. (rural)

(Let's fix Baltimore), instead of making Bel Air and Westminster mini cities because Baltimore City is crippled and it's not performing the function that it would naturally perform. (rural)

At the same time, no one wants to keep pouring money into the city to no avail. Participants brought up the lottery money that they think went to build stadiums, instead of improve education. They also mentioned that they have seen little results in the empowerment zone.

I don't think anybody would mind putting more money into the city if we saw results, and it seems like we put a lot of money in, money after money after money and there's no noticeable results. I'd gladly put money into the city if the education for those kids got better and the crime rate went down. (rural)

I see a lot of money being spent but I don't see a whole lot of things being accomplished, it's tough. (urban)

When you have a lottery that tended to help things like education and so forth, and it gets turned around into being something like let's build another stadium and then another one. (rural)

Maybe we can repeal the lottery thing. Initially the money was supposed to go towards education and some other things, and I'm not sure where it's going right now. But I know in other states where they actually put the money towards education and transportation or whatever. (suburban)

I think the empowerment project has not been as big a success as it should be, given the money that's available to make it better. (suburban)

You talk about economic development and one thing that I have a question mark about is we were earmarked for like \$100 million for this so-called empowerment zones, it was for economic development. The only things I've really see happening is some stuff over on the East Side around Johns Hopkins with the empowerment zoning. I'm curious because is the money like getting eaten up with administrators' salaries or something? Nobody is seeing the positive side of it in their neighborhoods. (urban)

Focus groups participants have a host of suggestions for improving the city, and thus, the region:

I think that if you make major improvements within the city, that that would have a ripple effect in terms of transportation and the economy. (rural)

Improve The Schools:

Education is a key part of the solution for a couple of reasons. One, people will not move back to the city if they do not think the schools are adequate. It is one of the reasons many left in

the first place. Two, Baltimore youth will not have opportunities unless they are well educated and trained. The cycle of drug addiction and crime will continue, unless they know a better way. Participants bring up a few specific suggestions on how to improve the schools: increase teachers' salaries, make teachers certification mandatory, decrease classroom size, and make schools safer so kids can learn.

*"I have coworkers who talk about how they would live in Baltimore if the schools were better. These are very intelligent people who want the best for their kids."
Suburban resident*

I think if you're going to make the city a more livable place and to encourage people with other levels of income to come and stay there, you've got to improve the schools. (suburban)

I have coworkers who talk about how they would live in Baltimore if the schools were better. These are very intelligent people who want the best for their kids. (suburban)

Empower the teachers. Get them certified. Give them more money. (urban)

If you want to send your kids to two schools away because you think it's a better education you should have that right, instead of the closest school. (urban)

They need to make some major changes to their school system as well. There are kids down there, they can't learn. They had no recess at all because you weren't allowed out of the playground because there had been a shooting two years ago or something at recess time between rival gangs. So how can kids learn in that environment, much less the fact that they're hiring people that aren't even certified to teach? (rural)

Infill and Clean Up: Focus group participants believe that there is a lot of unused, vacant space in Baltimore City, which could be developed and beautified. They want to tear down all of the vacant houses and rebuild. Respondents want to then create affordable, safe neighborhoods that are pleasant to live in. They warn, however, that neighborhoods must have good schools and be drug free before people will live in them. This should be part of an overall effort to clean up the city physically, and should extend to vacant warehouses and businesses. Some say, give the land away to developers if you have to in order to encourage redevelopment.

"Last I heard a couple of years ago there were there's 9,000 vacant houses. To me it's a slam-dunk, tear them down and build something new. " Urban resident

There are a lot of boarded-up houses in the city that could be renovated to really livable, very attractive communities. (suburban)

The last thing I heard a couple of years ago were there's 9,000 vacant houses. To me it's a slam-dunk, tear them down and build something new. (urban)

These vacant houses are just a waste of property. I think if you put the money in to fix it up, like if they say, if they build it they will come. I think more people will come to an attractive place. (suburban)

Make the housing affordable. (urban)

Maybe they should use some of the empty buildings in the Baltimore area, and if they cleaned up Baltimore, then businesses would want to stay in Baltimore. (rural)

Make use of the existing empty warehouses and buildings. Make things safer so that people are going to feel more safe working in Baltimore, keep more businesses in Baltimore, maybe in some way that would make more of an incentive for people to want to stay living closer to Baltimore. (rural)

Just give the land away to the developer. It's not doing any good sitting there by itself anyway. (urban)

They have to be drawn in by a decent education system, lack of crime. (urban)

They need to clean up the trash, a citywide sweep. They first need to educate people to clean up after themselves because people are slobs. They need to clean up on a regular basis the way they used to when I first moved in here. (urban)

Create Living Wage Jobs And Provide Job Training:

Participants say that people might be more enticed to stay in the city if there are decent job opportunities. So much of the blue collar, industrial base has eroded. Baltimore needs more blue-collar jobs, or those workers need to be retrained for the jobs that are available in the city. So if there are high tech jobs in the city, train a high tech job force. If city residents have access to decent jobs that pay a living wage, the crime and drug problem will improve.

“How about a living wage? That's one of the reasons why we have so much drug activity coming from young people, because you can't tell them that they have to go to school and go work at McDonalds for \$5 an hour and they can't buy their tennis shoes. When they can stand on the corner and make what some of us make in a month, they'll make in a week.” Urban resident

More blue-collar level jobs in the city. We lost all the factories, we lost the Domino Sugar plant, and we lost Bethlehem Steel. We lost a lot of the business that blue-collar people were making good money living in the city and they were managing. (suburban)

Maybe bring more jobs into the city, some of the factories and some of the businesses. But most of the businesses are high tech, so workers are not really trained for some of those jobs. (suburban)

Like putting some of that money to train individuals, to train them for new jobs or train them to be able to be a more productive citizen. So maybe some of that money could be used as an incentive to try to push education and training, because that is the key. (suburban)

Tell them they'll put some money into educating the people in that particular area in ways that the company can use those types of people. Teach them how to do the kind of work this company that's planning on moving, needs. (rural)

Raise the minimum wage, really raise it. (urban)

How about a living wage? That's one of the reasons why we have so much drug activity coming from young people, because you can't tell them that they have to go to school and go work at McDonalds for \$5 an hour and they can't buy their tennis shoes. When they can stand on the corner and make what some of us make in a month, they'll make in a week. (urban)

Revenue Sharing: There were brief discussions in a couple of the groups on revenue sharing. The focus groups suggest that everyone wants Baltimore to improve. But just how far will they go? Many of these people only occasionally go to the city to go see an Orioles game; but at same time, they are very concerned about how the city’s reputation and its problems will impact them. Said one county resident, “People in the outlying areas come and use the city infrastructure, mess up the roads, use the services, and go back to the county and don't leave a dime in the city unless they're eating lunch. So I think county people, including myself, should be taxed to come into the city.” Replied another, “But you can't automatically tax people just because one area is hurting.” This concept that should be further fleshed out and tested in the survey.

Control Development

Residents in the growth areas believe that development needs to be curbed – not stopped, but slowed and hopefully redirected to the city. There were a few vague ideas on how to do this: imposing impact fees on new construction, infill (refurbishing deserted businesses rather than building new ones in open spaces), and discouraging growth in the counties by encouraging growth in the city.

Less development, like maybe for a while, before every piece of grass and open space is gone, just take a step back for a few years and see where you are. We're building so many business complexes, strip malls, housing developments. I'm not sure how people are going to support all these things. You might want to just wait awhile and just see what works and what's not working before you just keep on expanding. (suburban)

You’ve got to have some kind of impact fees on any kind of construction. Make it more expensive for builders to be able to buy land. (rural)

If you talk about space, that sort of pressure might actually force people to be more creative and invest more resources in the city. (urban)

If you use this existing land, knock the building down, we’ll give you some kind of break on it. We’ve had buildings in the Carroll County area that are sitting empty for like over five, 10 years. I don’t think there’s a reason why they can’t use the existing property, unless somebody is just too money hungry and they want more money for it than what they’re asking. (rural)

Improve Connectivity

Some participants suggested improving the region’s public transportation system so that the counties are better connected

“They need a great transportation system that goes in all directions, not just north and south.” Urban resident

(suburban participants were particularly interested), as well as Baltimore and Washington, DC. However, it is not clear from the focus groups how much impact this

will actually have on areas residents, as most said they would not use public transportation unless it was idyllic.

I would say that Baltimore should develop a subway system like DC and have it connect, the spokes on the wheel connect at some point. (suburban)

Identify the key areas that people need to get to, say Towson, Gainesville, Annapolis, Owings Mills already has a place. But identify the areas that people go to, connect them. If it's a subway that's hard, but aboveground transportation system (would work). (suburban)

Convenient and connected. You want people from DC to come to Baltimore and spend some money. They were talking about doing a rail system from Baltimore to DC where you can get back and forth in ten or 15 minutes. If they pick up on that system that they had talked about some time ago and expand on that and develop that and maybe bring it into more counties in Baltimore. Come from DC through Baltimore and then out to the counties, and kind of go back and forth from area to area. (suburban)

And also connect with the DC subway system, which they could do. (suburban)

You have your major business center in Baltimore, your major political center in Annapolis, they should be connected as well, I would think. (suburban)

They need a great transportation system that goes in all directions, not just north and south. (urban)

The light rail is a wonderful system, so extend it further and have the different drop-off points where you can park the cars. You don't necessarily want to put it in communities because people don't like to have a light rail in their community where people can get on the light rail without a car and then just canvas the area. You want to have light rail stops that maybe you have parking lots just like in Odenton. Make it convenient for them but don't make it accessible to other people who necessarily don't have good intentions. (suburban)

DELIVERING THE MESSAGE

Direction Must Come From The Top

Focus group participants feel that creating a “vision” and “plan” for the future of the region must begin at the top. “It starts with the governor,” said one urbanite. “From there it drifts down to the top authorities of the regions that you're talking about, the county executives and the mayors or whatever.” There was not, however, a lot of trust in Glendening among these respondents. While they believe he and the state’s executive branch must set the tone, he is not a particularly compelling leader to deliver the message.

No Real Regional Cooperation

Beyond that, participants believe that such an effort must trickle down to the various city and county politicians and planners. There is not, however, a lot of optimism about regional cooperation. Most believe that these politicians just care about their own area.

“Nobody wants to give up the money from Howard County or Anne Arundel County to Baltimore City. You've really got to have some strong state leadership to bridge that and convince people that it's better for everybody if that happens. Right now that's a very difficult argument to make.”
Suburban resident

That is why strong state leadership is so important – so that city/county leaders understand the benefits of operating as a region. At the same time, participants admit that each locale has its own problems.

I don't feel there's a sense of cooperation between the counties when it comes to any of these things. I think Carroll County is worried about Carroll County. They don't worry about Cecil County or Montgomery County. Harford County is worried about the road system in Harford County. Each county is their own separate entity. They all have their own County Executive, they all have their Board of Educations. Every county is its own little state or city. (rural)

Nobody wants to give up the money from Howard County or Anne Arundel County to Baltimore City. When you were talking about each of the governments is responsible, that's right, they are. So they are not going to give any money over to another part of the government. You've really got to have some strong state leadership to bridge that and convince people that it's better for everybody if that happens. Right now that's a very difficult argument to make. Why should I give my Howard County taxes to Baltimore City? It's a hard argument to make. (suburban)

When the governor steps in and says okay, we're going to help Baltimore then you've got all of Western Maryland saying well, what about us? We live in such

poverty, we can't even get electricity in some areas and we can't exist because of the snow. The Governor has a balancing thing there that is hard to do. So much population is here, but when he starts to try to help this area he gets a big fight from the rest of the state saying what about us? And in all fairness, they've got some problems out there. (urban)

In addition, some say this is not the most politically expedient cause to champion. While everyone cares about the quality of life in the region, there are more pressing problems like the economy, crime and education. Though each of these is linked to transportation planning, transportation planning in its own right is not as important a concern.

When it comes to politicians they don't run on beautifying Baltimore or making Baltimore more livable; they run on crime, they run on education, they run on the touchstones that people really want to know about - the economy. They don't run on transportation. Nobody would be elected running on the transportation platform and the making Baltimore more beautiful platform. I think everybody is concerned. There's not a person who lives in any community who doesn't want their community to be nice looking. But I think it's just not as high a priority as crime or education. (suburban)

We Are All Responsible

Participants believe that this effort begins with politicians, but they have a sense of

*"We really need to come together as a whole, bring the issues to the table, raise hell about them, and then fight."
Urban resident*

shared responsibility. In the suburban and urban groups particularly, participants said there must be grassroots involvement for any change to take place.

I think it's the people, I think it's a combination of the two. Part of the problem is we sit back and wait for the government to do everything and come up with ideas and then sit back and say that wasn't good enough. But when we have opportunities to come out where we're not being paid, to come out and make a difference or voice or opinion or take the opportunity to do that. Even if we don't live in the city or whatever the issue is, there are still opportunities for you to be involved and try to make a difference. (suburban)

You have to fight for your rights. (urban)

Especially in the inner city because that's where I'm from, we give up to easy when we fight. We have a lot of good ideas on the table but we never follow through with them. We really need to come together as a whole, bring the issues to the table, raise hell about them, and then fight. (urban)

Remember, however, that a focus group is not a natural situation, and participants tend to get more involved and excited about an issue than they might otherwise. Also, there

were more active citizens than we usually see in our groups. However, in comparison to hundreds of focus groups we have done on various public policy efforts, these three groups suggest that there is a mid-to-high level of engagement on making the region more livable (as opposed to pure transportation planning). This needs to be tested further in the survey.

Potential Messengers

Participants in the focus groups were asked to name potential messengers for this effort. They began by throwing out names of politicians, but quickly became cynical. Several mentioned Mayor O'Malley, but he clearly has some image problems. Participants are

Potential Messengers Mentioned

Politicians:

Mayor Martin O'Malley
Kweisi Mfume
Governor Parris Glendening
Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend
Senator Barbara Mikulski
Senator Paul Sarbanes
Congressman Robert Ehrlich
County Executive Dutch Ruppersberger

Media:

Gregory Kane
Mark Steiner

Businesspeople:

Bill Stuever
The Cordishes
Cal Ripkin
Peter Angelos

worried that he is running for Governor, and still question his "vision". They are also disturbed by recent city salary increases. In two of the groups participants were enthusiastic about Kweisi Mfume. Said one suburban woman, "Kweisi is a strong voice, when you mention his name, especially in the Black community, they look up and they sit up. As soon as you say his name people are like let me help him."

In the suburban group, there was also some interest in local media personalities. Participants brought up Gregory Kane, the columnist from *The Sun* and Mark Steiner from WJHU.

Participants were also interested in hearing from local businessmen, particularly developers. In one group they said they wanted to hear from someone like Jim Rouse, who was not just out to make money, but had a vision. A few mentioned the Cordishes, though most thought were more concerned about money. Bill Struever was also discussed, and participants who knew of him tended to think of him as more visionary. Said one participant, "He's one of the developers who has done incredible things."